CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The core of this research is a case study of Phra Khammai, a Shan Buddhist monk who leads Shan *Sangha* (Buddhist community) members from Shan State in Myanmar[1] to go abroad for higher education and to conduct Buddhist missionary work among international communities. Beginning in the early 1990s, Phra Khammai led a group of monks to Sri Lanka to study at universities at levels ranging from diploma courses to doctorates in Buddhist Studies. This educational expedition came to be referred to as the 'Ceylon Journey.' Over the past two-and-a-half decades, the Ceylon Journey has now extended its territory to include India, Singapore, and Thailand in Asia, as well as the UK. In the early 2000s, Phra Khammai founded a Buddhist center and established himself at Oxford, UK. This center, the Oxford Buddha Vihara (OBV), has become a site from which Buddhism is spread in the West.

While there have been many studies focusing on social, cultural, economic, and political transnationalization, this study specifically focuses on religious transnationalism with a special focus on Shan Buddhist transnationalism. Among the many types of religious migrants, I pay particular attention to Buddhist transnational migrants. Within the three major divisions of Buddhist traditions (Mahayana, or 'Greater Vehicle,' which is widely held to the most liberal form of Buddhism; Theravada, the 'Doctrine of the Elders,' also known by the derogatory term 'Hinayana' or 'Smaller Vehicle,' and considered to be the most orthodox form of Buddhist tradition; and Vajrayana, or 'Diamond Vehicle'), Vajrayana is manifested among the Tibetan tradition and also widely known as Tantrayana with esoteric practices. As this research, however, originates from Burma, it is concerned with a form of Theravada Buddhism. Among these denominations, I pay

[1] The name of the country was changed from Burma to Myanmar by unelected military leaders in 1989. This dissertation uses both Burma and Myanmar, depending on the specified time and appropriateness.

special attention to the Theravada approach, which is the form practiced by Phra Khammai and his followers.

The Oxford-based Shan scholar and Theravadin Buddhist monk whom I identify as Phra Khammai is now widely known as 'Venerable Khammai Dhammasami.' Since he obtained his Ph.D from Oxford and a professorship at International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Yangon in 2006, he now uses the full title 'Venerable Professor Dr. Khammai Dhammasami.' In this study, I use 'Phra Khammai' throughout for convenience and to avoid confusing him with other monks with similar names. He is best known among Burmese communities and devotees within and outside the country as Sayadaw U Dhammasami. Following his establishment at Oxford, his nickname 'Oxford Sayadaw' has become more common among the Burmese. For the Shans, he is still known as 'Saokhu Long Dhammasami,' or sometimes 'Saokhu Long' or simply 'Saokhu Dhamma.' While studying their higher education abroad, Phra Khammai seeks to ensure that his fellow monks' academic skills and standards are competent and thus recognized. For the monks' Buddhist missionary purposes, he also wants to make sure that the spiritual guidance and teachings provided by the monks are applicable and useful for people in their daily lives.

"In Burma," Phra Khammai (2009) has written, "the awareness of national identity among the non-Burman nationalities became stronger in the mid-1950s; we see among the educated Shan people and *Sangha* members an aspiration similar to that of the two founders of the Shan Buddhist examinations in Kengtung and Mong Nang. In 1957, a board of Buddhist monastic examinations for the whole of Shan State was created in Panglong."[2]

Shan monks who are part of the network under study for this dissertation are aware that identity is important not only while abroad, but also in their homeland of Shan State. While seeking equality and justice, peace and harmony, and due respect and recognition

[2] Panglong is famous for a political treaty between ethnic highlanders (Shan, Kachin, Karenni, and Chin) and lowlanders (Burman or Bamar). The Panglong Agreement that was signed in 1947 effectively led to the formation of the present Union of Burma. Successive governments of the Union of Burma have marked the day of the signing, 12 February, as 'Union Day.'

in terms of monastic education and local Buddhism on the one hand, attempts are also being made to blur the line of ethnic boundaries through their academic proficiency and "religioscapes" in the transnational space on the other. Elizabeth McAlister (2005) refers to religioscapes as 'the subjective religious maps (and attendant theologies) of diasporic communities who are also in global flux'.

1.1 The Shans and Shan *Sangha*

Some historians argue that consciousness of distinct ethnic groups in Burma such as the Kachin, Karen, Mon, and Shan were fabricated by the British *raj* during the period of their rule in Burma (Alagappa, 1995: 370; Taylor, 2009: 94). Thus, the term 'Shan' was legitimized by the British throughout the colonial period. However, the Burmese term 'Shan' dates back even earlier, before the arrival of the British. According to some historians and local beliefs, 'Shan' is a Burmese corruption of 'Siam,' the original name of the country of Thailand. The Shan territories were collectively known as the "Shan states" during the period of British protectorate-status and "Shan State" after Burma's independence. Today, Shan State is administratively divided into three regions: northern, southern, and eastern. These were, in fact, the geopolitical terms coined during the British administration. The people who live in Shan State are not all ethnically Shan. Demographically, there are nine primary ethnic groups: the Shan, Pa-O, Intha, Lahu, Lisu, Taungyo, Danu, Ta'ang (Palaung), Ahka, and Jinghpaw (Kachin) (Joshua, 1997).

Like other ethnic states in Burma, the existence of Shan State today is related more to its geopolitical setting, its status as a contested zone due to the richness of its natural resources, and its being a site of contact for armed movements during the past four decades. The Shans who have settled in different locations differ in terms of dialects, cultures, and worldviews. Therefore, to lessen confusion, in this study, 'Shans' in plural form is used to indicate an inclusiveness of all the different ethnicities of people living in Shan State. Generally speaking, 'Shan' is used to refer to the people who live primarily in eastern and northwestern Myanmar (Burma), in Southeast Asia, and in China's Yunnan Province. Shans of Burma live largely in the Shan plateau's mountainous regions of contemporary Shan and Kachin states, but many are also settled in the plain regions of Myanmar, such as Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwaddy), Pegu (Bago), and Rangoon (Yangon). The

people studied in this dissertation, however, are mostly ethnic Shans of the Shan State, some living in Thailand and other countries, who call themselves 'Tai.'[3] Therefore, the term 'Shans' as used here specifically indicates the people who live in Shan State, and also those related to the Shans who have migrated to neighboring countries such as Thailand. The notion of 'nation' has perhaps only recently been developed, and is therefore a modern invention. It may have only emerged after the British left Burma. Shan as a "nation" and the birth of ethnic consciousness in Burma are partially due to British "fabrication" (Abhakorn, 2000; Takatani, 2007). Michio follows Edmund Leach's 1951 assertion that the definition of "Shan" requires further intensive research. Nevertheless, following Leach, Michio categorically analyzes Shan in Burma in three subgroups: Tai Mao, living on the Sino-Burma border; Tai Long in central Shan State; and Tai Khun in the eastern areas of Shan State. In her papers, Amporn Jirattikorn (2008, 2010) mentions that the three groups are not mutually linguistically understood. However, the language barriers among them today have become narrower as their translocal travels have made them more interconnected, and media and communication has become more advanced and accessible than at any other time in history. The major contemporary differences among the three groups are basically local/regional dialects and accents.

This study focuses on Shan *Sangha*, or groups of monks and novices, who are ethnically Tai Long ('Greater Tai'); Tai Khun monks in Kengtung; and Tai Mao monks on the Sino-Burma border. Like Amporn (2010), Michio points out that different groups of Shans are not mutually linguistically intelligible. Nevertheless, members of the major groups can still communicate among themselves regardless of their differences in dialects. Therefore, in this study I consider them all under the umbrella term of 'Shan *Sangha*' because they share the same ideology of promoting the teachings of the Buddha and Buddhist education.[4] Besides diverse ethnic members, the complexity of the Shan *Sangha* is also a

[3] The 'Shan' and the 'Tai' are treated as the same people in this study. Depending on the situation, the names may be used interchangeably to refer to the same people who speak similar dialects or root languages. Because of this, 'Tai' may be known among historians and scholars as the name of a family race, while 'Shan' is better known as one of the largest ethnic groups in Myanmar.

[4] Tai Mao is one of the major branches of ethnic Shans who populated Mong Mao (560–1604), an ancient Shan kingdom encompassing modern Ruili province in China and Muse and Namkham on Shan State's border with China. Tai Khun, centered in Kengtung, and Tai Long live all over Shan State. They speak different dialects. However, the level of understanding among the groups today is

result of its being under the governance of monastic institutions from different *nikāya* and subject to the state *Sangha* organization's regulations on the one hand, and the state's definition of it being one minority (Burmese: *taing yin thar*; Shan: *jaokhur*) on the other. The identity of its members can be flexible depending on different situations. The Shan *Sangha* is far from homogenous, as it is instituted by members from diverse branches of Shan, such as Tai Long, Tai Mao, Tai Khun, and Tai Loi. In Shan State, they may fall within the umbrella term of the Shan State Sangha Council (SSSC), or not actually be connected. For the past two years, 2011–2012, the SSSC has worked to document all of the Buddhist temples, monasteries, and religion-related monuments in its area. The effort has revealed 1,543 temples and monasteries in 45 of 55 city-townships with a total of 4,105 monks, 22,595 novices, and 327 nuns, totaling 27,027 monastic members.

1.2 Problem statement and rationale

For the past half-century, as early as just after Burma's independence in 1948, ethnic-consciousness in the country has been rising. The movement's birth is attributable to the ethnic communities' feelings that their participation and role in the country's affairs were imbalanced, their futures uncertain, and their voices unheard. As it became clear that their concerns were going unresolved, protests emerged over the course of time. In short, as concerns about injustice grew and negotiations failed, many ethnic people began protesting silently, while others confronted their grievances more directly by joining armed movements. Armed conflict between ethnic groups and the central authorities is still ongoing today in the country now known as Myanmar.

The central authorities have attempted to force the Shans to adopt and adapt to Burmese cultural ways of life, social norms and customs, literature, belief systems, and language. As part of this acculturation process, the education system throughout the country is controlled by the state, and the knowledge offered is what taught is in government schools, using Burmese as the de facto language of instruction. The state policy toward

much higher than in the past. This is partly due to printed media, music, videos, and other forms of communication being more widely available in Tai Long dialect than the others. Tai Khun script is still widely used for Buddhist texts and as a means of communication in eastern Shan State. Tai Mao script, however, is rarely used among the people.

ethnic groups in the country can be seen as a concerted effort to weaken ethnic cultural identities by weakening their place in the multicultural society, and hence, they are politically disadvantaged. In a similar vein, local beliefs such as Shan Buddhism, which is practiced locally, are directed under the umbrella of the state Theravada hegemony. Local monastic education has been marginalized by not receiving due recognition from the state. Several modern Burma studies (Charney, 2006: 137-145; Collins, 2002; Cultural survival, 2010; Houtman, 1999: 101-2; Sakhong, 2012; Smith, 1994; Takatani, 1998; Tucker, 2001: 11) suggest that in the present such forms of forced cultural assimilation are still ongoing in the country.

Among the many issues encountered by Shans in modern times, Phra Khammai seeks to revive aspects of their distinct ethnic identities through such efforts as *Lik Long* revivalism, modernization of monastic education, and paying special focus on local Shan Buddhist practices. Phra Khammai has recognized the need to revive and renovate the Buddhist education sector not just for Shan State, but for Burma as a whole. This motivated him in the early 1990s to start the Ceylon Journey to pioneer new exploration of higher education abroad. In the past, the study of the transnational aspects of Shan Buddhism was relatively unknown in academic circles. Scholarly works focusing on Shan Buddhism as transnational religious endeavors of committed groups of people to "keep feet in both worlds" (Peggy, 2001: 21) of old and new homelands were non-existent. Academic inquiry of Shan Buddhism and Shan monastic education was exclusively limited to analyses of the religious traditions and phenomena within the national hegemony of the modern Myanmar state. The few studies that were conducted on Shan Buddhism typically drew from Shan Buddhist culture, Shan manuscripts (*Lik Long*), and history. My aim for this work, therefore, is to investigate Shan monks who "keep feet in both worlds" or are "living in two worlds" (Peggy, 2008) between their homeland of Shan State and the transnational places they travel to for the transmission of Buddhist spirituality and higher education.

As previously stated, Phra Khammai has two main purposes for his international travels: education and *Dhammadūta* (Buddhist missionary work). This study will explore how he has managed to make his dream a reality. To remedy the poor education system in Shan

State of Burma is to create a space for education to bring about transformation of the country. Since the late 1980s, the Burmese education system—secular and monastic, in Shan State in particular and countrywide—has been disrupted by political upheavals that have caused the country to experience chaos and insecurity. With instability and uncertainty, people have been forced to search for alternatives for education and livelihood, including looking for opportunities abroad. Monks are included among those seeking alternatives.

While getting education abroad, particularly in Sri Lanka and India, monks from Burma have been willing to assist with mobilizing their colleagues back home to attain similar opportunities. Some of these Shan monks have indeed been able to develop the education system in Shan State. Some of them have even founded colleges. This may be the foundation for the modernization of the institution of the Buddhist *Sangha* in Burma. Monasticism in Burma must adapt itself to face the challenges of the increasingly globalized world. For all of these fundamental changes, the country is required to educate its monks in such a way that will enable them to understand and contribute to the rapidly changing world. At the same time, Phra Khammai wants the Shan *Sangha* to play a certain role in the country's modernization. He aspires to see Shan monks have an equal status and footing with their Burmese counterparts.

In regards to the current Shan monastic education system, Phra Khammai writes:

> "Over the years, the Shan *Sangha* educationalists have wanted to maintain their education system, but they face a difficult choice. If they do not closely follow the curriculum of the state-sponsored Pathamapyan and Dhammacariya examinations, there may never be hope of the government recognizing their qualifications. If they choose to follow it, the problem of recognition may be solved, but it would not be possible for them to promote learning of the *Dhamma* in their own language. The preservation of the early Shan monastic learning system and the related knowledge—which is at the heart of Shan literary identity—would suffer." (Phra Khammai, 2009)

He concludes that until the present day, the teaching-learning system of Shan monastic education has remained largely unchanged. Put another way, the Shan *Sangha* has been indecisive at this crucial juncture when they should be walking forward. He argues this point by saying,

> "[Amidst] these uncertainties, what we can be certain of is that the growth of the Shan Buddhist monastic examinations boards over the years seems to be taking place not only as a sideline, but also at the expense of traditional Shan Buddhist literature such as *Lik Long*, the unique characteristic of the Shan literary identity for which those examination boards were founded."[5]

One day, Burma may eventually become a democratic country. That conflicts will persist in the near future, however, was made clear when Min Aung Hlaing, chief of Burma's armed forces, commented in 2014 at a meeting of ethnic leaders on the role of Burmese as the only legitimate national language. Phra Khammai responded that Min Aung Hlaing's attitude toward 'national language' is not unique.[6] This opinion has been widespread among the country's ruling elite for the past sixty years and has been one of the main root causes of the country's political problems. Ethnic people want their languages to be taught in government schools. This demand was approved in a parliamentary session, and most of the ethnic languages are being taught in schools in their respective areas. However, so far the Shan have not yet begun teaching their language in schools due to the on-going debate among Shan intellectuals as to which curriculum should be used. This remains a challenge not only for Shan State, but for the Shan themselves.

Disagreements over language have torn apart many countries. Russia banned people in Poland from using their own language when it ruled the country's schools and the offices of Congress Poland (Patterson, 2014). Japan did the same to Taiwan and other Asian countries it ruled (Kaplan & Richard B. Baldauf, 2008: 11). England used to suppress Welsh, the native language of Wales. Similar tensions exist in Catalan, Spain, otherwise

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5 Ibid. (2009).

6 Personal communication, September 2014.

known as the Basque Region. Sri Lanka's S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's language policy has inflamed the Tamils of the country. Until 1955, Bandaranaike was in favor of having two official national languages, Sinhala and Tamil. With the rise of the Sinhala Only movement and the support it received from Sinhala Buddhist clergy members and the masses, however, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), led by Bandaranaike, resolved at the annual session the party held in December 1955 to make Sinhala the official language, with provision for the recognition of the "reasonable use of Tamil" (Rajasingham, 2001). After that, Bandaranaike began to exploit the traditional dislike of the Sinhala people against the Tamils in order to increase the support of the Sinhalese for the party (Rajasingham, 2001). A few countries such as India, Malaysia, and Singapore have been more inclusive when it comes to language issues.

Marginalized Shan monastic education has been growing, but only on the sidelines. This research is justified in two perspectives: *Sangha* networks as transnational Buddhist movements are a new phenomenon of the 21st century. Buddhist networks themselves are not new, but transnational movements of Shan *Sangha* networks are something not previously seen before. This study will add to the knowledge base of social science and anthropological inquiry in the category of 'Buddhism and modernity' following the work of Erik Braun (2013), whose most notable work focused on Ledi Sayadaw, who was responsible for the emergence of the global Vipassana meditation movement; Alicia Turner (2014), whose writing about Burmese Buddhism argues that the salient and ordering discourse was not nation or modernity, but *Sāsana*, the life of the Buddha's teachings; Michael Charney (2006), who challenges the notion of the court and the monastic order as static institutions by examining how competition within and between them prompted major rethinking about the intellectual foundations of indigenous society and culture; Juliane Schober (2011), who examines Burma's modern religious and political trajectories in an attempt to learn from their past and foresee future directions; Justin McDaniel (2009, 2011), who says literatures are not only metaphorically and rhetorically powerful, but also invite constant reimagining across time; Kate Crosby (2014), who describes Theravada Buddhism as "provid[ing] the protocol for a relationship of mutual support between *Sangha* and state, as well as emphasizing Theravada's adherence to "original" Buddhism"; and Steven Kemper (2005), who studies

the Sinhala people from a perspective of cultural collapse and whose "protestant" reformation of Buddhism drove monks toward increased political involvement and ethnic confrontation.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

I ask the following questions in this research:

Research questions:

1. What are the factors and conditions that have enabled Phra Khammai to start and expand his international Buddhist movement?

2. Why have Phra Khammai's teachings and practices come to be widely accepted by international Buddhist communities?

3. How is Phra Khammai's transnational movement articulated with local Shan Buddhism and other Buddhist movements in the Shan State of Myanmar?

In order to answer the above questions, this research is aimed to achieve the following objectives:

Research objectives:

1. To investigate factors and conditions under which Phra Khammai's international Buddhist movement has emerged and expanded;

2. To examine Phra Khammai's teachings and activities to understand the identity of his Buddhist movement;

3. To study Phra Khammai's transnational and local networks and networking process.

1.4 Theoretical concepts

This research looks at the Shan *Sangha* movement led by Phra Khammai through the lens of four major theorectical concepts: Networks, Transnationalism or Transnational Space, Identity, and Buddhism in Action, as elaborated below.

1.4.1 Networks

Networking has been a very important component and key characteristic of social movements in the modern time. This is because, by extending its network, a movement can expand its capacity through its connectivity in different geographical settings. According to older schools of thought, such as those about structuralism networks, networking in sociology was understood in terms of organizational structure—thus, as a fixed entity. This is clear by the definition of 'network analysis' (social network theory), which studies how the social structure of relationships around a person, group, or organization affects beliefs or behaviors. Causal pressures are inherent in social structures. Network analysis is a set of methods for detecting and measuring the magnitude of the pressures. The axiom of every network approach is that reality should be primarily conceived and investigated from the view of the properties of relations between and within units instead of the properties of these units themselves. It is a relational approach (University of Twente, 2015). My approach to network analysis in this study is, however, 'anti-structure,' a form which is fluid and multi-directional, such as with the Deleuzean understanding of a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005).[7]

The concept of networks and social movement provided by Marchetti and Pianta in their article "Global Social Movement Networks and Politics of Change" (Marchetti & Pianta, 2012) falls within the scenario of global political contestation with transnational networks playing a critical twofold role: inside and outside of global civil society. On the one hand, they are to be considered from an internal point of view as the backbone of social

[7] As a model for culture, the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source of 'things' and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those 'things.' A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by 'ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.

movements engaged in the political struggle for global justice because they provide essential connecting spaces for the flow of ideas (Smith, 2002).

Drawing from Manuel Castells' (2004, 2010) theory of network society, in this study 'network' or 'networking' is used as the key concept making this research project possible. As in the linking of computers or networks of computers located in different geographical locations around the world via the Internet, enabling information flows, in this study 'network' also means communication and/or flows of information in different locations linked through nodes and domains, in order that passing and sharing information is possible through the linkages.

Castells has looked at dislocation or disjunction and its effects on individual and social relations in cities (see also Robins 1993, cited by Taylor 2003), which has helped us to understand the nature of new social or civil society movements/organizations and related spatial arrangements. He argues that, essentially, the postindustrial or new societies consist of various forms and sequences of interaction and exchange, in an integrated and networked space of flows. These exchanges are undertaken through institutional and organizational networks (Castells 1996: 29, cited by Taylor 2003) that are not necessarily located in cities, but everywhere in interaction with physical space. It is an expression of the dominant social logic found in the new Informational or Network Society, which in turn is formed by the "real virtuality" of the space of flows (Taylor, 2003).

1.4.2 Transnationalism / Transnational space

Debates on the history of transnational activities go back several decades according to Michael G. Müller and Cornelius Torp as they argue: "Although often considered to be the most recent trend in our discipline, the debate on 'history beyond the nation-state' has been going for at least three decades" (Müller & Torp, 2009). Nevertheless, they take the position that the claim could not be substantially made if this trend has resulted in the development of broadly shared and methodologically operationalized new concepts of space in historical research.

Transnational space is the 'space' that contextualizes the geographical settings in this research. This is the space of focus where the *Sangha* movement led by Phra Khammai

is active in terms of geographical context and space and time. In this research context, 'transnational space' is defined as a field or domain where the members of the Shan *Sangha* act collectively or individually depending on their roles in the movement. The concept is developed from the existing literature on transnationalism and cross-border nation-state studies, such as (Fuchs, 2006; Jackson, Crang, & Dwyer, 2004; Kleist, 2003; Molina, Petermann, & Herz, 2012; Pries, 2001; Vertovec, 2001), and many others. In my context, however, the concept is redefined to fit my analysis, in this case 'transnational Phra Khammai-led Shan *Sangha* movement.' I problematize this research by considering the factors or conditions that given rise to the Phra Khammai-led Buddhist movement and how this concept of "transnational space" will answer my investigations into the case study of Phra Khammai.

"Transnationalism" is a broad term as it is used in a wide range of cross-border, trans-border, and migration studies on a regional and global scale, and is thus difficult to define. Transnational studies obviously refer to those investigating the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states. Today, myriad systems of relationship, exchange, and mobility function intensively and in real time while being spread across the world. Modern digital mobile technologies and advanced telecommunications serve to connect such networks. Despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations, and national narratives they represent), many forms of association have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common arena of activity. Everyday life and social structures increasingly span long distances and a multitude of places. In some instances, transnational forms and processes serve to speed up or exacerbate historical patterns of activity; in others they represent arguably new forms of human interaction. Transnational practices and their consequent configurations of power are shaping the world of the twenty-first century.

Following the major globalization debates of the last few decades, transnationalism is now one of the most important and promising approaches for border-crossing social phenomena. Transnationalism maintains a global view, but allows for empirical analysis of coherent social, political, economic, and cultural phenomena that span different

national “container societies”; it permits re-entry of actors, of social groups, and of social movements in the effort to explain the ongoing changes which people, institutions, and countries are experiencing today.

The increasingly invoked notion of ‘transnationalism,’ referring to various kinds of global or cross-border connections, currently frames the view of numerous researchers concerned with migrants and dispersed ethnic groups. ‘Identity,’ although it has long been one of the most slippery concepts in the social scientist’s vocabulary, can suggest ways in which people conceive of themselves and are characterized by others. According to some scholars, such as Steven Vertovec (2001), transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is because, on the one hand, many peoples’ transnational networks are grounded in the perception that they share some form of common identity, often based upon a place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it. Such networks are marked by patterns of communication or exchange of resources and information along with participation in socio-cultural and political activities. On the other hand, among certain sets of contemporary migrants, the identities of specific individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place (Vertovec, 2001: 573).

Unlike the Thai *Sangha*’s *Dhammadūta* mission abroad, the Phra Khammai-led Shan *Sangha* movement has neither a state sponsor nor state backing for its mission on any ground upon which Phra Khammai can rely. Nevertheless, it does receive support from Buddhist communities abroad that includes Burmese, overseas Chinese Buddhists, Shan, Thai, and some others. Phra Khammai acts like an individual unless referring to the Shan *Sangha* that he founded. In Europe, his mission takes place on a small scale; connections are made through personal orientations or those of friendship. His talks and teachings posted online through social media sites help his *Dhammadūta* mission become more widely known. His funding and other resources come from those people who have benefited from his spiritual guidance, Buddhist teachings, and regular Vipassana meditation retreats.

The state’s role in shaping transnationalism, and particularly transnational identities, is rather differently addressed by Pál Nyíri (2005: 142). Nyíri examines how the People’s

Republic of China continues to play a central role not only in the management of migration, but also in the reproduction of Chinese identity outside of the country. This is achieved particularly through the regulation or conditioning of migrant flows and the construction of everyday discourses. Nyíri demonstrates ways in which overseas Chinese are considered as part of Chinese culture and society, as well as how their depiction remains wholly in line with dominant official discourses of Chinese-ness, cultural heritage, and virtues. The process has been shown to lead to an increasing standardization of state- and self-depiction among overseas Chinese (Vertovec, 2001: 579). If that is the case, the Thai state and the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand have shaped not only how the monks should carry out their Buddhist missionary work abroad, but also transnational Thai identity.

1.4.3 Identity

The concept of identity has been widely used to analyze personhood, as well as individual, group, and social phenomena across disciplines of various studies, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, geography, and philosophy. The definition of identity varies depending on different schools of thought. According to Enlightenment schools of thought, as defined by Stuart Hall (1992), identity is a fixed entity based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose "center" consists of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same—continuous or "identical" with itself—throughout the individual's existence. The essential center of the self is a person's identity (Hall, 1992).

The notion of identity in sociology reflects the growing complexity of the modern world and awareness that the inner core of the subject is not entirely autonomous or self-sufficient. This type of identity is formed in relation to "significant others" who mediate to the subject the values, meanings, symbols, and culture of the worlds one inhabits. G.H. Mead, C.H. Cooley, and the symbolic interactionists are the key figures in sociology who elaborated this "interactive" conception of identity and the self. According to this view, which has become the classic sociological conception of the issue, identity is formed in the "interaction" between self and society. While the subject still has an inner core, which

is essentialization of the self as "reality," this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds "outside" and the identities which they offer. Yet this notion of identity is still an essentialist view.

In fact, with identity, in this sociological conception, attempts are made to bridge the gap between the "inside" and the "outside" and between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them "part of us," helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. Identity thus stitches (or, to use a medical metaphor, "sutures") the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable. Nevertheless, this view of identity is rather fixed as understanding of the self is unified as a stable identity. Yet this is exactly what is now said to be "shifting." The subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented, composed not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. Correspondingly, the identities which composed the social landscapes "out there," and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective "needs" of the culture, are breaking up as a result of structural and institutional change. The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic.

Postmodern theorists, however, conceptualize identity as fluid, as having liquidity (Bauman, 2000, 2001, 2003), being flexible (Ong, 1999), and having a constantly changing meaning with no permanent identity, like the Buddhist concept of *anatta* (non-self) or *ātman*. Thus, identity has a different meaning from one person's opinion to another, from time and space, and depending from which angle ones looks at it. According to Hall (1987), "Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us." It is historically, not biologically, defined. Thus, the postmodernist approach is that a variety of identities which are not unified around a coherent "self" can be assumed at different times.

1.4.4 Modern Buddhist movements

Before introducing the concept of 'Buddhism in action' in the context of modern Buddhist movements, I would like to briefly discuss some of what Buddhism in general represents. Buddhism is comprised of diverse traditions of Buddhist civilizations, cultures, philosophies, and religion. Buddhism has been accepted and practiced in a multitude of diverse settings, and adaptations have been created to better conform to local norms and in recognition of other views. This flexibility leads to Buddhist acceptance of diversity rather than strict adherence to traditions. These diversities have paved the way for Buddhism to be recognized as a universal form of spirituality that can be practiced and understood locally according to one's own interpretation and reinterpretation. Therefore, today there are many different forms and traditions of Buddhism in the world.

'Burmese Theravada Buddhism' has been well presented and accepted among scholars and enthusiastic learners around the world who are familiar with the popular Vipassana meditation techniques. From another angle, however, Theravada Buddhism is manipulated by state ideologies and regulated in the form of Burmese cultural identities. Buddhism in Burma gradually turned into a monolithic type of religion at the turn of the 19th century with the arrival of imperialism from the West. Indeed, Buddhism has long been associated with the ruling class of people in South and Southeast Asian nations. For centuries, Buddhism has long been used as a source of power to legitimate the ruling classes and to justify their rules. Anawratha (Aniruddha), the first emperor who founded the Pagan dynasty in 11th CE, declared the Theravada form of Buddhism acquired from Thaton, then a Mon kingdom, the state religion. During the Sukhothai and Ayuthaya periods, Thailand's rulers elevated Buddhism's prominence and gave it a close relationship with the state and what became the modern Thai nation. Being the state religion, the history of the Thai nation is also the history of Buddhism. Under the constitution, the king, as a symbol of the nation, although protector of all religions, must be a Buddhist (Payutto, 2012). According to the latest census, the total population of Thailand is over 60 million. Of this number, approximately 93.4% are Buddhists. Buddhism has had a deep influence in Thai arts, traditions, learning, and the character of the people. It has modeled their manner of thinking and acting. In short, it has become an

integral part of Thai life. Buddhism has been instrumental in demonstrating ruling-class legitimacy in Sri Lanka and Burma, as well as other Southeast Asian nations.

Within the Theravada tradition itself, interpretation of Buddhism is varied or practiced differently depending on one's own lineal understanding. Throughout the Theravada Buddhist tradition, there have been doctrinal issues and controversies since the founding of the Mahavihara monastery in the 4th CE in Sri Lanka. Abhayagiri and Jetavana groups of monasteries/sects were said to break away from the Mahavihara. According to Faxian, a Chinese Buddhist monk traveller, the Abhayagiri sect practiced Mahayana Buddhism, while Jetavana was a mixture of both Hinayana and Mahayana. In the 4th CE, as a supporter of Abhayagiri during his reign, King Mahasena (r. 277-304 CE) destroyed the Mahavihara monastery and many of its monks were expelled. Therefore, until 12th CE, Abhayagiri and Jetavana practices were believed to be dominant in Sri Lanka. With the patronage of King Prakmabhahu I (r. 1153-1186 CE), the history of Buddhism has been reversed. Mahavihara has risen again through the suppression of other sects. King Mahasena defeated the Abhayagiri and Jetavana groups of monasteries, which allowed Mahavihara to re-establish itself as an individual entity and pave the way for the arise of the Theravada tradition in Sri Lanka and beyond. Here it is seen that the survival of the sect heavily relied on the patronage of the rulers. A ruler may support and give his favor to one sect more than to others. Unfortunately, if a sect does not have a king patron, it is likely to be neglected and unsupported, especially in the case that it is seen as deviating from the mainstream, as the monks might be accused of holding 'wrong views.'

In contrast to many other forms of Buddhism, such as Mahayana and Vajrayana, Theravada, being the earliest surviving form, is reputed to be the most orthodox. This tradition is particularly adhered to in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma, and Buddhists in these regions claim that they follow the most authentic form of Buddhism. Although these countries claim to be Theravada, the degrees of orthodoxy, belief, and interpretation vary depending on the lineage one follows or belongs to. In the Burmese tradition today, the only version of 'texts' are the products of the Sixth Buddhist

Council (Pali: *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā* or *Saṅgīti*)[8] held in Rangoon from 1954–1956 marking 2,500 years of Buddhism, or after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, recognized as the most authentic 'Theravada Buddhism.' Prior to this council, each of the five Theravada countries held their own versions of the texts, all believed to be obtained from the same sources in Sri Lanka. Although their *Saṅgīti* (text reciters) monks participated in the Council with recognition, Sri Lankan Buddhist scholars continue to give their own version more weight than the sixth international version. The Tripitaka texts were edited and translated into English by the London-based Pali Texts Society (PTS), and are widely recognized and referred to among international academics and Buddhist scholars.

Sai Kam Mong (Kam Mong, 2004: 69) claims that Buddhism practiced in Shan State, the Lanna Kingdom, and southern Yunnan had common religious ceremonies and Pagoda styles. Since the time of Bayinnuang's invasion, Burmese influence was prominent and felt. Traditionally, the Burmese look down on people who believe in religions than their own version of Theravada Buddhism by referring to them as *micchādiṭṭhi*, or "heretics" without any knowledge of the "true religion." According to Sai Kam Mong, the forms of Buddhism practiced in Shan State before the invasion of Bayinnuang were of the same practices as those found in the Lanna Kingdom and Sipsongpanna regions. This is to argue that Shans received Buddhism not from the Burmese, but through their brethren in either the Lanna-Thai Kingdom or the Sipsongpanna region of modern China. W.W. Cochrane (Cochrane, 1915: 52) even claims that Buddhism arrived among the Shans prior to the period of Anawratha. "… [That] the great kingdom of Nan-chao had political, commercial, and possibly religious relations with northern India is believable," Cochrane wrote.

Engaged Buddhism

Engaged Buddhism refers to Buddhists who are seeking ways to apply the insights from meditation practice and Dharma teachings to situations of social, political, environmental,

[8] This Buddhist Council was attended by five Theravada Buddhist countries (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Thailand), and non-Buddhist states, including Nepal, India, Vietnam, and delegates from Japan. The only Western Theravada Buddhist scholar monks to participate in the council were the German-born Ven. Nyanatiloka and Ven. Nyanaponika, who were residing in Sri Lanka. If any other Buddhist traditions were represented, their participants are unknown.

and economic injustice. Finding its roots in Vietnam through the Zen Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, Engaged Buddhism has grown in popularity in the West (Queen & King, 1996). Founded on the belief that genuine spiritual practice requires an active involvement in society, Engaged Buddhism illuminates the evolution of this new chapter in the Buddhist tradition—including its history, leadership, and teachings—and addresses issues such as violence and peace, race and gender, homelessness, prisons, and the environment.

Common features and key characteristics of engaged Buddhists, as enumerated by Christopher Queen (Queen, 1996: 23-24), are evidence of its multicultural parentage:

- First, the engaged Buddhists were high-profile personalities whose careers straddled and sometimes blended East and West.
- Second, the engaged Buddhists were dauntless activists for cultural renewal, social change, and an ecumenical World Buddhism.
- Third, the engaged Buddhists come to be honored by their followers as saints and bodhisattvas.

In his study, Queen offers three examples of exemplary engaged Buddhists: Olcott, Dharmapala, and Ambedkar. They all were trained in English-speaking, Christian schools and universities.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1967) has explained that he founded the new form of Buddhism called Engaged Buddhism in order to meet the challenges of the modern world: “During the Vietnamese war, monks and nuns were confronted with the question of whether to adhere to the contemplative life and stay meditating in the monasteries, or to help those around them suffering under the bombings and turmoil of war.” Hanh was one of those who chose to do both, and in doing so founded the Engaged Buddhism movement, first using the term in his book *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (Hanh, 1967). According to his *Dhamma* talk on “The History of Engaged Buddhism,” the term dates back to 1954, when he wrote a series of ten articles entitled “A Fresh Look at Buddhism” for a daily newspaper in Hanoi. Hanh says: “…they took the article, and the article was always printed on the front page with a big red title. The newspaper sold very, very well because

people were very thirsty. They wanted spiritual direction because confusion was so huge" (Hanh, 2008). Engaged Buddhism, according to some analyses, is, in fact, inspired by China's Humanistic Buddhism reform movement led by Masters Taixu and Yinshun and then later propagated in Taiwan by Cheng Yen and Xingyun. During the Vietnam War, especially the second so-called Indochina war from 1945 to 1975, Thich Nhat Hanh and his monastic community made efforts to respond to the suffering they saw around them (Malkin, 2003). They saw this work as part of their meditation and mindfulness practice, not separate from it. Thich Nhat Hanh is said to have outlined fourteen precepts of Engaged Buddhism, which explained his philosophy and are detailed as follows:

The Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism

1. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.

2. Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.

3. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrow-mindedness.

4. Do not avoid suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images, and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

5. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.

6. Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them when they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as they arise, turn your attention to your breath in order to see and understand the nature of your hatred.

7. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing both inside and around you. Plant seeds of joy, peace, and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness.

8. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

9. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things of which you are not sure. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.

10. Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community, however, should take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.

11. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realise your ideal of compassion.

12. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.

13. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others, but prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

14. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realisation of the Way. (For brothers and sisters who are not monks and nuns: Sexual expression should not take place without love and commitment. In sexual relations, be aware of future suffering that may be caused.) To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings. (Hanh, 1998)[9]

Engaged Buddhism for His Holiness the Dalai Lama is to be compassionate as he manifests "compassion in action." For him, the practice of compassion is very much at the individual level rather than the collective. In the Dalia Lama's documentary film *Compassion in Action*, narrator Harrison Ford paraphrases the Dalai Lama: "Every day, think as you wake up: Today I am fortunate to have woken up. I am alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others, to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind thoughts towards others. I am not going to get angry, or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can."[10]

Putting the two missions—educational and *Dhammadūta*—together in practice, "Buddhism," from Phra Khammai's standpoint, may be understood as being similar to Thich Nhat Hanh's "Engaged Buddhism" or "Applied Buddhism." Phra Khammai serves not only the *Sangha* (or in a more narrowly defined manner, the Shan *Sangha*), but all Buddhist communities/societies at large. As an educationist, he is not just studying to

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9 The list of the Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism is reproduced from *A View on Buddhism*. http://viewonbuddhism.org/resources/14_precepts.html. Accessed: December 2015.

10 Dalai Lama Film. "The Dalai Lama Speaks on Gratitude and Thankfulness". November 24, 2015. Retrieved from <http://dalailamafilm.com/the-dalai-lama-on-gratitude-and-thankfulness-10-quotes-1651>. Accessed: December 2015.

achieve degrees for himself, but teaching both monks and the laity alike, and also striving to put Buddhism into practice at the spiritual level. Engaged Buddhism/Applied Buddhism is widely considered to have been created by Thich Nhat Hanh himself when he founded the Unified Buddhist Church (Eglise Bouddhique Unifiée) in France in 1969, during the Vietnam War, and subsequently the Plum Village in 1982. Engaged Buddhism has been a very popular concept in the West, among both academic researchers and practitioners. This form of Buddhism seems to appeal across nationalities and surpasses all major Buddhist traditions. Thich Nhat Hanh claims Buddhism is for all. Dr. Ambedkar, a widely known Theravada Buddhist activist in the 19th CE, has today been recognized as an early engaged Buddhist activist. The Sarvodaya Sharmadana movement led by Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka, and the more recent Sakyadhita Feminist Buddhist movement with its stance for women's rights to higher ordination, are two of the many examples of engaged Buddhist activities. To some scholars and to a certain extent, while applying Mahatma Gandhi's notion of Ahimsa in his political view and stance, Aung San Suu Kyi is even seen to be following a sort of engaged Buddhist ideology when she puts non-violence into practice to meet her own political ends. Sulak Sivaraksa, an outspoken Thai intellectual and prominent Buddhist writer and activist, is an important figure who is closely associated with this trend of Buddhist activism. He is a leading founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB).

Sulak is said to reinterpret the five classic Buddhist precepts (Pali: *Pañcasīla*) for the modern day. He said, "Individuals may not be killing outright, but they must examine how their actions might support wars, racial conflict, or the breeding of animals for human consumption." Considering the second precept of abstaining from stealing, Sulak questions the moral implications of capitalism. Ending the exploitation of women is a natural extension of the third precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct, while vowing to abstain from false speech would naturally bring into question how mass media and education promotes a biased view of the world. Finally, the fifth precept to avoid intoxicants deals with international peace and justice because, "the Third World farmers grow heroin, coca, coffee, and tobacco because the economic system makes it impossible for them to support themselves growing rice and vegetables (Pistono, 2012)."

Humanistic Buddhism

According to some authors, Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism was inspired by Master Xingyun's promotion of Humanistic Buddhism. This section introduces some of the major concepts of Humanistic Buddhism. Master Xingyun, founder of Fogaungshan and a secular/celestial university known as Hsi Lai in 1991 in the United States and later renamed the University of the West, claims to be an international person. He translates the Buddha's teachings and refers to his mission as "Humanistic Buddhism" (*renjianfojiao*). The concept, although not coined by Master Xingyun, but by Master Taixu (1890–1947) (Chandler, 2005a, 2005b), is profoundly applied to promote his vision of Chinese Buddhism across the globe through its Fogaungshan network of temples and the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA). Although two other famous Buddhist monasteries contemporary to Fogaungshan exist in Taiwan, Master Xingyun's Fogaungshan is widely and synonymously known with Humanistic Buddhism. This leads me to understand that Humanistic Buddhism is a major departure point within the Mahayana school. This Buddhist movement is not without its reasons. As Scott Pacey (2005) argues, as Chinese monks from the mainland began arriving in Taiwan in 1949, within the mainstream of Taiwanese Buddhism, its *Sangha* wanted to differentiate itself from that of the mainland.

Buddhism in different forms and interpretations

Engaged Buddhism seeks to distinguish what is engaged from what is disengaged. A study on the mass Buddhist lay meditation movement in Burma by Ingrid Jordt (2007) finds that although interacting with a mass of people, the movement is actually disengaged. In my opinion, it actually is engaged in some senses with the masses, but is largely selective. Unlike Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh, the meditation masters/instructors of Mahasi deal with practitioners on an individual basis, and their teachings are directed only to those immediate practitioners. The Mahasi is, however, a meditation center open for people from all walks-of-life, and it has a different management system from the usual *kyaung*/*kyaung-tike*, or monasteries and monastic institutions. The Mahasi treats monks and laypeople alike unless individuals attain some higher knowledge in mediation. In other words, the level of a person, high or low, is

defined in terms of spiritual advancement, not in distinctions of age-seniority or monks or laypersons.

Within the Theravada tradition, Buddhism has been interpreted and understood in many different ways by Buddhist scholars and anthropologists since colonial periods in Asia. In line with Gananath Obeyesekere (1970), in his analysis *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Banaras to Modern Colombo*, Prof. Gombrich uses 'Protestant Buddhism' to describe the phenomenon of the Sinhala Buddhist movement, modernism, and elitism in the 19th century (Gombrich, 1988; Prothero, 1995). Also, in their co-authored *Buddhism Transformed* (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988), Gombrich and Obeyesekere assert the same about the early revival period and protestant Buddhism (Bond, 1988). During that time in Sri Lanka, Sinhala Buddhists felt that Buddhism was in decline under the influence of European rule and became self-conscious about the need to revive the status of Buddhism. Heinz Bechert (1970) named this type of Buddhism as 'Buddhist Modernism,' referring to the Buddhist movement of resurgent social and political issues in the late 19th and 20th centuries in Burma and Ceylon. Buddhist Modernism or modern Buddhism is also contented by some other scholars, for instance (Borchert, 2008; Foxeus, 2013; LeVine, 2005; McMahan, 2008; Schober, 1995), as well as Lopez, 2002; Braun, 2008; Houtman, 1990; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1990; King, 2002; and Kirichenko, 2009. Still some other scholars refer to this type of Buddhist movement as 'Buddhist Revivalism.' Sinhalese Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dhammapala and Henry Olcott were best known for the Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka and India.

In our time, while Buddhism goes global and with the influence of the West and encounters with colonialism during the last centuries, interpretations of Buddhism have required a specialized from of discourse, which is known as 'scientific Buddhism.' However, Donald S. Lopez dismisses the notion that Buddhism has anything to do with science. In his *Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life* (2012), Lopez argues that ideas of Buddhism as compatible with science came into being as simply a way to counter Christianity's expansion into Buddhist countries in Asia. Many Buddhist writers, including Theravada monks, claim such compatibility by quoting Albert Einstein's

statement, “The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.” According to Lopez, this statement cannot be located in any of Einstein’s writings. But there is something about Buddhism, and about the Buddha, that caused someone to ascribe these words to Einstein (Donald S. Lopez, 2012:19).

Experimental Buddhism

Experimental Buddhism provides innovative as well as controversial responses to the challenges facing Buddhist monks. From traditional activities (conducting memorial rituals, supporting residences for the elderly and the infirmed, providing relief for victims of natural disasters) to more creative ones (collaborating in suicide prevention efforts, holding symposia and concerts on temple precincts, speaking out against nuclear power following Japan’s 2011 earthquake, opening cafés, storefront temples, and pubs, and even staging fashion shows with priests on the runway), more progressive members of Japan’s Buddhist clergy are trying to navigate a path leading towards renewed relevance in society. An additional challenge is to avoid alienating older patrons while trying to attract younger ones vital to the future of their temples.

In contemporary Japanese society, Buddhist monasticism has been commonly viewed as no more than traditional priests conducting memorial rituals such as funerals and weddings. Nevertheless, John Nelson (2013) explains that Buddhist monasticism in contemporary Japan attempts to come to terms with innovation and activism through ‘Experimental Buddhism.’ Experimental Buddhism highlights the complex and often wrenching interactions between long-established religious traditions and rapid social, cultural, and economic change. Japanese priests and other individuals employ Buddhist traditions in selective and pragmatic ways. Using these inventive approaches during a time of crisis and transition for Japanese Buddhist temples, priests and practitioners from all denominations seek solutions that not only can revitalize their religious traditions but

also influence society and their fellow citizens in positive ways. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, Nelson's study is one of the first works to give readers a sense of what is happening on the front lines as a growing number of Buddhist priests attempt to reboot their roles and traditions to gain greater significance in Japanese society.

The central theme of Experimental Buddhism provides a fresh perspective to understand how priests and other individuals employ Buddhist traditions in selective and pragmatic ways. Using these inventive approaches during a time of crisis and transition for Japanese temple Buddhism, priests and practitioners from all denominations seek solutions that can not only revitalize their religious traditions, but also influence society and their fellow citizens in positive ways.

Buddhism in action

Juliane Schober (2007) notes education has long been associated with power and privilege, and it is because of this that the saying "knowledge is power" came into being. Further, she discusses the role of religion in education. She refers to Taw Sein Ko's observation on this matter, paraphrased as "education divorced from religion is of little value." Buddhist education is in principle a moral training and of value for the endeavor towards human moral perfection. Daisaku Ikeda is a Nichiren Buddhist philosopher, peacebuilder, educator, author, poet, and current president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI). SGI is the largest, fastest-growing, and most diverse association of lay Buddhists in the world today. Ikeda draws his philosophy from the teachings of the thirteenth-century Buddhist sage Nichiren (1222–82) and the Lotus Sutra from which Nichiren's teachings are derived. His teachings and practice are known to be in the form of "Buddhism in action" today (Ikeda, 1992). His achievement has been the ability to understand and express the essence of these teachings as a philosophy of human development and social engagement in a way that offers a vigorous response to the challenges of contemporary society. There are three prominent characteristics of this philosophy: an approach that has been called Buddhist Humanism; a belief in the importance of dialogue; and a commitment to personal transformation as the driving force for social change, referred to as "human revolution." It finds expression not simply as a set of ideas, but as a basis for actively engaging with life and social realities. The basic

core of this philosophy is the utmost value it places on each individual life. More than anywhere, Ikeda's philosophy has been embodied in his own actions. As an impassioned advocate of dialogue for peace, Ikeda has engaged in dialogue with an astonishingly wide range of thinkers. He has sought to build bridges of understanding among people of different nations and cultures from diverse philosophical and faith traditions. These efforts are deeply rooted in the Buddhist belief that the most valuable way of life is one committed to the alleviation of human suffering.

Like other world religions that are flexible to the trends of international travel and migration, local forms of Buddhism from various backgrounds have become a worldwide phenomenon. Thus, 'mainstream Buddhism' no longer has a homogenous form. At Oxford, the Oxford Buddha Vihara (OBV) is situated in a world-class academic environment, a largely non-Buddhist community with a few Thai Buddhists but almost no Burmese or Shan community members in existence. The only Buddhist center to exist prior to OBV was a Tibetan Buddhist center, a non-Theravada community. As an educationist, Phra Khammai sought to establish a Theravada center within this academic community before the completion of his Ph.D in 2003. With a strong backing in Pali traditional learning in Burma, coupled with a Sri Lankan Western-oriented Buddhist education and Oxford scholarships, Phra Khammai today holds non-sectarian views of Buddhism. Ironically, he has not been compelled to represent pure Burmese Theravada Buddhist traditions, at least among transnational communities. In his "Buddhism as an International Movement for Peace and Well-being," Ian Cook (2012) focuses on 'global Buddhism' as a modern Buddhist movement today. Cook, however, contends that "any attempt to create a 'global' Buddhism, then, requires a de-emphasizing of local nuance for general acceptability." In short, to become the basis for an international movement or 'world religion,' Buddhists must "emphasize the transcendental and universalistic goals of their faiths" (Kitiarsa, 2010: 112). Bubna-Litic and Higgins (2007) explain that "'global Buddhism' also consciously follows the precedent of the Santa Fe Vipassana Sangha in not tying itself to any particular teacher, group of teachers, or approach to practice" (Bubna-Litic & Higgins, 2007: 167).

1.4.5 Shan Buddhism, monasticism, and education

Being a modern Buddhist scholar, Phra Khammai's rationality does not alter his notion of Shan Buddhism in the philosophical sense. He was ordained as a *samanera* at a local monastery in Laikha in the Shan Theravadin tradition, and he remains an ardent adherent to the orthodox doctrine, both practically and ideologically. At the same time, he also seems to retain traditional beliefs of Buddhists, as they may have been incorporated for ages, although not necessarily complied with Theravada orthodoxy. These may include superstitions and local belief, rites and rituals, *khwan* and *vinyan*, amulets and incanted sacred items, etc. These beliefs have remained 'unquestioned' regarding whether they are right or wrong, or if they are scientifically proven or empirically verifiable.

As Jim Taylor (2003) discusses, "Buddhism in Thailand has long been seen as a holistic cultural system, with an all-embracing normative cosmology that provides everyday meaning." In a similar fashion, local Buddhism among the Shans in Shan State is also holistic (Crosby & Khur-Yearn, 2010). The point here is to determine if Phra Khammai's Buddhist knowledge—which is academic, conceptual, and sophisticated—and ways of understanding the canonical textual Theravada Buddhism is contradictory and conflicting with the local practices. While Theravada Buddhism is a community religion, is has also been stereotyped as a "religion of the books," meaning the Pali Canon (Crosby, 2014: 2). Actually, local Buddhism is ritualistic, composed of somatic and cognitive practices that incorporate several non-Buddhist elements (Crosby & Khur-Yearn, 2010). My interview Dr. Jotika confirms this view. Shan Buddhism, according to Jotika Khur-Yearn, has unique features, including traditional beliefs, rites and ritual practices, *khwan* or *vinyan* existing after one's death, belief in reincarnation remembering previous lives, temple-sleeping rituals, and other seasonal festivals.[11] Referring to these practices, there is a twelve month-cycle of festivities, well integrated with local Shan culture and Buddhist civilization. For instance, *Poi Khao Wa*, *Poi Awk Wa*, *Poi Sang Long*, *Poi Kathin*, *Poi Khao Wat*, etc., are related to monastic ecclesiastical order functions. When they have

[11] Personal interview, May 20, 2015.

been incorporated into society, they become festival-related to ordinary people, even though they are still celebrated within monasteries.

The contradictions and conflicts between these two types of Buddhist practices actually came to a head when a co-leader of the Khun Sam Law movement resisted giving up his activities and practices (Phorn, 2015). In my forthcoming paper on the Khun Sam Law movement in Shan State, I demonstrate that the Shan State Sangha Council's knowledge is based strongly on Theravada canonical texts. Put into a global context, differences in religious views—or in other words, globalization and localization—are not necessarily two opposing views of what happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality (Anan Ganjanapan, 2003: 126).

Keeping all of these Buddhist interpretations in mind, here I offer an analysis of Phra Khammai's *Dhammadūta* mission to determine the type of Buddhism that Phra Khammai is promoting. For instance, "Shan Buddhism" manifests one or more of the following characteristics: Shan *Lik Long* culture is particularly led by Shan lay devotees and intellectuals, called *Jare* (also spelled *Care* or *Zare*). They lead the compilation of the Buddhist texts extracted from Tripitaka ranging from the life story of the Buddha to the higher level of Vipassana meditation. Tadayoshi Murakami (2009) refers to this type of Buddhist tradition as 'Shan Buddhism.' Murakami's interpretation is, however, not limited to *Lik Long*, but many other features, such as the maintenance of unique seasonal festivals, religious rites of passage, practices using Shan manuscripts, and temple architecture. He argues that although the Thai state attempts to institutionalize and standardize "Thai Buddhism," including in border areas where the Shan and Thai state meet, Shan Buddhism survives in the border area as the Thai state's effort fails to assimilate it into Thai Buddhism (Murakami, 2012).

As we witness in Shan State, today, one of the most distinctive features practiced within the Shan-speaking communities is the use of Khruba Bunchum's formula of devotional recitations. But this does not happen among the Shan communities in northern Thailand where the region is near to Khruba's domain. The spread of Khruba's formula in Shan State is likely the result of cooperation among some prominent monks, including the OBV

networks, and recent foreign graduates. While in Thailand, the practice is not very popular, but this trend is indeed growing.

The question is whether these religioscapes can be termed as the most distinctive and unique feature(s) of Shan Buddhism. It is not likely traceable to the history of Buddhism in Burma to have a clear-cut answer to the question. As far back as we know, in one way or another, Burmese religious beliefs and culture have been very influential since Buren Naung (Bayin-naung)'s conquering of Shan State. Therefore, I consider it very important to look at the way people practice it and use it in their daily lives, so the certain aspects of Buddhism that are meaningful or make sense for them is important. This will lead us to understand what Shan Buddhism is all about.

Among the Shan's Buddhist prayer formulations used in Myanmar by Buddhist monks and devotees have many variations depending on the place and lineage of the teachers one follows. Some formulas are longer than the others. The composition of formulas are mixtures of prose and verse, either in Pali or other languages depending on one's ethnicity. Nevertheless, in recent times, Khruba Bunchum's method has become popular among Shan Buddhists all over Shan State. Phra Khammai himself has adopted this formula and it is being used in his OBV and related branches. The reason for the locals comfortably adapting to it could be because no Burmese style of prayers are used. The contents of the prayer may be shared, but the recitation style is unique, which makes the Shan different from Burmese. This certainly contributes to the definition of Shan Buddhism.

1.5 Conceptual framework

This research is conceptually framed by looking through the lens of 'Buddhism in action' in particular and 'Shan Buddhism' in general, and 'identity construction' in the context of transnationalism/transnational space. The concept of identity is used to investigate the Buddhist typology of the Shan *Sangha*. Buddhism may be understood as education, training, and spiritual attainment. Thus, the goal of Buddhism is the realization of *Dhamma* and final emancipation. This objective is aimed at the transcendental level as its highest achievement. In order to reach this level, it is important to attain a mundane level

of emancipation, a freedom from suffering in ordinary life. Buddhism can address both emancipations. However, to achieve this mundane level, it is required to understand in the local context through culture, language, and custom. Understanding Shan Buddhism is crucial for the context of the Shan-speaking population.

In addition, the research also emphasizes the movement's network, which influences the movement's status. This includes its relations with the Myanmar state and official *Sangha*. Within the Myanmar State Sangha Order, the SSMC[12] has control over the all of the *Sangha* in the country, while the SSSC's[13] power on the one hand is given to the Shan monks, and institutionalized Theravada Buddhism on the other. The SSMC is the umbrella term for the governing body of the state *Sangha*. Theoretically speaking, the SSMC oversees the welfare and wellbeing of all monks in the whole country, while the SSSC operates for the Shan monks in the same way. However, critics and observers say the SSMC is serving the welfare of the state more than that of the monks themselves. These two organizations, historically speaking, exist independently without influencing the other. The SSSC was formed in 1957 in Loilem near the capital Taunggyi in southern Shan State, while the SSMC was created in 1980–81 through General Ne Win's government's "unification of all *Sangha* and purification of Buddha-*sāsana*" program for all Buddhist schools and sects within the *Sangha* in the country. Within this complex structure, the Shan *Sangha* exists both dependently and independently. The SSMC is the umbrella organization of all monks concerned. Therefore, the whole *Sangha*, including those of the Shan SSSC, are required to follow the rules and regulations of the State Sangha Order.

Within or without this complexity, Phra Khammai operates his network independently and dependently. Being a Theravada monk within the Myanmar state, Phra Khammai is related to both the SSMC and the state specifications while working with the SSSC for the matters of Shan *Sangha* affairs. He does not necessarily receive instructions or guidance all the times from the SSMC or even the SSSC. On the other hand, he does not

[12] SSMC = State Sangha Mahanayana Council or Committee.

[13] SSSC = Shan State Sangha Council. Detailed structures of both SSMC and SSSC are in chapter 2.

necessarily create an uncomfortable environment among the Myanmar *Sangha* and the lay supporters who may be non-Shan when he receives the capital, financial or social, to build not only the university, but his entire Buddhist mission.

Although Buddhist networks are not a modern invention, the Shan *Sangha* movement is a new phenomenon in the context of transnational Buddhist missions. With different approaches from traditional Buddhist missions in the West, Phra Khammai's network purposively takes a new level of *Dhammadūta* mission to the West among non-Buddhists. This religious mission may be understood in terms of religious "imaginaire"[14] following Appadurai's conception of "-scapes" and Jim Taylor's "religioscapes," a discussion of Thailand's urban real-and-imagined religious life (Taylor, 2003).

If transnational ties are not new, how have religious networks and transnational migration become more pronounced and of greater interest in recent decades? Technological innovations have facilitated such connections in the past. This is no less the case at present with email, the Internet, faster aviation, and cheaper shipping making it easier to communicate and travel. All these forms of connectivity are included in Appadurai's term "technoscapes" (Appadurai, 1996). The Shan *Sangha* movement in recent years is increasingly connected with other countries through academic activities, travels, pilgrimages, and international *Dhammadūta* missions. These linkages frequently facilitate their connections as well.

Modern society is increasingly demanding spiritual guides to facilitate its urban ways of life in which members encounter pressures of all kinds. Phra Khammai describes his *Dhammadūta* mission as teaching Buddhism around the world for providing for the spiritual needs of the people, while the founding of Shan State Buddhist University (SSBU) is to add to the glory of Buddhism for those who are serious in undertaking academic research in the Buddhist field. Both tasks enhance the other to promote peace for all mankind beyond Myanmar. While building the conceptual framework around Phra

[14] I use the term 'imaginaire' rather than 'imaginary' following Steven Collins (2010: 4) as he explains imaginaire can have various meanings, broad and narrow, and sometimes seems to be used to mean more or less the same thing as 'culture.'

Khammai's *Dhammadūta* works and education, this study will contribute to an "unbound peace" for all, regardless of where and who they are.

Drawing from Phra Khammai's argument on the ethnic peoples of Burma's discontentment due to the lack of recognition of their cultural identities, and his own desire to lift up Shan monastic education for the current Myanmar state *Sangha* education system, he was inspired to become an Oxford-based scholar and a global Buddhist missionary (Chapter 3). His basic discontentment and personal inspirations provide the motivation for the rise of the Shan *Sangha* movement in transnational space, in the larger global context. As he admits being inspired by an "English-titled book" on Buddhism by a foreign writer that made him dream about learning English to become a *Dhammadūta* who delivers Buddhist missions internationally, I reproduce what the Venerable Khammai Dhammasami writes:

> "At this point in time, the potential of receiving recognition from the government for the qualifications of the Shan Buddhist examinations boards has not materialized; nor has the government given any hint of expanding the *Pathamapyan* [*Sangha* examination] into the Shan medium, as with the Mon. Lack of recognition of the cultural identity of the minorities has indeed been the cause of continued discontent for decades. The editor of a university Shan magazine, for instance, wrote in 1958: 'It is with the deepest regret that we have to mention that the literature of the minorities has been overlooked in the Union Constitution, though they deserve at least secondary official recognition.' (Tip, 1958:1)." (Phra Khammai, 2009).

1.6 Research methodology

This study attempts to understand the networks and identities of the Shan *Sangha* led by Phra Khammai. It focuses on Phra Khammai's life history, teachings, activities, and his connections in many parts of the world, including in Shan State of Myanmar. I have known Phra Khammai well for many years, as I was his student for a few years in Sri Lanka. In addition, I particularly know well some members in the movement who are in turn my own informants and friends. However, due to the distance between us since I

arrived in Thailand, while Phra Khammai and other members of the movement are in other countries, including Myanmar, I mainly use the Internet to collect data. Digital technology means basically communicating via the Internet. This method allows me to collect data and download online library archives, conversations, and interviews, and exchange information. The method has been very useful for me, as it is the only way that has allowed me to connect with many Shan monks in different geographical settings. By this means, most of the contacts and conversations were conducted through the unstructured qualitative research method.

Informants with whom I have made regular contacts include Hsengherng (Bangkok, Thailand); Sirion (Tachileik, Shan State); Samseng (a native of Kengtung, now living in the USA); Sengpan (assistant to Phra Khammai, Oxford, UK); Saosra Mongkut (head of the Shan Tripitaka Translation Project, Panglong, Shan State); Saosra Nando (former assistant to the abbot of Khruba Bonchum Buddahgaya Tai Temple, Bodhgaya, India); Sao Hsintham (co-leader of the Khun Sam Law Movement); Wanchai Kornkaew (Chiang Mai); and Phra Khammai himself. With all of these informants I had either direct interviews or informal conversions of at least not less than three occasions. Following face-to-face meetings, I also had online communication with them via the Internet.

My interviews took many forms; for instance, with a set of questions prepared and sent to informants though emails, and sometimes online conversations through chat-based social media networks including Facebook, Viber, LINE, Skype, and the telephone. The frequency of conversations depended on the type of data and information I required, and also on the proximity of the personal relationship between me and my informants. Being friends with all the informants made me more comfortable to request data through conversations and discussions. I ascertain that due to the strength of our friendships, the data and information provided to me are authentic.

For some part of data collection, I have had to rely on social media networks, in which many of them have been uploaded to Internet public domain. For instance, the Khun Sam Law movement in Shan State and the *Lik Long* conferences are not available to watch online or download via YouTube. Data and information gained through my informants consist of various formats, such as CDs, DVDs, leaflets, video clips, and texts.

Websites and related URLs regularly accessed for this research include:

- oxfordbuddhavihara.org.uk
- oxfordbuddhaviharasin.org
- facebook.com/Buddhavihara Oxford Obv
- facebook.com/ShanDhammaland
- facebook.com/kingnyana.sirion
- facebook.com/KhuvaBoonchumTaiTempleBuddhagaya, and
- youtube.com/watch?v=XkJEQSn9SxM

As for physical fieldwork, I visited Bodhgaya, India, in 2011 where the Khruba Boonchum Buddhagaya Tai (KBBT) Temple is located. KBBT now has two centers located approximately 2 km from one another in Bodhgaya. In Bodhgaya, I had a chance to make conversation with the head of KBBT, who joined the Ceylon Journey in the early 1990s for Buddhist studies in Colombo. I also had an opportunity to talk with the deputy of KBBT during my visits and after on many occasions. This deputy monk now has returned to Shan State to establish himself at his hometown. Following this, I also traveled to Kengtung and several times to Tachileik meeting my informants for discussions related to my research. From June–July 2014, I had an opportunity to visit OBVS, a branch of OBV in Singapore. On several occasions, I had the chance to talk with the resident monks, including the assistant abbot of the center.

I realized that researching within my own culture and background provided numerous challenges that had the ability to influence my collection of adequate data (Jones, 1970). Being a former member of the *Sangha* does not necessarily make it easier for me to conduct data collection. I found that it is actually a huge disadvantage. This is because being known to some *Sangha* members seemed to cause them discomfort with the questions asked, making them unwilling to offer the data requested. In some cases, I was told that certain subjects are only for "immediate *Sangha* members concerned." Having some close friends among them, however, gave me an advantage with accessibility of information.

For the most part, the primary disadvantage I encountered during my research was that I was not able to travel to the Oxford Buddha Vihara in the UK, nor was I able to meet the Shan monks who are part of the new generation of the Ceylon Journey in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, I was not able to pay a visit to Panglong, Shan State, where the Shan State Sangha Council, the governing body of the Shan *Sangha*, has its office. A final disadvantage was that I did not have direct knowledge as to the type of Buddhism Phra Khammai promotes.

1.7 Organization of dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. These seven chapters are organized and are briefly detailed as follows:

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that seeks to provide an overview of the research from pre-colonial (1824-1885), colonial (1885-1948), and post-colonial (1948-present) periods in Burma. This overview includes a brief history of Shans of Burma, problem statement, rationale, and research justification. While this chapter defines the research questions, an attempt is also made to explain theoretical concepts and offer a review of literature followed by methodology. The theoretical concepts and conceptual frameworks review and discuss a wide range of Buddhism in general with special focus on 'Buddhism in action.'

Chapter 2 highlights the importance of research background by going back to the early 19th century history of Burma in order to understand the complexity of relations between the *Sangha* and the state. Burma is a state of diverse ethnic groups, and many of them manifest themselves as Buddhists, properly referring to Theravada Buddhist society in line with the nation-state, while in terms of language, culture, customs, beliefs, political ideals, and social norms they are unique in their own rights. Certainly what I refer to here as "State *Sangha*" is a recent construction, as has been shown in chapter 1.

Chapter 3 relates the life story of Phra Khammai from his time as a novice to his monastic life in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Oxford. The chapter continues by describing the Shan Buddhist monk who sees himself as an educationist and a *Dhammadūta*, a transnational Buddhist missionary, Phra Khammai. I take special focus on his pioneering educational

journeys to Sri Lanka and the UK, his global vision for *Dhammadūta* works, his establishment of the Shan *Sangha* movement, and his connections with monks and laities alike. Thus, he is best described as a transnational *Dhammadūta* missionary and an Oxford-based Theravada Buddhist scholar from Shan State, Burma.

Chapter 4 describes and analyses Phra Khammai's teachings and practices. This dissertation finds that Phra Khammai draws his teachings and practices from two *suttas* (discourses), the *Satipattha-sutta* (Foundation of Mindfulness) of Majjhima-nikaya and the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (Great Foundation of Mindfulness) as appears in the Dīgha-nikāya. This is to stress and strengthen that people need mindfulness for whatever they do or practice in their daily lives. The teaching emphasizes the practice of *Brahmavihara* ("noble ways of living"), which are *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karunā* (compassion), *muditā* (joyfulness), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). The Buddhist concept of *Brahmavihāra* is well known for meditation in the Buddhist world, and today is becoming increasingly popular in the West. The *Brahmavihāra* can be conceptually taught, and from it, it is easy to learn the core idea of what makes a Buddhist. This core concept requires no ritual practices or textual studies.

Chapter 5 explains the main theme of the Shan *Sangha*'s educational journeys and its global vision for *Dhammadūta* missionary activities. Moreover, how the Shan *Sangha* movement was established and is expanding globally is explored.

Chapter 6 discusses Phra Khammai's movement in its homeland, Shan State. In particular, it will describe the process by which Phra Khammai and his colleagues carry out their Buddhist education projects while coordinating and connecting with many actors and movements in Shan State. One main actor is the Shan State Sangha Council (SSSC), which has played a crucial role in the Shan *Sangha* affairs for nearly six decades. Although this Shan *Sangha* organization does not exist independently from the Myanmar state *Sangha* governing body, it has its own rights to exercise for the welfare of the Shan State *Sangha* and its Buddhist communities.

Chapter 7 explains analytical factors and conditions that have enabled Phra Khammai to initiate and expand his international Buddhist movement. It also attempts to relate the

development of this particular Buddhist movement and its identities in relation to other transnational or global Buddhist movements, including other Shan Buddhist movements in Shan State and local Shan Buddhism at the present time. Finally, this chapter concludes with a non-sectarian view of Phra Khammai's philosophical perception, which transcends the binary opposition between rational/reformed and irrational/superstitious or otherwise traditional forms of Theravada Buddhism and localized Shan Buddhism.