

## Competency Evaluation of Dhammaduta Monks (Buddhist Missionaries) in Social Public Welfare Roles within Healthcare

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### ABSTRACT

The research aimed to survey and analyze the operating conditions, establish criteria and indicators for competency assessment and to present a competency assessment model for Dhammaduta monks (Buddhist missionaries) serving both international and domestic roles for public welfare, social development and human security volunteering (SDHV). This study employed a mixed research methodology, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research. Data were collected from 4 countries namely the United States, Norway, New Zealand and Japan as well as five provinces in Thailand namely Bangkok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok, Surin and Nakhon Si Thammarat. The quantitative study was conducted with a sample of 560 monks, while in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 monks. The deductive and inductive methods were used to incorporate document analysis, statistics evaluation, and in-depth interviews, and data were presented in the form of descriptive analysis. The results revealed that Thai Dharmadutas (Buddhist missionaries) abroad work and develop society within the legal and cultural frameworks of their respective countries, relying on the assistance of all parties, i.e., Thai Sangha, local communities, and government authorities. All monks perform public welfare duties under the guidance of the Buddha's teachings and the Sangha Supreme Council with great emphasis on improving mental and physical health as well as enhancing public welfare, social development and stability. The criteria for competency evaluation of Thai monks are based on 5 five key aspects: knowledge, skills, attitude, application, and performance. The evaluation results of the competency of Dharmadutas working abroad and performing public welfare work were at the highest level across all aspects, with an average score of 4.63. The breakdown of scores was: Knowledge: 4.43, Skills: 4.62, Attitude: 4.57, Application: 4.79, Performance: 4.62. In particular, application shows the highest level of score which means monks use all social and ecological capital to benefit the work. To address these, the research proposes a strategic implementation framework focusing on curriculum alignment with national qualification standards, institutional collaboration, systematic monitoring, and sustainable development integration. These strategies aim to enhance the preparedness and global relevance of Thai Dhamma missionaries, positioning them as key contributors to cross-cultural dialogue, public welfare, and peaceful global coexistence.

**Keywords:** Dhammaduta, Buddhist Missionaries, Evaluation Competency, Social Public Welfares, Mental Health

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An evaluation of the competency of Dhammaduta monks (Buddhist missionaries) in propagating the Buddha's teachings abroad is much necessary and important as it will reveal the qualifications of Buddhist missionaries such as the ability, competency, skill and capability to disseminate the Buddha's teachings and perform the social benefits for the sake of peace and happiness to people in the whole world. These qualifications must be in good proficiency, expertise and accuracy until they receive social acceptance from the public. From investigating the roles of Dhammaduta monks (Buddhist missionaries), it is found that their roles and duties are related to help people improve their physical and mental health. It can be said that one of the roles of Dhammaduta monks is to help human beings in the world to take care and pay attention on their integrated health improvement such as physical health, mental health, social welfare and creating wisdom to solve complicated problems, and purify the mind. These roles of Dhammaduta monks (Buddhist missionaries) have been practiced and carried on from time to time and the past to the present time.

Buddhism is regarded as a religion of wisdom and realization, which encourages practitioners to attain enlightenment and see the truth by themselves (Ruksat et al., 2025). Buddhist teachings mainly focus on mental and physical health and well-being. Starting from morality, meditation and wisdom development, the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to attain Nirvana (the state of eternal peace and happiness). These are called "The threefold learning or training". The purpose of morality development is to control one's behavior and activity in both physically and verbally to be in accordance with good custom, culture, etiquette and ethics, and to be free from physical and verbal offense, which eventually lead to create a peaceful society and social stability. Meditation has its purpose to purify the mind and create mental peace and happiness. Meditation can be divided as tranquil meditation and insightful meditation. The first one focuses on mental calmness and tranquility, while the second one places great emphasis on developing insightful wisdom to see things as they are and to eliminate all mental defilements. Wisdom in Buddhism is not merely a simple knowledge, but it is the ability to realize the true nature of all things. Wisdom involves an intuitive understanding of phenomena as they truly are, which beyond superficial appearances. People with wisdom in Buddhism can see how sufferings arise from and realize the path leading to the cessation of sufferings (Channuwong et al., 2022).

Those who engage in the propagation of Buddhism are referred to as Dhammaduta, or Buddhist missionaries. This tradition traces back to the time of the Buddha, who instructed his disciples, saying: "Caratha, Bhikkhave, carikām bahujanahitāyā bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya..."— "Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world" (Vinaya Piṭaka, IV: 32–39).

The initial group of Dhammadutas comprised 60 Arahants, enlightened monks who spread the Dhamma to various regions, influencing individuals and communities alike by promoting moral conduct and spiritual development. In later periods, Emperor Ashoka the Great institutionalized this effort by dispatching nine groups of Dhammadutas to propagate Buddhism across the known world (Buddhavamsa, 2010). Of particular significance was the mission to Suvarnabhumi, identified with present-day Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. Throughout Thai history, Buddhist propagation evolved in tandem with political and cultural developments. During the Sukhothai period, King Ramkhamhaeng invited monks from Nakhon Si Thammarat to advance Dhamma education. In the Ayutthaya and Thonburi periods, Thai monks were sent abroad, especially to Sri Lanka, China, and Japan, to study and restore Buddhist traditions. In the Rattanakosin period, particularly during the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V, the work of Dhammadutas became more structured and aligned with national development, with monks acting as moral agents and cultural ambassadors across various dioceses (Swearer, 2010).

Today, the role of Dhammaduta monks extends globally. Thai temples have been established in continents such as Europe, North America, and Australia, fostering cultural cohesion among Thai diaspora communities and promoting Buddhist teachings internationally. Organizations such as the Thai Sangha Assembly in the United States and the Thai Sangha Missionary Union in Europe oversee these efforts, ensuring they align with the Vinaya and promote sustainable propagation through intersectoral cooperation (Office of National Buddhism, 2020). Notably, Dhammadutas now engage in public welfare roles, both domestically and internationally, often collaborating with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Issuance of Passport B.E. 2005). Their work fosters temple-home-community (THC) integration, particularly in multicultural settings. However, these efforts face persistent challenges such as financial limitations, lack of systemic support, and limited training, leading to inconsistencies in impact (Cholvijarn, 2011).

Despite the significance of their contributions, there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation regarding the competencies of Dhammadutas in their dual roles—spiritual propagation and social service. Current research tends to focus on doctrinal dissemination or monastic discipline, while neglecting the multifaceted competencies required for effective community engagement in diverse socio-cultural contexts (Phra Dhammapitaka, 2005). This gap highlights the urgent need to assess the Dhammadutas' abilities from multiple perspectives—spiritual, educational, communicative, administrative, and intercultural—to enhance their effectiveness. Moreover, there is limited empirical data concerning how well Dhammadutas

fulfill their prescribed roles under the Sangha Supreme Council regulations, particularly in rapidly evolving contexts that demand digital literacy, intercultural competence, and strategic planning (Office of the Promotion of Buddhism Propagation, National Office of Buddhism, 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the competencies of Dhammaduta monks in their social and public welfare roles, with an emphasis on areas that require governmental and institutional support, such as infrastructure, curriculum development, budget allocation, and training programs. The findings are expected to provide a knowledge base for formulating policies and strategic collaborations between the Sangha, government, and civil society, especially through the Department of Standards and Development of Society and Human Security, which acts as a key agency for promoting Thai social development abroad.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To survey the operating conditions of Dharma missionaries in Thailand and abroad in the roles of public welfare workers and volunteers, social development and human security volunteers (SDHV) and social development volunteers.
2. To establish the criteria and indicators for evaluating the competence of Thai monks both domestically and internationally in the roles of public welfare work and volunteering social development and human security volunteering (SDHV).
3. To present a model for evaluating the competence of Thai monks both domestically and internationally in the roles of public welfare work and volunteering, social development and human security volunteering (SDHV).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

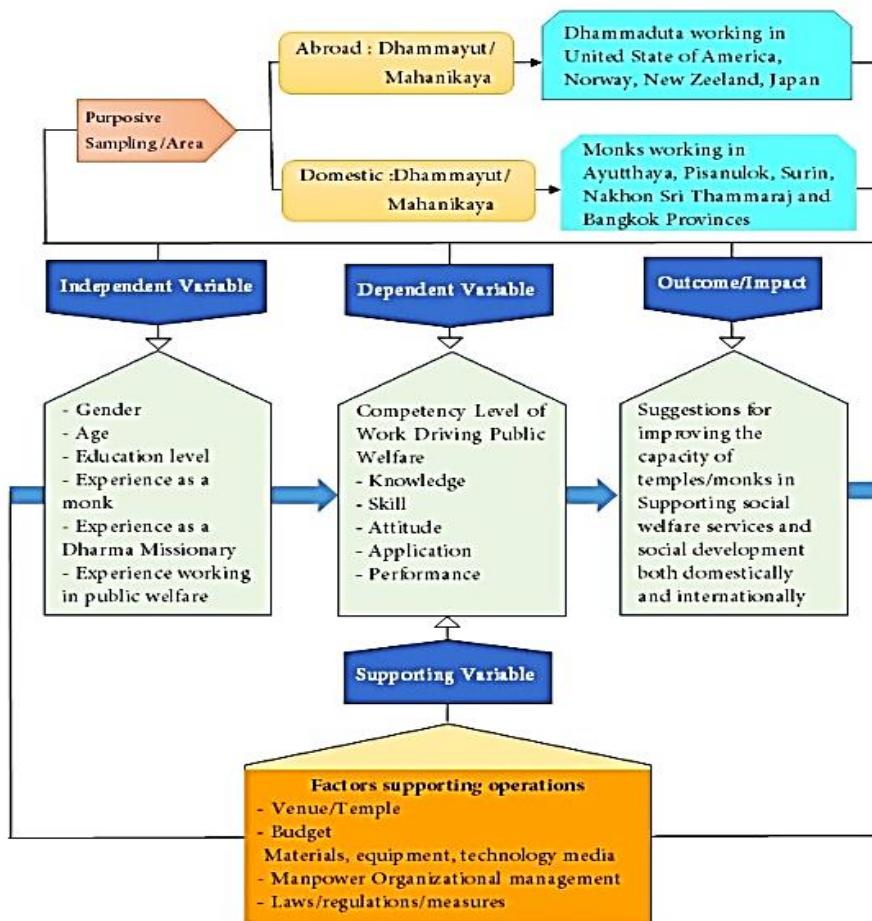
### **1. Capacity of Temples and Monks in Supporting Social Welfare and Development**

Buddhist temples and monks have historically played a vital role in community development and healthcare, acting as centers of moral guidance, education, and social support (Suksamran, 2003). In contemporary society, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, temples serve as community hubs for both spiritual and social services, offering assistance in areas such as healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation (Wells-Dang, 2014). Thai Buddhist monks, under the framework of Dhammaduta (missionary monks) and Sangha administration, frequently engage in welfare-oriented activities such as providing shelter, supporting education for underprivileged youth, and leading initiatives on drug rehabilitation, natural disaster relief, and community cohesion (Chareonwongsak, 2006). Temples often collaborate with local administrative organizations, civil society, and government agencies to mobilize resources for the public good (Phra Khru Baidika Wichian Wisuttho et al., 2022). Research by Dhiravangso and Chuenban (2019) emphasizes the potential of Sangha leaders to act as change agents when equipped with sufficient organizational support, leadership capacity, and institutional legitimacy. The study identified that temples with robust administrative systems and visionary abbots are more likely to succeed in implementing effective public welfare programs.

### **2. Competency in Driving Public Welfare Work**

Competency in social welfare delivery requires a multidimensional approach, typically classified into five key domains: knowledge, skills, attitude, application, and performance (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Knowledge refers to the foundational understanding of Buddhist principles, community needs, and welfare mechanisms. Monks need not only theological knowledge but also socio-political awareness to support communities effectively (Phra Maha Rewat Pomhom et al., 2023). Skills encompass communication, coordination, and management abilities that enable monks to liaise with external organizations and lead community initiatives (Rodrigues et al., 2017). Attitude reflects the internal disposition of compassion, patience (Khantī), and selfless service, which are central to Buddhist teachings (Brahmavihāra Dhamma). Application refers to the ability to translate knowledge and skills into practical action—mobilizing resources, planning projects, and fostering community participation (Phra Mahachai Wichit Chayapintho, 2017). Finally, performance is the actual outcome of the monk's welfare activities in terms of measurable impact on social development indicators such as education, health, and income generation (Office of the Supervision of Buddhist Missionaries Abroad, 2024). This five-dimensional competency model is frequently used in religious and civic leadership training programs and has been validated in multiple studies on monastic leadership to increase sustainable development of the community, society and the country at large (Channuwong et al., 2025; Dhiravangso & Chuenban, 2019).

The conceptual framework is drawn from the Sangha administration in both Mahanikaya and Dhammayutika and in five provinces in Thailand: Bangkok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok, Surin, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, as well as four countries: Norway, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States. The concept of David McClelland's Iceberg Competency Theory and the concept of the Ministry of Education's competency-based curriculum, covering five key aspects: knowledge, skills, attitudes, application, and operations are also contributed in the framework (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2019). The figure of framework is laid as below:



**Figure 1 Research Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research is structured and categorized into two primary domains:

**1. Capacity of Temples and Monks in Social Development:**

- Institutional support
- Community collaboration
- Role of Sangha leadership

**2. Competency Dimensions in Driving Public Welfare Work:**

- **Knowledge:** Understanding of Buddhist teachings and community welfare systems
- **Skills:** Communication, project management, stakeholder coordination
- **Attitude:** Compassion, patience, social responsibility
- **Application:** Ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world situations
- **Performance:** Effectiveness and impact of public welfare activities

These two dimensions are interrelated: temples with higher organizational capacity tend to foster greater competency among monks, and monks with strong competency can expand the welfare roles of temples. The framework integrates both institutional and individual components of competency, aiming to develop a model that supports enhanced social welfare practices through the Buddhist monastic system.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project is designed to systematically collect, record, analyze, and synthesize field data from specified operational areas. It is part of a broader initiative that aims to explore administrative models, legal frameworks, and strategic action plans to strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration in the social development of Thai communities, both within Thailand and internationally.

#### 1. Scope of the research

**Scope of the document:** The competency assessment is researched from the Tipitaka scriptures based on the 3 insights: Saccañāna, Kiccañāna, and Katañāna. The concept of David McClelland's Iceberg Competency Theory and the concept of the Ministry of Education's competency-based curriculum, covering five keys-aspects: knowledge, skills, attitudes,

application, and operations are also included.

**Scope of the area:** The research focuses on five provinces in Thailand: Bangkok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok, Surin, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, as well as four countries: Norway, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States. The study includes 20 pilot temples in the administrative areas of the Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika Nikaya and 10 temples abroad.

**Scope of key informants:** The research includes a quantitative population of 5,000 monks with a total of 34 key informants providing qualitative insights.

**Scope of Time:** The research was conducted over 120 days, from June to September 2024.

## 2. Population and Samples

The study employs a Research and Development (R&D) approach, comprising three distinct phases of data collection and analysis.

**In Phase I**, the total population consisted of 38,091 monks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005). A total sample of 560 monks was selected, divided into two key sub-groups. The first group included Thai Dhammaduta monks working abroad, with a total population of 309 and a sample size of 175. The second group consisted of monks based in Thailand who are involved in public welfare services, with a population of 37,782 and a sample size of 385.

**In Phase II**, the focus shifted to qualitative data collection. This phase involved 40 key informants, all of whom were monks with experience in Dhammaduta missions. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 individuals, including six experts in Dhammaduta work (representing both the Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika Nikaya sects) and seven experts in public welfare from both sects. The sampling method used was snowball sampling, as recommended by Campbell et al. (2020), which allowed researchers to identify knowledgeable participants through referrals.

**In Phase III**, a smaller and more targeted group was selected for group discussion and synthesis. Out of a total population of 20 monks identified for potential participation, a final sample of seven key informants was chosen. This group consisted of four individuals involved in Dhammaduta operations, three involved in public welfare role, and two from government or volunteer evaluation units associated with the social development and human security volunteer (SDHV) program.

## 3. Research Instruments and Validation

Three principal research instruments were developed in alignment with the research phases.

**The first instrument** was a questionnaire, used to collect quantitative data. This tool was reviewed for content validity by a panel of five experts using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), as proposed by Crocker and Algina (1986), with a minimum acceptance threshold of 0.75, based on the criteria set by Hambleton (1978). The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with 30 individuals who were not part of the main sample. Its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a benchmark score of 0.70, as recommended by She L. et al. (2021). Item discrimination was also evaluated using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation method, ensuring that each item met the minimum requirement of 0.30 (Field, 2009).

**The second instrument** was an in-depth interview guide, developed to support the qualitative aspects of the research. It was used to gather insights from 13 key informants, contributing to the creation of a competency evaluation framework for monks serving in public welfare and SDHSV roles. The content validity of this instrument was determined using Item-level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) and Scale-level Content Validity Index using the Average method (S-CVI/Ave), based on expert consensus, in accordance with Crocker and Algina (1986) and Rodrigues et al. (2017).

**The third instrument** was a document analysis tool, used to examine both primary legal texts—such as the Thai Sangha Act—and secondary literature relevant to the collaboration between the Sangha and the Ministry of Social Development. This tool consisted of a structured document review checklist and a thematic summary template, ensuring that the documents reviewed aligned with the research objectives.

## 4. Processes for Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in three consecutive phases.

**In Phase I**, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered on-site in various international locations, including the United States, Norway, New Zealand, and Japan, as well as in domestic provinces such as Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok, Surin, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Bangkok. In locations where on-site access was restricted, online surveys were employed to ensure comprehensive data collection.

**In Phase II**, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected key informants. These interviews aimed to gather expert

insights and inform the development of performance evaluation tools for monks involved in public welfare and Dhammaduta missions.

**In Phase III**, a group discussion was conducted with the selected key informants. The discussions were audio-recorded, video-recorded, and transcribed for analysis. This phase also included sequential document analysis and follow-up interviews to support a triangulated synthesis of the findings.

All phases of data collection were conducted following approval from a relevant human research ethics committee. Researchers ensured strict compliance with ethical guidelines, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and safeguarding participant privacy.

## 5. Data Analysis

The study utilized a Mixed Methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies across its three phases.

**In Phase I**, quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics—including frequency, percentage, mean, median, and standard deviation—to assess monks' competencies. Additionally, inferential statistics such as one-sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were applied to identify statistically significant differences, following Ferguson's (1981) guidelines.

**In Phase II**, qualitative data obtained from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns and themes, which informed the development of a framework for evaluating monks' competencies in public welfare and SDHSV roles.

**In Phase III**, findings from the group discussions were synthesized through content analysis. The data were triangulated with the results from earlier phases and relevant document studies to develop and validate a comprehensive set of assessment indicators.

All data were processed using standard statistical software, and analytical procedures were aligned with the research objectives to ensure accuracy, rigor, and coherence in the interpretation of results.

## 6. Statistical Analysis

The study employed a variety of statistical techniques such as Descriptive Statistics consisting of Frequency, Percentage, Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (SD), and inferential statistics such as one-sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA. Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Analysis, Content Analysis, and Triangulation. These analytical techniques provided a robust framework for interpreting both the quantitative and qualitative data, thereby reinforcing the validity and reliability of the study's conclusions.

## Research Hypotheses

The five competencies of monks in Thailand and abroad can promote the role of public welfare work and in the role of volunteers, social development and human security volunteers and social development volunteers (SDHV).

## 4. RESULTS

The results of the document analysis found that the Dhamma Missionary tradition began with 60 noble monks who went out to spread Buddhism. Later, during the reign of King Ashoka the Great, nine groups of monks were sent to spread Buddhism abroad. In particular, the eighth group was dispatched to Suvarnabhumi, meaning Southeast Asia including present-day Thailand. In Thailand, the overseas dissemination of Buddhism historically required royal and ecclesiastical approval. They issued tangible regulations for spreading Buddhism called "Regulations of the Sangha Supreme Council on the Spreading of Buddhism B.E. 2550" which were under the work of the monks of both the Mahanikaya and Thammayutika sects. It is under the supervision of two agencies: 1. Office of the Supervision of Overseas Dhamma Missionaries 2. Office of the Training of Overseas Dhamma Missionaries (Dhammayutika)

In order to expand the readiness of the management of the competence of the two sects of foreign Dhamma missionaries, both Buddhist universities have been assigned to take care of the academic aspect as follows:

1. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University has established a Dhamma missionary college that provides training for the competence of Dhamma missionaries to be ready in all aspects. There is a Master of Buddhist Studies program in Dhamma missionary studies, a new program in 2023, a Vipassana Meditation Certificate Program (International), a Dhamma missionary certificate program, a certificate program for the Overseas Dhamma missionary training program, a certificate

program for the Overseas Lay Dhamma missionary training program, and a certificate program in English for communication for Dhamma missionaries.

2. Mahamakut Buddhist University has assigned the Graduate School to oversee the degree, certificate, and certificate programs, in collaboration with the Overseas Dhamma Missionary Training Center (Dhammayut), to organize the Overseas Dhamma Missionary Training Course (Dhammayut) in 2017.

The curriculum of each program aims to produce high quality Dhamma missionaries who uphold strong moral conduct and possess knowledge and ability in both worldly and spiritual matters, are able to work with unity and confidence in practicing religious missions in foreign countries, adhere to correct, appropriate and consistent teaching principles in Buddhism support the mission of the Sangha and the Sangha Supreme Council, and create religious heirs to continue the life of Buddhism and maintain the faith of Buddhists around the world.

Foreign Dhamma missionaries are deployed across various continents. The readiness of the competence of foreign missionaries working in the United States is under the supervision of the Thai Sangha Assembly, while in Europe, under the supervision of the European Sangha Union. Later, there were Sangha assemblies in other continents, including Asia, Oceania, and Africa, to ensure unified care and administration. Competence and quality of missionaries and temples enable them to propagate Buddhism and perform public welfare duties because the missionaries have been carefully selected and undergo a systematic training program to ensure they meet the criteria of a good Dhamma teacher, namely,

- 1) having a firm belief in good values,
- 2) having a noble heart and thinking of giving good and useful things to others, awareness of the problems and needs of the communities they serve,
- 3) knowing the background and living conditions, the impacts from the economy and society,
- 4) learning how to communicate effectively, the ability to apply Buddhist teachings appropriately to different individuals, including proficiency in language and media communication, and commitment to Buddhist ideology while strictly adhering to the laws of their host country.

In terms of problems and obstacles in the work of foreign Dhamma missionaries, it was found that there were problems with language proficiency at the expert level, cultural and legal differences use of communication technology, a small number of monks who need to obtain a Green Card, administrative budget constraints, and instances of inappropriate behavior.

The analysis of documentary data on monks performing public welfare duties reveals that monks must perform their duties in accordance with the 1962 Act, amended by the Sangha Act (No. 4) B.E. 2561. Section 20 stipulates that the Sangha must be under the administration of the Sangha Supreme Council. The organization of the Sangha administration must be in accordance with the regulations of the Sangha Supreme Council and adhere to the six missions of the Sangha Framework (Office of Public Welfare of the Sangha Supreme Council, 2021):

- 1) Administration
- 2) Religious Education
- 3) Educational Welfare
- 4) Propagation
- 5) Public Utilities
- 6) Public Welfare

In accordance with the regulations of the Sangha Supreme Council on the various committees of the Sangha Supreme Council B.E. 2539, Section 3 (6) states that there must be a Public Welfare Committee in conjunction with Section 16. The duties of the committee are as follows: (1) Supervise, monitor, take care of and advise on public welfare to ensure that it is carried out smoothly and well. (2) Support and promote public welfare initiatives tailored to local (3) Ensuring that public welfare efforts align with the Dhamma and the monastic code of conduct. (4) Propose recommendations to the Sangha Supreme Council for enacting rules, regulations, orders or announcements. (5) Carry out other assigned duties within the framework of the Sangha's four missions.

1. Public welfare 1.0 (welfare). This stage focuses on alleviating immediate suffering by providing assistance to temples and communities affected by various disasters such as floods, storms, and fires. Support is offered both materially through the distribution of the four requisites such as food and clothing, and mentally by providing Dhamma teaching as a source of encouragement. Activities in this area include providing assistance during crises. (Disasters such as floods, storms, fires, etc.)

2. Public welfare 2.0 (support). At this level, monks engage in resource management for people and communities to live and work, such as forest management (trees planting, forest ordination, and conservation), water resource management

(construction of headwater dams, ponds), community environmental management, redeeming cows and buffaloes for farming. Activities in this area include forest management, forest planting/forest ordination, community environmental management, community drug prevention and resolution, herbs and local wisdom, redeeming cows and buffaloes for farmers.

3. Public welfare 3.0 (development) Here, the Sangha takes on a leadership role in community development by integrating Dhamma principles into economic and social development, such as setting up temples as community assistance centers, promoting Buddhist agriculture, implementing the King's philosophy for sustainable development, forester Sajja Savings Groups, and promoting community occupations. Activities also include creating a volunteer culture, creating a center for community assistance, Buddhist agriculture, the Sajja Savings Group, promoting right livelihoods, the royal science application, healthcare support, and the creation of community museums.

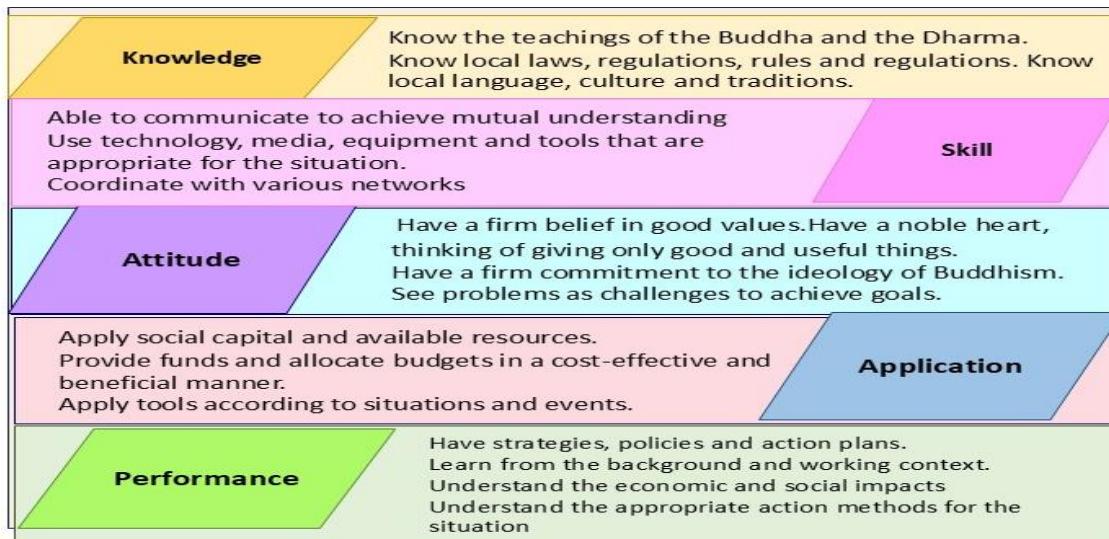
4. Public welfare 4.0 (integration) At this stage, the Sangha collaborates with external network such as the Monk Health Charter, the Elderly School, Buddhist tourism, Buddhist cultural heritage conservation, the Disaster Relief Fund, and the Volunteer Network to create sustainable development and joint development.

Criteria for evaluating the competence of foreign missionaries and their volunteer roles, volunteers for social development and human security volunteers (SDHV), and volunteers for social development are summarized in the diagram, must consist of:

1. General information of the respondents, including status of Thai monks, age, ecclesiastical rank, status within the temple and/or position in the Sangha administration, length of experience in public welfare work, current address

2. Readiness of the temple for foreign public welfare work, including Structure Readiness (components and locations), Material and Equipment Readiness, Operational Readiness (receive, advise, and coordinate referrals for individuals in need), Communication Readiness (availability of public communication channels, media outreach, and methods for disseminating information to target groups), Service Readiness (ability to function as a coordination center for receiving individuals, offering guidance, providing initial assistance, and coordinating referrals for providing social welfare services).

3. Readiness in competence assessment of monks in foreign public welfare work, consisting of knowledge (Knowledge) in public welfare work/social welfare services, skills (Skill) in public welfare work/social welfare services, and attitude (Attitude) in public welfare work/social welfare services, Application side: Public welfare operations/social welfare services and Performance side: Public welfare operations/social welfare services as mentioned below:



**Figure 2: Five competencies of Sangha's work**

The analysis of competence evaluation of Thai monks both domestically and internationally in the roles of public welfare and volunteers, volunteers for social development and human security volunteers (SDHV), and volunteers for social development in a quantitative manner found that:

1. Knowledge, with an average of 4.43, means that personnel have a good level of knowledge in public welfare operations and social welfare services.

2. Skill, with an average of 4.62, means that personnel have expertise in public welfare operations and can work efficiently.
3. Attitude, with an average of 4.57, indicates that personnel have a very positive attitude towards public welfare operations, have good intentions and attitudes in providing services to society.
4. Application, with an average of 4.79, indicates that personnel excel in applying their knowledge and skills in practice demonstrating effective implementation in real-world scenarios.
5. Performance, with an average of 4.62, indicates that personnel maintain a professional standard, effectively performing tasks according to the correct procedures.

Among these five criteria, application received the highest average score. This indicates the ability to provide services that effectively meets societal needs, and can be further developed in terms of enhancing skills and applying knowledge; so that personnel can work effectively in the long term.

The in-depth interview analysis reveals that the performance of the foreign missionaries is well-prepared in both individuals and locations for public welfare work because of complete supporting components, including monks, temple executive committeees, staff, and Buddhists in Thailand and abroad who assist in various capacities. The temple has a stable status and is widely recognized by its country of residence due to its commitment to correctness, neutrality, and adherence to local laws and cultural considerations. As such, the missionaries are able to coordinate with government agencies, private sector, and civil society.

As for the performance of the monks in public welfare work, they work under the authority and duties specified in the assigned tasks, working as a team, and working alongside with the designated committeees. This includes the Public Welfare Committee, the Wat Pracha Rath Sang Suk Project Committee, the 5 Precepts Village Project, the Central People's Training Unit Project, and the Sub-District People's Training Unit (OPK-OPT). In this regard, the work is consistently linked with government agencies because it requires budgetary support, personnel, and networks. Collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security allow them to receive cases, provide advice, and provide initial assistance and facilitate referrals to other service providers in accordance with project plans. Public welfare projects operate under the framework of "assistance, support, development and integration, creativity, development of a peaceful society". Currently, the public welfare network collaborates with both public and private sector organizations, including foundations, to enhance the impact of their work. The challenges are still the uncertain budget, relying on donations from the faithful, and some initiatives lack clear regional work plan. As for the main projects of the Sangha, there are both clear strategies and plans.

## 5. THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES

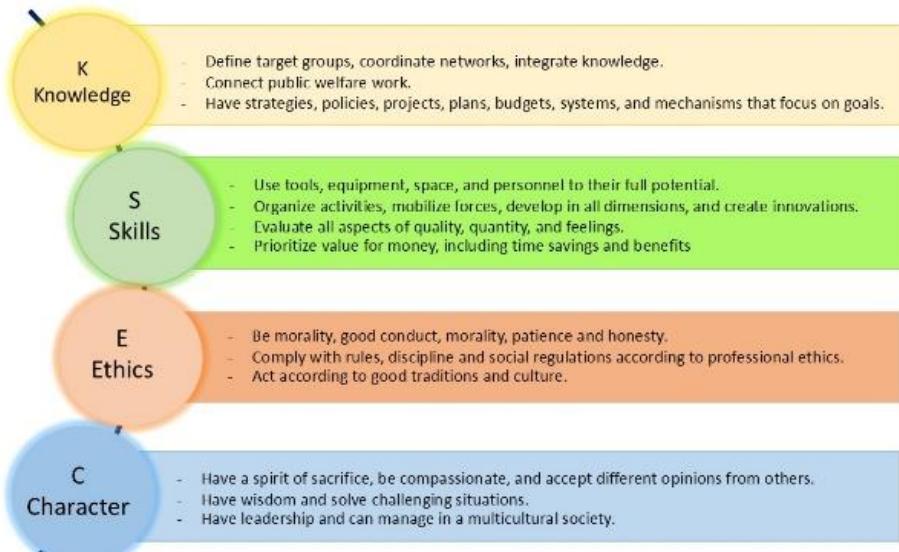
The evaluation framework for assessing the performance of foreign missionaries and monks who perform public welfare duties in the public welfare role and in the volunteer role of the Social Development Volunteer, can be summarized as follows:



**Figure 3: The evaluation framework for assessing the performance of foreign missionaries**

Diagram: Dynamics of Competency of Foreign Missionaries and Monks Performing Public Welfare in the Role of Public Welfare and Volunteer, APM, Social Development Volunteers (Researchers)

This is to bring the knowledge of all 8 dimensions to be adjusted into the curriculum framework more conveniently according to the announcement of the Higher Education Standards Committee on the details of learning outcomes according to the Higher Education Qualification Standards B.E. 2565 in 4 areas: Knowledge (Knowledge), Skills (Skills), Ethics (Ethics), and Personal Character (Character), which are considered the current curriculum development guidelines. Summarized in the following diagram:



**Figure 4: Extracted as learning outcomes according to the curriculum standards (Researcher)**

### New Body of Knowledge

The research findings reveal that personnel involved in public welfare and social service operations—particularly Thai Dhammaduta monks working both domestically and internationally—demonstrate a high level of readiness and efficiency. This includes strong knowledge, practical skills, positive attitudes, effective application of their expertise, and clear operational procedures. Average ratings across all assessed aspects were consistently high, with "application of knowledge" scoring the highest. This reflects their capacity to provide services that effectively meet societal needs. The recommendation from this research is to further enhance skills development and applied knowledge to ensure long-term operational sustainability.

### 1. Place or Location

Most international Dhammaduta monks operate in locations close to Thai or local Buddhist communities abroad, offering convenient access for engaging in religious activities. These establishments are typically full-fledged temples, equipped with essential structures such as an ordination hall, meditation hall, monk residences, and office spaces. However, due to legal constraints in different countries, these buildings are often registered as foundations or religious organizations rather than formal temples, despite being referred to as "wat" in Thai cultural terms. Many such temples are branches of those in Thailand, either directly built or supported through the invitation of monks from mother temples. Spatial capacity in these temples supports their role in public welfare and volunteer activities, highlighting their effectiveness in fulfilling their duties abroad.

### 2. Logistics or Transition

Temples and their related facilities are designed with functionality and practical usage in mind, prioritizing space for religious and cultural activities. Construction considerations include climate suitability and legal allowances in the host country. Architectural style often reflects available funding—both from Thailand and local Buddhists. The area size depends on land acquisition permissions. These logistical arrangements facilitate the effective implementation of social development roles by the monks and ensure sustainability in their humanitarian efforts.

### 3. Communication

Technological tools and infrastructure—such as computers, internet access, and communication devices—are generally sufficient to support religious activities, administrative work, and outreach. These technologies enable smooth internal coordination and external communication with local and international stakeholders. Public outreach efforts heavily rely on websites, Facebook pages, email, and messaging applications like LINE. In Japan, for example, Buddhist temples

efficiently use websites and social media to engage four main target groups: (1) Thai Buddhists residing in Japan, (2) Thai tourists, (3) Japanese individuals interested in Thai culture, and (4) Japanese individuals seeking to learn about Buddhism.

#### 4. Service or Client

International Dhammaduta monks carry out their responsibilities under assigned duties, working closely with temple committees and Thai communities abroad. They also coordinate with government bodies such as the National Office of Buddhism, the Department of Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. These collaborations often involve offering preliminary support, consultations, and referrals for Thai nationals in need. Assistance typically includes temporary shelter and moral support rather than legal or formal aid structures. Emotional and spiritual guidance, including meditation and Dhamma teachings, is a regular part of their services. However, direct financial aid is limited due to budget constraints and reliance on local donations.

#### 5. Environment or Circumstance

The working context of Dhammaduta monks abroad is shaped by cultural expectations, legal frameworks, and local community dynamics. Though their roles are unofficial in terms of legal authority, monks are widely respected and seen as senior figures within the Thai expatriate community. Their extensive knowledge and experience make them a trusted resource in matters of finance, education, health, legal issues, and general well-being. In most cases, initial support is provided by local temple committees or Thai community members, with monks stepping in primarily for moral and spiritual support. Challenges in their environment include limited funding, the need for local adaptation, and ensuring cultural sensitivity when engaging with non-Thai communities.

#### 6. Activities

Key activities of Dhammaduta monks (Buddhist missionaries) include organizing religious ceremonies, offering Dhamma teachings, conducting meditation retreats, and providing spiritual counseling. They play a central role in nurturing moral development and guiding individuals toward righteous living. Their services extend to offering advice on legal, financial, educational, and health-related matters, especially to Thai nationals facing difficulties abroad. Although in-depth crisis interventions are limited, monks continuously engage in ethical cultivation, often becoming essential figures in community resilience and social harmony:



**Figure 4: Knowledge of the assessment of the competence of foreign missionaries and monks performing public welfare work related to the role of social development and human security volunteers (SDHV) and social development volunteers (researchers)**

## 6. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to (1) survey the operating conditions of Dhamma missionaries in Thailand and abroad in their roles as public welfare workers and volunteers, including social development and human security volunteers (SDHV); (2) establish criteria and indicators for evaluating their competence; and (3) present a model for evaluating such competence

both domestically and internationally.

Findings indicate that foreign Dhamma missionaries demonstrate the highest level of competence in the domain of application, particularly in adapting and implementing public welfare activities in unfamiliar environments. These environments often include challenges such as language barriers, cultural diversity, differing climates, and local customs that significantly contrast with those in Thailand. Consequently, foreign missionaries must possess a high degree of flexibility, emotional resilience, and interpersonal skills. Their effectiveness is supported by adherence to key Buddhist principles: Saraniya Dhamma (harmony in teamwork), Aparihāniya Dhamma (effective monastic management), Brahmavihāra Dhamma (compassionate leadership), and Khantī Dhamma (perseverance and patience). These virtues foster spiritual strength, motivation, and a sense of purpose in their mission (Pomhom et al., 2023).

1. The positive attitudes and values expressed by these missionaries—such as respect for all individuals, kindness, and willingness to assist Thai expatriates, temple visitors, and local foreigners—contribute significantly to their success. This reflects a high degree of vocational commitment and interpersonal maturity, reinforcing the notion that the competence of missionaries is deeply rooted in both Buddhist ethical training and practical social engagement. These findings are consistent with Channuwong & Ruksat (2022), and Pomhom et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of missionaries developing adaptable mindsets and interpersonal skills when working in multicultural, multireligious contexts such as the Thai-Myanmar border. Their success is linked to their ability to engage with communities through compassion and clear communication, while holding firm to the core tenets of Buddhist propagation. Likewise, the work of Panyawachiro et al. (2022) supports this perspective, highlighting the continuous role of Buddhist missionaries as both religious educators and social catalysts. Their ability to revive and maintain Buddhist practices is enhanced by their dedication to community cohesion and education, both of which are crucial in modern global contexts. Chayapintho (2017) further supports this by emphasizing the need for missionaries in Europe to serve not only as religious figures but as holistic community developers. His research stresses that competence in propagation includes spreading the teachings of the Buddha, fostering faith in the Triple Gem, and encouraging the application of Buddhist principles to everyday life. Effective missionaries are those who actualize the threefold Buddhist benefits: Dīthadhammikattha, Samparāyikattha, and Paramattha (i.e., benefits in this life, the next life, and ultimate liberation).

2. Domestically, monks involved in public welfare roles also displayed high competence in applying welfare operations and providing social services. This is attributed to the fact that many of these monks serve in leadership roles such as abbots, possessing the legal authority and structural capacity under the Sangha Act to implement and manage social programs. These monks skillfully mobilize resources—such as temple facilities, community donations, and volunteer efforts—for the benefit of education, healthcare, and local development (Wisuttho, Yuphas, & Kosonkittiampon, 2021). These findings align with research conducted in the lower northeastern region, where Sangha leaders were found to excel due to three major factors: (1) organizational competence in resource management, (2) external support through collaboration with various sectors, and (3) personal competencies including leadership, communication, and community engagement (Wisuttho et al., 2021). Such leaders serve as key actors in transforming public welfare activities into meaningful societal impact through effective coordination and ethical stewardship. Similarly, the study by Dhiravangso and Chuenban (2019) on Sangha chiefs in Surin Province revealed that competence in public welfare roles is comprised of three interconnected dimensions: (1) general competence—morality, communication, and exemplary behavior; (2) personal competence—self-leadership, intelligence, and personality development; and (3) interpersonal competence—teamwork, altruism, and trustworthiness. Each of these domains encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential to effective monastic leadership.

3. The findings of this study underscore the importance of a five-dimensional competency framework—comprising knowledge, skills, attitude, application, and performance—as a foundation for enhancing the role of Thai Buddhist missionaries in both Dhamma dissemination and public welfare work. Notably, the ability to apply theoretical and practical knowledge in real-world settings emerged as the most critical determinant of effectiveness. This aligns with the principle of *Paticcasamuppāda* (dependent origination), which emphasizes the interdependence of understanding and action in Buddhist practice (Rahula, 1974). Educational institutions such as Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) and Mahamakut Buddhist University (MBU) have played a pivotal role in institutionalizing and professionalizing the training of foreign missionaries. Their curricula, structured in accordance with the Sangha Supreme Council's Regulations on the Spreading of Buddhism (B.E. 2550), have successfully integrated Buddhist doctrine with modern pedagogical strategies, thereby fostering a holistic approach to missionary education (Sangha Supreme Council, 2007; Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2022). This institutional foundation is further reinforced through multi-sectoral collaboration. The involvement of government bodies such as the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, alongside civil society organizations, strengthens the operational capacity of monks serving abroad. These partnerships facilitate resource mobilization, legal protection, and logistical support, enabling missionaries to engage in a wider spectrum of public welfare activities—ranging from disaster relief and healthcare outreach to intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding (Keyes, 1999; Swearer, 2010).

Importantly, the integration of Buddhist ethical principles into community development projects has elevated the role of the Sangha beyond spiritual leadership, positioning monks as agents of sustainable development and human security. This aligns with the Buddhist Social Engagement model, which advocates for the application of Dhamma in addressing contemporary social issues (Queen, 2000). Nevertheless, this study also reveals persistent obstacles that hinder the full realization of these roles. Language proficiency remains a significant barrier, particularly in non-Thai-speaking countries, where effective communication is essential for both Dhamma propagation and social service. Cultural adaptation is another challenge, as missionaries must navigate diverse socio-cultural environments while maintaining doctrinal integrity. Furthermore, legal and visa-related constraints often limit the duration and scope of missionary activities, while funding insecurity continues to pose a challenge to long-term sustainability (Numrich, 2008; Pongsapich, 2012).

In overall, this study underscores that Dhamma missionaries and monks, both domestically and internationally, exhibit high competence in public welfare and volunteerism. Nevertheless, there is a continued need to develop their capacities in strategic planning, organizational coordination, and intercultural communication to meet contemporary social needs effectively. Enhancing these areas will strengthen their role as compassionate leaders and agents of sustainable development rooted in Buddhist values.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the historical foundation and present-day evolution of the Thai Sangha's role in foreign Dhamma missions and public welfare services, both domestically and internationally. Beginning with the noble tradition of the Buddha's 60 disciples and significantly expanded by King Ashoka's missions, the Thai Sangha has maintained the legacy of overseas propagation through a structured, royal and ecclesiastical system. The formalization of this structure via the "Regulations of the Sangha Supreme Council on the Spreading of Buddhism B.E. 2550" and subsequent efforts by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) and Mahamakut Buddhist University (MBU) reveal a systematic approach to developing the competencies of foreign missionaries. The competence framework developed through this research emphasizes five key components: knowledge, skill, attitude, application, and performance. Among these, the highest strength lies in the ability to apply theoretical and practical understanding to real-world contexts. The study found that foreign Dhamma missionaries excel not only in teaching Dhamma but also in playing essential roles in public welfare, social development, and volunteer work, fulfilling the four-tiered model of public welfare operations: relief, support, development, and integration.

Moreover, institutional support from temples, collaboration with government and non-government agencies, and the integration of Buddhist principles into sustainable community development have been identified as key drivers of success. Challenges remain in areas such as language proficiency, cultural adaptation, budget limitations, and visa-related legal status. Nonetheless, the structure, training programs, and regulatory frameworks provide a resilient foundation for the ongoing global role of Thai Buddhist missionaries and their contributions to human security and social well-being.

### Implementation

To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the Thai Sangha's foreign Dhamma missionary and public welfare initiatives, the following implementation strategies are proposed:

#### 1. Curriculum and Competency Development

Curriculum Alignment: Utilize the research-based competence framework to align missionary training programs with the 4 areas of Higher Education Qualification Standards B.E. 2565: Knowledge, Skills, Ethics, and Personal Character. Skill-Based Modules: Develop training modules that emphasize real-world application, language proficiency, cross-cultural communication, and use of technology for Dhamma dissemination. Ethical Leadership Training: Reinforce moral and ethical foundations, integrating case studies and roleplay scenarios to prepare missionaries for complex social dynamics.

#### 2. Institutional Support and Collaboration

Resource Allocation: Strengthen budgetary and administrative support through partnerships with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and other relevant agencies. Temple Infrastructure Readiness: Ensure readiness in physical, communicative, and administrative infrastructure at temples abroad to serve as effective welfare coordination centers. Volunteer Network Expansion: Promote the formation of multidisciplinary volunteer teams—including laypeople, professionals, and local communities—to assist monks in public service missions.

#### 3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Performance Evaluation Tools: Implement a regular monitoring system using the five-competency framework (knowledge, skill, attitude, application, performance) for ongoing assessment and development. Feedback Mechanism: Create a feedback loop from community beneficiaries and partner agencies to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of missionary

work. Strategic Planning: Develop regional strategic plans to ensure that activities align with both local needs and global Buddhist mission goals.

#### **4. Sustainable Development Integration**

Promote Public Welfare 4.0: Encourage integrated approaches by collaborating with external networks (e.g., health services, tourism, education, disaster relief) to embed Buddhist principles into sustainable development models. Capacity Building: Train monks in project management, fundraising, digital media, and intercultural ethics to improve long-term program delivery and reduce reliance on uncertain donation streams. Cultural Diplomacy: Position foreign Dharma missionaries as agents of soft power and cultural diplomacy by nurturing partnerships with international Buddhist organizations and foreign governments.

Through these strategies, the Thai Sangha can enhance the preparedness and competence of its foreign missionaries, ensuring their contributions remain effective, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the holistic vision of Buddhism in public welfare and global peacebuilding.

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#### **Declaration**

We hereby declare that this research entitled **“Competency Evaluation of Dhammaduta Monks in Social Public Welfare Role with Healthcare”** is our original work and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, to any other institution for any academic award. All sources of information used in this research have been duly acknowledged. The research has been conducted in accordance with academic integrity, and any assistance received has been clearly noted.

#### **Ethical Approval**

This research involves the evaluation of competencies of Thai Dhammaduta monks, both within Thailand and abroad, in their roles related to public welfare, volunteer services, and social development and human security volunteering (SDHSV). The research involves interaction with human participants and thus required ethical approval. This research was reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University to ensure the protection of participants' rights and safety and to maintain research quality. The ethics approval number is **MCU RIB.636/2567**.

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