

A Response to the 30th December 2009 Article, “Monks Target Western Clergy”

On 28th December 2009, a representative delegation of senior monks from the Wat Nong Pah Pong Sangha held a press conference in response to various articles in the major Thai newspapers released earlier between the 20th to 24th December. These articles effectively stated that the Council of Elders and the Office of National Buddhism had done everything in their power in regards to Ajahn Brahmavamso and the bhikkhuni ordinations and that the future status of Ajahn Brahmavamso as abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery and the ownership of that monastery was left up to Wat Nong Pah Pong’s decision. The articles effectively left the responsibility of this issue back on Wat Nong Pah Pong to proceed with. In order to make clear Wat Nong Pah Pong’s stance, it was decided by Luang Por Liem and other governing committee members to make a statement to the Thai media. A very unprecedented move in Wat Nong Pah Pong’s history.

Although this matter has been cleared up within the Thai press, it seems that the article in English has stirred up and agitated Western readers. This has been caused by some misrepresentations of the events of the press conference and the editorial language used in the article. Wat Nong Pah Pong feels that it is best to clear up these misunderstandings.

The article says that the Thai Sangha “want the properties of Thai temples in the West to come under the ownership of the Thai Sangha to ensure complete control.” In reality, Wat Nong Pah Pong stated in the press conference that it had no power in which to retake ownership of Bodhinyana Monastery, even if the land on which it was built on was initially offered to Ajahn Chah (Bodhinyana Thera) and Wat Nong Pah Pong. Wat Nong Pah Pong requested the Office of National Buddhism to re-evaluate the way that monasteries in the West are governed so that confusion and division such as with the present situation would be avoided in the future.

The most misleading section is where it is written that “If action is not taken, the council fears that more women could be ordained in the West,” and quotes Phra Kru Opaswuthikorn saying that “Sooner or later, we’ll see female monks everywhere.” Although this is a sensational statement in the eyes of a Western reader, a more accurate translation would be, “If we (Wat Nong Pah Pong) had not taken any action, it would open the doors in the future for women to ordain as bhikkhunis within the Wat Nong Pah Pong western sangha, running into the same problem we have at the moment (breaking Thai law)”. The issue is not that Wat Nong Pah Pong is against women ordaining, but rather due to Wat Nong Pah Pong’s status as a member of the Thai Sangha and its obligation to follow Thai Sangha Laws.

Further, this article’s portrayal of facts is to be questioned. It cites that “two women” were ordained, instead of the four women which were actually ordained.

In conclusion, we would like readers of this article to be wary of the editorial sensationalism and misrepresentations that have been given to this press release. It was originally intended to reply to the questions the Thai media had on Wat Nong Pah Pong’s stance in relation to the present situation with Ajahn Brahmavamso and Bodhinyana Monastery’s status, not a gender equality and power-seizing issue that it has been made into.

The Administrative Committee of Wat Nong Pah Pong