

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After 23 years of Thailand's economic development, from the first economic development plan in 1961 to 1984, the year that *Snakes*, Wimon Sainimnuan's first novel was first published in Thai language, Thailand's economic development brought various negative impacts to Thai society and its people both in urban and rural areas. One aspect that Sainimnuan mainly criticizes in *Snakes* is the changes in life values among Thai monks, which the researcher considers to be consequences of economic development. *Snakes* portrays monks who do not study Dharma or practice meditation or help the community, but spend time thinking of rebuilding the temple's properties, and making and selling amulets to the laity. These changing roles and behaviors of monks make the researcher question the conscience and responsibilities of Thai monks. Therefore, in this research, the researcher is trying to discuss causes for the change of monks' life values to values which focus on objects and money.

The concept of materialism, consumerism, capitalism and commercialism fit well with the economic development process that was first adopted from western economic development system in an era of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat's government. According to Pipit Supapipat's *Social Study and Country Development* (1979), Thailand's approach to economic development under an apparent support from the United States was to adopt Classic and Neo-Classical Growth Theories which aimed to collect capital and encourage free competition which is an essential idea of capitalism. Thailand's national goal is to change the country's economic structure from an agricultural-based economy to an industrializing one. Assoc. Prof. Srisak Wanlipodom in his work, *Knowledge of Thai History 1: Socio-cultural Development in Thai History* (2001) also states that Thailand and its neighboring countries were labeled as underdeveloped countries by these foreign organizations to justify the necessity of the development under their guidance which included two major activities: industrial infrastructure development and educational development,

such as construction of roads and dams in rural areas which allowed capitalists to take advantage of natural and labor resources which created various negative impact on the destruction of the environment, and rural community, poverty among rural population, and changes in attitudes, religious values, and moral system (165-170).

From Wanlipodom's point of view, it can be seen that in an early age of modernization, Thai people were not aware of economic development's impact that the country later faced. Once we did realize that the traditional society was gradually conformed into a modern one, and many traditional things were changing or some were destroyed in order to let modernization take place, it was too late. Modernization started at first in the capital city, Bangkok, and then expanded to other regions and countryside. However, during the economic development process, a number of key roads were widened and new routes were built, and the traffic congestion became so severe with numbers of cars and motorcycles. Residential condominiums which expanded and led to the production of a variety of housing projects in the city was counted as the causes of air and noise pollution. Moreover, most manufacturing and other industrial activities that remain clustered in and around Bangkok became the driving force of Bangkok's expansion and continued to be the major contributor to population and immigration growth.

While economic development started its impact in the city, people in rural areas were hoping and waiting for the development, such as roads, dams, electricity, television, and refrigerators, to come to their villages. John E. De Young states in his book, *Village Life in Modern Thailand* (1958) that Bangkok extended its power, as a process of domination and centralization, to the region both politically, and economically. In the past, most Thai peasants were independent farmers living in a subsistence economy. Villagers had no radios, and only headmen, abbots, and some schoolteachers read newspapers. However, when road construction became priority in the government's program of modernization, better transportation had increased contact between the villages and the city. Traveling dispensaries brought not only western drugs but the latest songs, news, and fashions from the city. The cinema had also gone deeper into villages with the advent of better roads. Young people

particularly, were coming in contact with both Thai and western movies, and were imitating the behaviors they saw in them. People started to purchase luxurious materials such as jewelry, bicycles, pressure lamps, and sewing machines. When all these fantasy objects reached people, they framed and fascinated people to want more and consume more. Thus, modern life pattern gradually originated at the same time that the old traditional values continued to decline. Although it is rather surprising to think about how people have changed their simple lifestyles rapidly for these modern things, it is actually a normal concept of economic development and modernization.

Economic development is actually a process whereby an economy's real national income increases and if the rate of development is greater than the rate of population growth, then per capita real income will increase. With the increase of income, people have more money to spend for healthy food, good medical services, luxurious residence, higher education, entertaining activities, and other comfortable things, which means their standard of living increases. This is how economists measure the development of a country. Yet, all these things do not happen easily, people and society have to exchange this living standard with the loss of tradition throughout the process of economic development. Wolt Rostow has identified Five Stages of Economic Development which are traditional society, transitional stage (the preconditions for take-off), take-off stage, drive to maturity stage, and high mass consumption stage. The first stage is to identify characteristics of traditional society that traditional society should be dominated by subsistence activity where output is consumed by producers rather than traded. Any trade is carried out by barter where goods are exchanged directly for other goods. Agriculture is the most important industry and production is labor intensive using only limited quantities of capital. Resource allocation is determined very much by traditional methods of production. Second, condition necessary for industrialization begins to take shape. People become convinced that economic progress is possible and that it will bring them numerous desirable benefits. The next stage is called the take-off stage where rapid growth is achieved through the application of modern industrial techniques in a limited number of sectors of economy as well as the rise of the investment. The fourth stage is the drive to maturity which involves the application of modern technology over the whole

range of the economy. And the last stage is the high mass consumption which consumer industries and the service sector become increasingly dominant.

In the high mass consumption stage, Thai society has been reinforced by various marketing and advertising strategies which encourage people to keep on spending money to buy things that they do not really want to consume. Moreover, it can be seen that consumers do not actually consume those commodities but they consume their social values. According to Jean Baudrillard, consumption is a structure that is external to and coercive over individuals. While it can and does take the forms of a structural organization, a collective phenomenon, a morality, it is above all else a coded system of signs. Individuals are coerced into using that system via consumption which is an important way in which people communicate with one another. The ideology associated with the system leads people to believe that they are affluent, fulfilled, happy and liberated. What we consume is signs, or messages, or images rather than commodities. Commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify. And what they signify is defined not by what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities. When people consume more, they are addicted to consumption and consumption becomes part of their life or what is called consumerism. The word “consumerism” is often used to refer to a life “excessively preoccupied with consumption” (qtd. in Miles 4). It apparently has a fundamental influence upon every experience of social life in advanced capitalist society.

As consumerism is a consequence of economic development process which is actually a part of modernization, changes in life values because of consumerism are also the consequences of modernization. According to Robert H. Lauer, there are two broad types of consequences of modernization, structural and social psychological changes. Structural change involves five areas: demography, the stratification system, the polity, education, and the family. Social psychological changes include two changes: changes in values and attitudes and changes that bear upon the well-being of individuals. Modernization is not possible without the kinds of structural and social psychological changes, and tradition has to be obligated or at least disrupted by the

process of modernization (294-309). Neil J. Smelser (qtd. in Etzioni 259-271) also gives the model of modernization through his ideal-type structural change: Differentiation, Reintegration, and Social Disturbance. For the differentiation of value system, many traditional attachments must be modified in order to set up more differentiated institutional structures. Because these established commitments and methods of integration are deeply rooted in the organization of traditional society, a very generalized and powerful commitment is required, in the nature of the case, to “pry” individuals from these attachments. Such lines of differentiation form the secularization of religious values because other institutional spheres such as economic, political, scientific, come to be established more nearly on their own. The values governing these spheres are no longer sanctioned directly by religious belief, but by an autonomous rationality. As such rationalities replace religious sanctions in these spheres, and secularization occurs. In the process of reintegration, the resulting integrative structures coordinate and solidify social structure which the forces of differentiation threaten to fragment. The consequential changeability points up the extremely vital needs for reintegration under conditions of rapid, irregular, and disruptive processes of differentiation. As for the social disturbance or the discontinuities, the structural changes associated with modernization are disruptive to the social order. These often conflict with old modes of social action, which are frequently dominated by traditional religious, family, and kinship systems. These traditional standards are among the most inflexible of obstacles to modernization, and when they are threatened, serious dissatisfaction and opposition arise. The faster the tempo of modernization, the more severe are the discontinuities. This unevenness creates anomie, for it generates disharmony between life experiences and the normative framework by which these experiences are regulated. The new forms of integration compete with the old undifferentiated systems of solidarity. Such conditions create virtually unlimited potentialities for group conflict. Three responses to these discontinuities are people’s anxiety, hostility, and fantasy.

Economic development encourages spending and consumption that make people feel that they always need to buy commodities to communicate with other people in the society about their working status, images, wealth, and social class. The

way people can afford these commodities is from working harder. Therefore, it can be considered that consumerism is based on the views that work and competition are what people are compelled to do in order to obtain money for consumption, especially people in modern society who aim at accomplishment and constancy, and tend to hold money and authority in the highest regard. According to Thailand Development Research Institute (qtd. in Tasondhi 3-4), most modern people who live in urban areas earn their living mainly from engagement in activities in the service sector and the pattern of living is rather competitive. Time is very expensive factor for individual urbanites. Behaviors of modern people under capitalism, materialism, and consumerism fall to the condition of desire that is higher than ability to make money and to produce. Thus, feeling of uneasiness always occurs and people have to make great effort to seek material things to satisfy themselves endlessly. Whereas Thai society has been moving ahead by influences of modern science, technology and popular culture, traditional culture and religious values as well as the roles of temple and monks have demolished following those five stages of economic development.

According to Prayudh Payutto (Phra Debvedi) in *Buddhist Economics* (1992), while people are enthusing towards modern environment, coffee shops, bars and nightclubs have replaced the temple. Modern people see the temple and monks as an outdated institution. In the same way, the temple and monks which are forced by the society in every aspect are becoming different from the temple and monks in the old days. Traditional society does not demand severe competition but loving kindness and generosity. In contrast, modern society associates more with marketing and advertising strategies which speak in purely economic terms because advertising consists of methods used to persuade people to consume and spend money. Advertising is also one of marketing strategies that is bound up with popular values, and the social psychology is employed to utilize popular values for economic ends. The volume of advertising may cause an increase in materialism and consumerism (1-38). Moreover, among instability in economics, society and culture, people seek material belongings such as cars, motorcycles, and furniture. Modern teenagers own expensive mobile phones, brand name clothes and accessories. Competition between business companies increases. Various commercial advertisements, marketing and

promotion strategies, and product distributing channels are easily offered to the target customers. People can effortlessly seek things to consume because consumer products are out there at department stores. People cannot deny these commercial offers the same way monks who live in urban areas cannot escape from this consumerist lifestyle. In the old days, monks only need food, clothing, lodging, and medicine for living. Eight basic requisites for monks are alms bowl, robes, a sitting cloth, a needle case, a wristband, water filter, razor, and its sheath. Later items such as an umbrella and sandals are allowed. However, monks nowadays pay more attention to modern objects such like those used by the laity. Monks in modern time own television, computer, internet service, and particularly mobile phone. At this point, the researcher is concerned with life values among Thai monks that change from the simple living pattern following the Buddha's teaching to the more complicated one forced by materialism and consumerism. In the same way, Sainimnuan, a novelist who critically expresses his attitudes toward changes of life values among Thai monks in *Snakes*, by forces of materialism, consumerism, capitalism and commercialism, portrays monks who violate monks' rules as well as fail to teach Dharma to lay people.

In Buddhism, Dharma means the Truth which is called The Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are suffering (*Dukkha*), the causes of sufferings (*Samudya*), the end of Suffering (*Nirodha*), and the path leading to the end of suffering (*Makkha*) or the attainment of Nirvana or the Noble Eightfold Path. The truth of suffering is that life is an imperfect, uncomfortable, and struggling process. The causes of sufferings are found in the three desires which are desire for sexual object, desire for existence, and desire for annihilation. The end of suffering is the enlightened mind itself. After death, the absolutely purified mind will merge with a "Perfect, Immortal State" called "Nirvana". And the fourth truth is the Noble Eightfold Path which is the middle way between self-gratification in sensual pleasure and self-mortification. According to Gerald Roscoe's *The Triple Gem: An Introduction to Buddhism* (1994), in order to meet the end of suffering, one must follow the Noble Eightfold Path which is Right Action, Right Speech, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Meditation, Right View and Right

Thought. The Noble Eightfold path goes forward to moral cultivation, mental cultivation and to insight-wisdom.

The Right Action, Right Speech, and Right Livelihood are grouped in the cultivation of moral conduct process which lies at the core of Buddhist ethical conduct. They influence all aspects of lay behaviors and of monastic behaviors. Right Action promotes honorable and peaceful conduct, and is based on the Five Precepts: abstention from destroying life, stealing, illicit sex, intoxicant, and falsehoods. Right Speech promotes courteous, considerate, non-contentious conduct. It requires abstention from harsh language, slander, gossip, and bearing false witness, which are evidences of false Speech. And Right Livelihood promotes life instead of destroying life. It requires abstention from earning a livelihood in any way that harms others: slaughter of animals, and trading in arms, drugs, intoxicants, poisons or living beings. Moreover, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are grouped as a way of mental cultivation. Right Effort lies in developing our will power to change our habits of thoughts, and in developing the insight and intuition to perceive our states of mind. Effective mind cultivation takes effort, commitment and persistent meditation. Right Mindfulness requires unremitting awareness applied to every thought, word, and deed in order to keep one's mind in control. And Right Concentration is right meditation for calming the mind and developing insight-wisdom. Finally, it can be seen that the cultivation of ethical conduct is the first requirement in religious discipline. It is the indispensable foundation on which to build the cultivation of mental tranquility and mindfulness or meditation. And meditation is the discipline from which insight-wisdom derives. In order to attain insight-wisdom one must have the Right View, and the Right Thought. Right View or understanding of life is the view that there are three fundamental truths which are imperfection, impermanence, and impersonality. Right Thought means right motivation and right attitude. This involves freeing oneself from what the three major defilements which are greed, aversion, and delusion.

A monk must not only believe completely in Dharma and understand the substance of the doctrine, but also must undergo 227 monk's rules so that a monk can

attain salvation for himself. According to *Patimokkha: the Rule for Buddhist Monks* (1969), the rules for monk are called *Patimokkha*. *Patimokkha* is a part of the greater *Vinaya Pitaka* or Discipline Observance which is the basic attitude which governs monks. These rules represent authoritative orders of the Buddha on modes of conduct and restrains on both physical and verbal actions. Every monk should be governed by the law of the *Vinaya*. The violation of any of its rules is called an *Apatti* or offence. The 227 monk's rules are grouped by content into the following eight divisions: *Parachika*, *Sanghadisesa*, *Aniyata*, *Nisaggiya-Pachittiya*, *Pachittiya*, *Patidesaniya*, *Sekhiya*, and *Adhikaranasamatha*. The *Parachikka* are four offences which are murdering, sexual intercourse, stealing, and false speech to the spiritual attainments. Transgressor for *Parachikka* is expelling from the Order. The *Sanghadisesa* are thirteen offences, including masturbation, for which punishment is decided by a meeting of monks. The two *Anittaya* rules cover cases in which the penalty is determined according to circumstances. The thirty *Nisaggiya-Pachittiya* deal mainly with the possession of prohibited articles. The ninety-two *Pachittiya* deal with a wide range of offences from lying, drinking alcoholic beverages, destroying life, eating out, proper times, including going to see an army, and damaging plants. The four *Patidesaniya* rules cover the confession a monk should make when he finds he has eaten food he should not have eaten. The seventy-five *Sekiya* are rules of conduct which carry no penalty for transgression but merely directions. They deal principally with conduct among the laity, manners in eating, and manners in teaching the doctrine. Lastly, the seven *Adhikaranasamath* are rules for settling disputes which may arise within monks.

In Thai society, monks' livelihood is entirely dependent upon the laity for material support because along the line of *Vinaya*, monks cannot engage in economic transactions. So Buddhist people are persons who provide monks with the four necessities of life which are food, clothing, housing, and medicine. Therefore, besides religious duties, in return, monks have a responsibility to give services to the laity at secular or social functions or to perform for the benefits of the whole society. According to Seang Chandra-ngarm, monks have two kinds of duties which are religious duties and secular duties. Religious duties are to observe 227 monastic rules,

to practice meditation, and to develop insight into the three truths of life: imperfectness, impermanence, and impersonality. Secular duties are to teach Buddhist philosophy and moral to the public, to conduct religious rites for people in different occasions, to help in rural development work, and to serve as general consultants to lay members of the temple (14-15).

However, since Thailand adopted western economic development system which mainly consists of five stages in developing processes, traditional things gradually disappear and are replaced by modern things such as transportation and accommodation. This parallels with Rostow's 4 steps of economic development. Simple ways of living and traditional values seem to be outdated and subjected to be changed by new stream of modern thoughts. And in the fifth stage of development process, high mass consumption in various kinds of material commodities is introduced to Thai society and has influence on life values of Thai people. When Thai people both in urban and rural areas value and consume material things continually, they begin to rely on, and become victims of materialism and consumerism. Consumerism comes from the West and expands to everywhere in the world and finally enters Thai society. Monks as members of the society also attach themselves to the influences of materialism and consumerism. However, simple life style of monks under the monks' rules is opposite to the significance of money and objects. Therefore, materialism and consumerism are considered problems among Thai monks.

Changes in life values among Thai monks in *Snakes* are represented by three monks who attach to materialism and consumerism: Abbot Nian, Phra Janthorn, and Old Monk Tei. For Abbot Nian, materialistic and consumerist forces drive him to conduct deadly sins, from encouraging villagers to donate money to renovate the temple, having sexual affair with Phra Janthorn, making up stories and telling lies as strategies to gain money from the villagers, and becoming a tool for a politician to seek money and wealth. In the case of Phra Janthorn, he violates monks' rules in having sexual relationship and getting paid from the Abbot. As for Old Monk Tei, he makes his livelihood by selling amulets. He is a money collector who never lets even

a *satang* out of his pocket. Old Monk Tei is a representation of monks in 1980s, an era *Snakes* was published, that the trade in amulets had become big business and amulet markets sprung up in various parts of the city (Phongpaichit and Bakers 169).

Before becoming a Khoak Phranang's Abbot, Abbot Nian used to be a monk in a city temple where modernity has already presented. Abbot Nian carries modern vision with him. When he arrives to an undeveloped temple like Khoak Phranang Temple, he desires to renovate and to make it a modern temple so that Khoak Phranang Temple will be like a temple in town. The Abbot goes to the city from time to time to meet his reverend and friends. What he has seen from a modern temple in town, and what information and suggestion he has received from the reverend about the renovation inspire him to make his temple modern. From the Abbot's point of view, the temple should have luxurious decoration to give pleasure to people's eyes:

As for the prayer hall, it is built in a thoroughly old fashioned style. The walls of plain stucco are devoid of the least decorative patterns. ... Doors and windows are made of plain wood, without any cravings to please the eye. ... Well, within five years at most, this temple will be on a par with those in the city. I'll turn it into a small paradise. (27-28)

The new temple for the Abbot is a place where he can live comfortably, and where he can use for commerce, and earn more money whereas for the villagers, the new temple shows how much the Abbot has faith in Buddhism and how much he dedicates himself to maintain the Buddhist monasteries. The sacred and modern image of the temple is used to represent the sacred and modern image of the Abbot as well as to bring the Abbot fame and admiration from the villagers. For these reasons, the Abbot starts his renovation project and it keeps expanding, from a new crematorium, sermon hall, payer hall, to the monks' quarters:

Once the crematory's built, I'll go ahead with the sermon hall, and then the prayer hall. It's a shame the Lord has to stay in that stuffy place. When the new hall's ready, He'll be more comfortable. So, I'll have to bother you again. (142)

Building temple properties is actually for the benefits of the monks and the villagers, not for the convenience of the Buddha statue. For him, it is a shame because the old prayer hall creates bad image to the temple and when other people from other places come to the temple, the old prayer hall makes the Abbot himself feel ashamed because he thinks that it is his responsibility to develop the temple. If he cannot develop anything, he will also have bad image. According to Baudrillard, what we consume is signs rather than commodities because commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify. And what they signify is defined not by what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities. This means material ownership and material consumption contain denotation that people consume material to present their working status, images, wealth, and social class they belong to. For example, most people might not eat McDonald because of its taste, but to present themselves as modern people. People might not wear Nike because of its softness, but because Nike represents image of being a new generation or being the winner. People might desire Mercedes Benz, not for its safety, but to show their social class and wealth. As for Abbot Nian, he does not really need the sermon hall or the prayer hall for monks and the villagers' religious activities but for the image of the temple. Thus, the way the Abbot wants to renovate the temple is not for religious activities using but for the image of the temple which is only a sign.

Abbot Nian does not only attach himself to materialism and consumerism, he also supports these values in the people's thought:

The kamnan clears his throat. "If I want to make merit, it's to set an example for my offspring. Once it's built, I'd like them to remember me by it and to follow my examples. So, I'd like to ask you, Father ---"

"Sure. Go ahead."

"Er --- I'm sort of embarrassed to mention it, because I've never ---"

"What is it?"

"I'd like to have my name on the crematory, so that those who pass by and see it are edified by my example."

The abbot laugh. "Oh, that's no big deal. I've thought the whole thing through. All those who make contribution will get their names up so that everyone is aware of how they contributed. It's a way

of acknowledging a person's meritorious deeds and goodness of heart. Good people must be upheld, as I'm sure you know, kamnan". (103)

Abbot Nian desires for the temple to become famous the same way Kamnan Rit wants to become famous. In order to gain honor, Kamnan Rit donates a lot of money to the temple in exchange for his name on the crematory. It can be obviously seen that Kamnan Rit's desire to become famous is supported by Abbot Nian. In other words, Abbot Nian encourages an attainment to *Atman* or "self". In Buddhism, the idea of "self" is not right because fame, honor, and glory are passing phases which soon vanish in the air. According to the Buddha's teaching cited in *What the Buddha Taught* (1967) written by Walipola Rahula, *Anatta* is the doctrine of no-self or no-soul which means there is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging and eternal in the whole of existence. Nothing really belongs to humans, even humans' body will disappear in the end. In contrast, *Atman* or "self" doctrine supports status of being, permanent, everlasting, and unchanging, which Buddhism sees as imaginary and not corresponding to reality. The "self" doctrine produces harmful thoughts of "me" and "mine", selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, impurities, and other defilements. Thus, according to the Buddha's teaching, Abbot Nian should teach Kamnan Rit the "no-self" doctrine so as to make him realize that fame is an imaginary. It is not permanent and will finally disappear.

In addition, it can be seen that the more Abbot Nian concerns himself with material development, the more his worldly desire becomes uncontrollable and it drives him to lose his life value. He fails to complete his monk roles in teaching Dharma to the villagers. He does not teach the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to free villagers from the suffering but he encourages the villagers to believe that their present existence is a consequence of what they did in their past lives. And in this life, villagers should make merit for the better life in the next life. So he teaches the villagers to make merit by donation. Every time he talks to the villagers, he has to bring the topic of donation into the conversation by claiming that it is the way to gain merit.

In fact, donation is a kind of giving (*Dana*) which is one of the ten ways suggested for Buddhists to do. According to Bhikkhu Khantipalo in *Buddhism Explained* (1986), ten ways of making merit are giving (*Dana*), virtue or respecting the religious rules (*Sila*), meditation with the purpose of understanding Dharma (*Pawana*), reverence, helpfulness, transference of merit, rejoicing in others' merit, listening to Dharma, teaching Dharma, and striving after knowledge of the truth of good and evil. Moreover, donation to the monastery consists primarily of funds given for the construction and repair of buildings, and money and goods given on the occasion of the robe-offering or *Kathina* ceremony. The money given at robe-offering ceremony is especially important to small provincial monasteries, allowing them to purchase new equipments and goods.

According to Phra Paisarn Wisalo (qtd. in Tasondhi 4) an obvious change in Buddhist values is the form of merit making which automatically translates into the amount of donation. Even the Buddha's teaching represented by Thai monks is also reinterpreted according to monetary terms. Buddhism in Thailand has changed its form due to the force of consumer culture. Although it appears that Buddhism still exists but its goal to the end of sufferings or to free from an attachment has disappeared because monks in modern time fail to persuade lay people to live wisely and morally.

According to Nareenoot Damrongchai in her work, *Reinterpretation of "Tam-boon" in Contemporary Thai Society* (2003), merit making is a basic tradition in Buddhism and is believed to be a simple way of gaining merit. Since Buddhists believe in Dharma and *Karma* instead of the existence of a God, the object of their worship is rather abstract and at the same time individual. Merit is accumulated for oneself, and can directly lead to a happy life. For this reason, making merit is always highest in a Thai Buddhists' mind. After making merit, good fortune will return in some ways even in a more abstract form, like a better life in the next world. However, this belief may function well in a small society that is not very materialistic. In big cities, which have been developed into modern communities where materialism seems to dominate everything, practical things such as money or material goods, which are

readily attainable, have replaced abstract concepts (220-221). Like lay people who try to apply their knowledge and special skills to their work in order to make more money, monks apply their Buddhist knowledge in merit making to earn money and finally they are confused themselves until they fail to teach the real value of Dharma to the people.

In *Snakes*, Abbot Nian cannot wait for money that comes only from robe-offering ceremony which is organized only once a year. So he asks the villagers to donate money so that he can start the construction earlier. Abbot Nian makes the villagers understand that donation is the only way to gain merit. He tells people to donate money as much as possible. It seems that for the Abbot, money is the symbol of merit-making. Everyday Abbot Nian thinks of how to get money from the villagers to renovate the temple. He has an ability to calculate income that he earns from his temple fair business such as by organizing nine night-temple-fairs, he will get enough money to build 4 new monk cells. As the Abbot knows well that all money to support his project mainly comes from villagers' donation who are extremely poor because the rice they grow provides not much income, and they have not enough to eat each day, the renovating project should be kept simple. However, the abbot does not really care or at least wants to help them to have better living condition. The Abbot assumes that the villagers are willing to donate money to the temple. He talks to Kamnan Rit:

The villagers here are poor, but they are all generous and love to make merit. That one time when we held the festival of the fourth month, we were able to collect enough donations to build all the quarters anew. This year, the villagers are growing rice again, so after they sell their crops, we can expect enough donations to finish the construction of the crematory. (128)

In addition, the Abbot encourages the villagers to think of better life in the next life, which they do not really know exists. He uses the villagers' faith in the next life as a key to gain money from them. In reality, he exploits them because he never stops asking for money since the scope of his development project keeps expanding from the quarters to the sermon hall and to other things.

Gaining merit is from doing good deeds. One way to conduct good deed is to make merit but it should be merit not from monks asking people to donate money. There are many ways to make merit in Buddhism such as studying Dharma, practicing basic meditation, and preserving five precepts. However, these are ways of making merit which Abbot Nian never teaches the laity to do. Furthermore, with regard to modernizing the community, the Abbot should be closely involved in helping villagers develop their livelihood first. The Buddha teaches monks to have loving-kindness (*Metta*) and compassion (*Karuna*) toward humans and animals, it is a monk's activity to help and develop living condition of the villagers before thinking of rebuilding the temple's properties which are just material things. The Abbot, as an educated monk who has better knowledge than the laymen, should teach the villagers to be satisfied in what they have, and to try their best in this life in order to lift up their living condition. He should be a general consultant who helps in rural development work. These are examples of secular duties that Abbot Nian should do. However, these are examples of secular duties that in reality the Abbot never does.

Besides failing to teach Dharma to villagers, Abbot Nian also violates monk's rules which mostly concern money issue. Dharma of the Buddha stands in contrast to money, materialism and consumerism. Buddhist Dharma encourages people to eliminate material desires whereas money, materialism and consumerism encourage people's greed for objects. Therefore, whenever monks attach to money and objects, they lose their Buddhist insight and finally violate monks' rules.

From the Buddha's teaching about monks rules, the four defeats (*Parachikka*) are considered the most severe offenses which consist of killing, sexual intercourse, stealing, and false speech to the spiritual attainments. Transgressor for the four defeats is expelling from the Order. In *Snakes*, the Abbot violates two of the four defeats which are sexual intercourse, and killing. From the Buddha's teaching, a monk must not recommend killing, suicide or help arrange a murder. Also, a monk must not engage in sexual affair. Every form and variety of sexual penetration be it genital, oral or anal, whether with woman or man or animal is forbidden. However, Abbot Nian

and Phra Janthorn have sexual affair with each other. The Abbot desires sexual pleasure whereas Phra Janthorn wants money:

It's for you --- a gift. You can give it to your family and stop about disrobing. I'd like you to stay with me from now on and help me develop our temple as I planned. Go on, take it."

Janthorn raises his joined hands, bows to the abbot and mumbles words of thanks, not daring to look the abbot in the face.

"I'm giving you five thousand first, and again ten thousand afterward ---"

Janthorn's heart beats faster. Though it is only five thousand, he has never laid his hands on much money in his life.

"I'll keep giving you more so long as you stay with me. I've got plenty of money," he says with smile, puts his arm around Janthorn's shoulders and gives them a gentle squeeze out of fondness. Janthorn feels abashed, but out of consideration for the abbot he dares not move.

That night Janthorn receives another ten thousand in a way he has never dreamed of. (133)

Their sexual affair has to be kept secret but Old Monk Tei finds out their secret relationship one day. The Abbot is afraid that Old Monk Tei will go public on what he has seen, so he kills Old Monk Tei by using a spare key to get into The Old Monk Tei's room and poisons him by pouring the snakes' poison into the teapot. According to the four defeats which provide the heaviest punishment, the Abbot must be defrocked from monkhood because of sexual affair and killing charges. However, no one knows about his bad deeds because he uses his position to keep them secret.

Another crime Abbot Nian has conducted is making up stories and telling lies for the purpose of gaining donation from the villagers and city people. Abbot Nian is smart in oral communication to the villagers. His speech makes the villagers believe what he says is the truth, and they comply with what he says. The first story is about a statue eating a man. One day a novice sees that the Buddha statue in the prayer hall's bleeding at the mouth. Phra Janthorn and the Abbot say that a gang of robbers tries to cut off his head and the Buddha image tries to fight back by using his mouth to bite those robbers until blood gushes forth. Then, the Abbot uses a hammer and nails to seal the Buddha statue's mouth and hands, mumbling magic spell, and blows at the

mouth of the statue. After that, the statue eating a man becomes a trademark of the temple; more and more people come to the temple to pay respect to the statue and to donate money. People praise the Abbot for his outstanding virtue; the Buddha statue lets the Abbot drive nails into his mouth and hands. They think that if it is someone else, the statue would fight back. For this reason, they consider it their duty to pay respect to the Abbot also. They shower him with flowers, incense and candles, and donate money toward the construction of a new prayer hall.

The second story is about Old Monk Tei's rotten corpse. After killing Old Monk Tei, Abbot Nian goes to the district and comes back with formalin which he injects into Old Monk Tei's corpse. Then he makes up a story that Old Monk Tei's body does not rot which brings more and more people to Khaoak Phranang Temple to pay respect to Old Monk Tei's body. Then the Abbot announces that after the cremation is over, he will have Old Monk Tei's relics made into amulets to be leased. He also advertises in newspaper that Old Monk Tei amulets are available to the faithful for 500 Baht for each. In this case, Abbot Nian loses his virtue of being a monk. He plans to and kills Old Monk Tei. He is a murderer. He has no loving kindness and compassion to other humans, even with a corpse, he even finds a way to make money from it.

The huge amount of money donated by the faithful is not handled by honest intention. It is not really used for temple's renovation but for the Abbot's personal desire. For instance, the Abbot gives ten thousand baht to Phra Janthorn without reluctance while the villagers work so hard to get only little amount of money that finally is asked to donate to the temple. This is what the Abbot does for his villagers, telling lies to gain money, encouraging people to believe in supernatural things, employing tricks to create opportunities to exploit the villagers, and using the villagers' faith in Buddhism to seek ways to build him fame and earn him money for personal pleasure, and comfortable life. His intelligence also helps him from being defrocked and helps him gain more fame and respect from the Khoak Phranang villagers and people from other cities and from other provinces. Abbot Nian is a monk who can do everything for money. Money becomes a main factor that forces him to

violate monks' rules. In other words, money changes Abbot Nian's life values from the Buddhist way to the modern and consumerist one.

As for Phra Janthorn, when he is a lay person, he is the head of the family but he cannot deal with his laity life efficiently. Janthorn is a person who has no responsibility in life. He used to work at a restaurant in Bangkok but he can not save any money. So he does not go back home because he can not look after his parents, wife and children. He lets his wife works hard all alone. He becomes a monk because his mother asks him to. Also, his brother encourages him to get ordained because he thinks that ordination will probably broaden Janthorn's views, and make him more responsible.

According to Saeng Chandra-ngarm, there are six motives for becoming monks. First is to dedicate one's life to the earnest practice of the Noble Eightfold Path to attain enlightenment. Second is for further education. Third is for short-term training in Buddhist principles and practice for a period ranging from 2 weeks to 3 months. It is believed that an ex-monk is well-matured and ready to lead family life. The forth motive is to dedicate the merit derived from monkhood to parents, especially to mother who cannot be a monk. Fifth is to help preserve Buddhism. It is believed that the robe itself is the symbol of Buddhism. And the last motive is for other non-Buddhist reasons such as for living, for fulfilling a vow previously made, for research and even for fun (13-14).

In a case of Janthorn, he becomes a monk because of his mother and brother's encouragement, not because he, himself, has faith in Buddhism or that he wants to learn Dharma. He does not aim for the attainment of Nirvana. Janthorn has 2 main purposes of becoming a monk which are to be trained in Buddhist principles and to practice for a short period in order to get ready to lead his family life, and to dedicate the merit derived from monkhood to his parents. However, he fails to accomplish his ordination purpose. When he becomes a monk, he receives an opportunity for better living where money and material support from lay people are available. Also, money he gets from Abbot Nian brings him a more comfortable life. These opportunities

make him refuse to go back when his wife asks him to return home to work and take care of his children because he no longer wants to live in a hard living condition. Therefore, Phra Janthorn is an example of a selfish person who no doubt becomes a selfish monk.

Another example of a monk who owns and collects money found in *Snakes* is Old Monk Tei:

Nobody knows how much money Old Monk Tei has collected over the years or where he keeps it. Old Monk Tei has never shown any concern about his money, but since the day the Buddha statue was found beheaded, he has been not a little worried as he is afraid that one day the thief will come and cut off his head. So he has hidden his money safely away. When he is asked how much money he has, he always answers he has only a little, because the donations amount to nothing much and he has expenses of his own so there's little left. (77)

Old Monk Tei collects money from selling amulets. He has more money than anyone can think of and he is afraid to lose his money. So he is always under pressure because he worries that someone will steal his money. The tension increases until he becomes ill. According to K. Sri Dhammananda in *How to Live Without Fear and Worry (1989)*, people worry because of the concept of “me” and “mine”, or what is known in Buddhism as the “Delusion of Self”. Worry is a negative state of mind arising out of attachment to worldly pleasures. The stronger the attachment is to a thing, the greater is the fear of losing it, especially for the attachment to money. Money itself has its danger; the more money a person owns, the more desire he has for objects. Rahula states that the term “thirst” or *Tanha* includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more. All desires are the causes of the arising of sufferings (30-31).

Furthermore, monks cannot concern themselves with money because money leads to the corrupting in the monks' life. The struggle for wealth is suffering and money is not the way to find happiness. According to the Buddha's teaching about

money quoted in *The Bhikkhus' Rules: A Guide for Laypeople* (1998), the Commentary prohibits monks from touching unsuitable objects, which includes gold, silver, and value things or even credit cards and cheques which function in the same way as cash. Rules concerning money are those of Confession with Forfeiture or *Nissaggiya Pachittiya*. This means that money or articles that are wrongly acquired have to be forfeited. It is specified that money cannot be forfeited to a single monk but must be given up to the community (95-98). In the case of Old Monk Tei, instead of reducing defilement and thirst, he attaches himself to money. He thirsts more and more money. Although he has no plan to use his money, he never gives it to other people, and he never shares it to the poor villagers.

In addition, it can be seen that monks' failure in teaching Dharma creates ambiguous condition for lay people. This is somehow a reason why more people turn to believe in Buddhist miracles instead of the real Buddhist principles and why more and more monks turn to amulets business and earn their living by creating and selling amulets. According to Yoneo Ishii in *Sangha State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (1986), when monks cannot teach the core of Dharma or The Forth Noble Truths to the lay people, the lay people cannot use Dharma to resolve crises by rational means or to predict the outcome of the course of action. In a case like this, both primitive and modern people often resort to miracles to relieve their anxiety, dispel uneasiness, and restore confidence. The existence of miracles allows people to satisfy their desires within the framework of Buddhism, though they are incompatible with Buddhism. And the persons who sanctify amulets and derive their supernatural element are monks (20-29).

In *Snakes*, when people desire for and demand amulets, Old Monk Tei as a supplier sanctifies amulets for them. Old Monk Tei's amulets are able to protect the owner from dangers or death. From the Buddha's teaching, a monk engages in buying and selling with money or obtains gold or money through trade is an offence. Moreover, selling amulets with the purpose of immortality is wrong because there is no immortality in Buddhism. There is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging and eternal in the whole of existence. Monks cannot see things permanently as well as

cannot teach people to believe that there is permanence in life. Monks must have insight to the truth that things are imperfection, impermanence, and impersonality.

When monks cannot escape from greed, their life values are not different from those of laity who are trying hard to earn more money and comfortable goods. One way that monks can seek money is accepting politicians' request to become their political agents. It seems that a reason why politicians use monks as a tool for accomplishment in political career is because monks are ranked high in the hierarchy of Thai society and they influence from village level to national level. Somboon Suksamran states in *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: the Role of the Sangha in the Modernization of Thailand* (1977) that because monks have influences on Thai society, politicians intend to use monks as their agents to gain them the villagers' votes. A person who wants to be a politician or a person who is now a local politician and wants to be provincial or national politician tries to have good connection with monks because monks can be good political agents. In *Snakes*, Kamnan Rit and the Abbot share benefits. Kamnan Rit gains votes from the villagers and the Abbot gets money for the temple's renovation:

Thank you for your kindness, Father. I'd like you to tell the people who come to visit you to choose me as their MP in the next election. As I see it, you're the only one who can help me because your guests come from all over. You're a focus for people in the whole province, in the whole region, and if I may say so, in the whole country. When you say something, everybody believes you."

The abbot smiles. "So you want me to be your electoral agent? I'm expensive, you know."

The kamnan laughs ingratiatingly, "I trust in your kindness, Father."

"A new sermon hall in exchange for my help: how is that?" the abbot says with a smile.

"If I'm elected, right away, Father. Not the whole building, though. According to your blueprint, it'll cost more than four million baht. I've no outside revenues. Anyway, I'd like to pay for the roof as I already told you. And when you rebuild the main hall, I'll pay for the walls, and the porch as well. And if you want to build anything else later, I'm more than willing to be of help". (179-180)

By donating a lot of money to the temple in exchange for the name displayed on the crematory, Kamnan Rit gets good image from his donation that has a benefit for his political career in the next MP election. When the villagers see his name on the crematory or know that he has given a lot of money to help renovating temple, the villagers will vote for him. According to Tambiah' study (qtd. in Lester 139), the acts of greatest merit among Thai Buddhists from the greatest to the least important are building a monastery, becoming a monk or having a son become a monk, giving money for the repair of a temple or for *Kathina* gifts, daily food offerings to monks, observance of every holy day, and observance of the Five Precepts. Villagers believe that donation for building a monastery and for the repair of a temple are important and get most merit that only a real wealthy person can do that. Therefore, when Kamnan Rit donates a lot of money to the temple, villagers seem to admire him as being a person of merit, and even more desire to support him for the next MP election.

It can be seen that monks in *Snakes* can not even preserve the Five Precepts and they fail to achieve the goal of being monk which is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path to the end of worldly suffering. When they cannot accomplish the cultivation of moral conducts; Right Action, Right Speech, and Right Livelihood, which are the first religious disciplines, they fail to cultivate mental calmness and to purify and enlighten their mind. Therefore, they are easily influenced by materialism, consumerism, and great wealth, filled with greed, aversion, and delusion, which are actually the factors that interrupt the roles of monks. Buddhist values do not lead the life of Abbot Nian, Phra Janthorn and Old Monk Tei any longer due to the fact that those monks have opportunities to easily access the money offered by lay people. They do not develop insight into the three truths of life which are imperfectness, impermanence, and impersonality. On the other hand, they want to have much money whether by rightful or wrongful methods. They misuse their intelligence and the villagers' trust by dishonestly enriching themselves at the expense of villagers. They attach themselves to accumulating money. Virtues of morality and honesty have been lost to them. Under the siege of materialism and consumerism, these three monks are losing sight of spiritual values of being humans, and especially of being monks.