

## Chapter III

### Modern Thai society

Before open this chapter and talking about Buddhism in modern Thai society, I would like to give again, a short review of the early Buddhism in Thailand .

According to the history, Thailand received Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka during the Sukhothai period in 12th century of the Christian Era, and from that period until now it was able to maintained a canonical tradition and an unbroken ordination lineage. So, in that same period Buddhism came and played an important part in the Thai history ever since. The Thai nation settled firmly in present day Thailand 700 years ago,by influencing widely and enormously Thai kings, and it “adopted the present form of Buddhism for ever”. Also, Theravada Buddhism in Thailand is known as Lankavamsa. This is because 700 years ago King Ramkhamhaeng invited a leader of Sri Lankan monks from Nakhon Si Thammarat in the South to preach Sri Lankan Buddhism in Sukhothai. That was the beginning of Lankavamsa in Thailand. Thai Kingdom 250 years ago had opportunity to return a favor to Sri Lanka when King Boromkot sent Phra Upali and others to revive the higher ordination tradition in Sri Lanka , after the ordination lineage in this island had been broken by Portuguese persecution.

The higher ordination tradition was reintroduced to Sri Lanka, thanks the great sacrifice of Phra Upali, followed by the establishment of the Siam Nikaya. Thus, when Phra Upali decided to come to Sri Lanka he might have known that it was a journey of no return. He was ready to sacrifice his life for the benefit of mankind and for the stability of Buddhism saying simply to his monks to go for the benefit and happiness of the world, out of compassion for the world. I personally regard Phra Upali as the greatest Dhammaduta or missionary monk that Thailand has ever produced. This is because of the reason that Phra Upali not only accomplished his mission in Sri Lanka but also succeeded in establishing here the greatest Nikaya

which was named after his motherland and his name as Syamopali Mahanikaya, the Siam Upali lineage or simply the Siam Nikaya.<sup>1</sup>

The people of modern Thailand are varied. Definition of “Thai” is political: citizens of Thailand, subjects of Thai King. Cultural and linguistic is to speak Thai and participate in Thai culture. All the things that make up Thai identity, however, have developed only slowly through many centuries. The “Tai” peoples today are widely spread over several million square kilometers of the southeastern corner of the great land mass of Asia. SEA peoples inhabited in relatively permanent sites in much of the region. Hunting and gathering food from streams and forests, using wooden and bamboo tools. With stone choppers and knives led to tools as the blowpipe, the bow and arrow, animal and fish traps, and baskets. Later, they began to engage in agriculture, cultivating peas and beans and domesticated animals, i.e. chicken. Individual ethnic groups began to be differentiated, linguistically and culturally, from the Yangtze Valley to the islands of the Indonesian Archipelago. Core of technology of SEA civilization emerged at this time. Swine, cattle, fowl domesticated and rice was cultivated. Invented canoe, navigated to Japan, Melanesia, India. Metallurgy developed. Copper and bronze used. Iron-working, pottery.

Formed subsistence agriculture based on rice, supplanted by fishing and gathering of forest products. They lived as nuclear families in small villages, regular communication and some trade with others. The region was under populated, manpower was highly valued and women enjoyed a relatively high social status, certainly by contrast with Chinese and Indian women. In determining inheritance, equal value was accorded the maternal and paternal lines. Sons and daughters received equal shares of parents estates. Folk beliefs were remarkably consistent. The world was regarded as being peopled with good and evil spirits that had power to aid or harm humans and thus had to be propitiated by ceremonies or offerings of food. Women believed to have a special power to mediate between mankind and the spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Karuna Kusulasaya , *Buddhism in Thailand* (Bangkok: Chomthong, 2001 ), pp.20-21.

world. Nature and the world were unpredictable and hostile forces with which humans had to cope as best they could.<sup>2</sup>

Thailand has always been able to harness the talents of its people, make effective use of its natural environment, and progress at an evolutionary pace. The tendency of the Central Thai--for centuries the controlling group in Thai society--to eliminate or suppress ethnic or religious differences was tempered by the Chakkri Dynasty, which had, for the most part, fostered toleration since assuming the monarchy in 1782. Although Thai society appeared homogeneous, it actually represented a compromise among various groups, which, in order to preserve their own identity, accepted certain aspects of general Thai identity, or Ekkalak Thai. As in the past, in modern Thailand the basic social and communal structure was controlled by a power elite system comprising the monarchy, the military, and upper level bureaucrats. These groups had a symbiotic relationship with the economic and business community that strongly influenced decision making. As a result of modern education and international influences, however, the composition of all parts of the elite system later was changing . Commerce and other economic endeavors had always had a place in modern Thai society, but it was only in the late twentieth century that income derived by means other than landholding became socially acceptable.<sup>3</sup> In modern Thailand, entrepreneurs, educated civil servants, and career military officers were all accepted into the elite ranks. This expansion of the ruling elite was reflected in the growing influence of elected members of the National Assembly.

More kinds of people had the opportunity to participate in the shaping of Thai society after 1973; however, the gap continued to widen between rich and poor. Although Thailand benefited from modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and tourism, being a rapidly developing nation was not without problems and costs. People who first found access to modern technology of the West, usually those in urban areas and the intellectuals, identified themselves with Western thought and

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<sup>2</sup> The National Identity Board Office of the Prime Minister. In [http:// www. Identity opm.go.th/](http://www.Identityopm.go.th/). (12 June 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin ( USA : Boston, November 2002), in [http:// www.ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org). (9 June 2009).

culture. In doing this, they gradually isolated themselves from the traditional Thai society, a term which was usually used to refer to the backward rural areas and uneducated or the old-fashioned. One who tried not to be isolated sometimes found himself a man of twin personalities: a traditional Thai and Westernized modern Thai. For these people Buddhist institutions were associated with the traditional Thai society or, at least, the traditional personality, and Buddhism was identified with traditional culture activities.

Thus, Buddhism made itself accessible only to one part or one half of Thai society, the less privileged and waning half. Buddhism and the modern Thai society gradually isolated themselves from each other. Thai Buddhism has put itself in a more and more narrowed confinement. Under the modern Westernized system of education, Thai youth have to a large extent been alienated from Buddhism and also, to a lesser extent, from traditional Thai culture. Thailand's modern system of education is sometimes accused of being education for Westernization or education for alienation of Thai youth.<sup>4</sup>

Another problem related to increased urbanization and a growing market economy was the heightened desire for more consumer products at the expense of locally made goods, services, and recreational activities. The growing incidence of violent crime, divorce, prostitution, and drug addiction also could be attributed in part to increased urbanization. Modernization was also changing the traditional ways by which individual Thai improved their economic and social condition. A university education, for example, used to virtually guarantee financial betterment; by the late 1980s, however, large numbers of liberal arts graduates were either unemployed or underemployed. Modernization also hurt the rural Thai. As we seen above, another cost of modernization was loss of security by some, including the elderly and Thailand's Buddhist monks, who previously had had an assured place in Thai society. Care of and respect for the elderly had once been the responsibility of the immediate or extended family, but by the 1980s Thailand was beginning to build public and private senior citizen centers. Before World War II, the local monks and the Sangha

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<sup>4</sup> Phra Rajavaramuni. *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress press, 1984), p.107.

had been the main source of advice, culture, education and information, but in the 1980s, civil servants were often better equipped to attend to the needs of the people in an increasingly urban society.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, another traditional system of complex values and behaviors that the majority of Thai people shared was Theravada Buddhism. Complementing the religion were beliefs and practices assuming the existence of several types of spirits (or- phi) whose behavior was supposed to affect human welfare. The Buddhism of the Thai villagers, and even of poorly educated monks, often differed substantially from the canonical religion. More than that, Buddhism in Thailand is still the state religion of the country. Under the constitution, the King as a symbol of the nation, although protector of all religion, must be a Buddhist. The Crown and the State have always been involved into the changing, supporting and assisting the Ordained Sangha and in promoting Buddhism among the people.<sup>6</sup>

To King Mongkut, who ascended the throne in 1851 as the fourth of his line, fell the task of meeting Western demands for open commercial intercourse. With him, the country entered upon a period of increasing prosperity that was not to abate for decades. The primary factor in this economic development was foreign trade, which brought increasing number of foreign ships to Bangkok each year, and with them a growing community of resident foreigners which included the representatives of foreign governments, businessmen, and missionaries. The face of Bangkok was changed considerably. Roads were constructed and canals were dug. A police force and costumes house were provided for the safety and convenience of foreigners. Printing presses were set up and utilized by the government, the monkhood, the missionaries, and a growing commercial press. The city entered upon a period of building and of bustling commercial and governmental activity. His primary concern was to maintain the independence of his kingdom in the face of Western pressures which were overwhelming his neighbors. Surely the most lasting impression Mongkut

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<sup>5</sup> Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

<sup>6</sup> B. J. Terwiel, 'A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942' (University of Queensland Press, Australia 1983), in [http://www. Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com) . (12 June 2009).

left on his country was that of his mind and outlook. He was a man of wide-ranging interests, curious, and logical.<sup>7</sup>

So, during the time of King Monkut many cultural reforms movement, and modern education, took place in Thailand, and one of it has been the Thammayut school founded by King Monkut of Siam while he was monk. Stricter in discipline and more modernist and rationalist in its interpretation of scripture, it was closely linked through royal patronage to the Thai royal family. In 1852 saw the large influx of English and American missionaries into Siam as Mongkut hired them to teach English language for the princes, as an example of the integration of new fields of knowledge into the traditional tutorial regime provided for his young children, without any significant change in the institution itself.. Here was a case of traditional educational institutions being modified to function in the service of changing social and political needs as defined by the ruling class.

He also hired Western mercenaries to train Siamese troops in Western style. In Bangkok, American Dan Beach Bradley had already reformed the printing and then resumed the publishing Siam's first newspaper - *Bangkok Recorder*. Mongkut also improved the woman's rights in Siam. He released a large number of royal concubines to find their own husbands. This was what readily contrasts what have been dramatized. He banned the forced marriages of all kinds and selling one's wife to pay the debt. For Buddhism, Mongkut pioneered the rehabilitation of various temples. He also began the *Makha* festival in the full moon of the third lunar month, to celebrate Buddha's announcement of his main principles. And he instigated the Recompilation of Tripitaka in Siam according to Theravada traditions. Of course, he formally established the Thammayuttika sect as a rightful branch of Theravada.<sup>8</sup>

Thammayuttika movement, would influence also other neighboring countries like Cambodia and Laos, and them as Thammayuttika monks often studied in Bangkok, where the French were afraid they would be indoctrinated with the virus of anti-colonialism. The Buddhist Institute did encourage Buddhist studies, but it also

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<sup>7</sup> Wyatt, David K, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn.* (Yale University Press : New Haven, CT. Publication Year: 1969), pp.31-32.

<sup>8</sup> B. J. Terwiel, 'A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942' (University of Queensland Press, Australia 1983), in <http://www.Wikipedia.com> . (12 June 2009).

stimulated wider studies into culture and history, folklore and language, which rekindled cultural pride that fed into the rising tide of nationalism. Mongkut had initiated the reforms and modernization of traditional Siam, as Siam gained acceptance and became a rightful nation in world diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> Thus as we seen above, he was willing to make changes when he could see their necessity, but he was cautious enough to try to prepare the way for change rather than force it pace. He was a practical, no nonsense, realistic king who did what he had to do; but he was sufficiently the prophet to attempt to prepare his sons for a different world which soon would come. This new world, however, arrived much sooner for him than he expected, with his sudden death.<sup>10</sup>

After his reforms of the state bureaucracy in the 1890s King Chulalongkorn would continue to restructure the Sangha administration in 1902 to provide for a parallel centralization of bureaucratic control over all Buddhist monks in the country. The principles that established the basis for a national Sangha were embodied in the Sangha Administration act of 1902. The more important features of the Sangha Administration Act of 1902 were probably: 1)the incorporation of all monks into a national structure;2) the establishment of a hierarchical principle of authority ;and 3)the establishment of a national system of clerical education. King Chulalongkorn is considered one of the greatest kings of Siam. His reign was characterized by the modernization of Siam, immense government and social reforms, and territorial cessations to the British Empire and French Indochina. As Siam was threatened by Western expansionism, Chulalongkorn, through his policies and acts, managed to save Siam from being colonized. All his reforms were dedicated to Siam's insurance of survival in the midst of Western colonialism, so that Chulalongkorn earned the epithet *Phra Piya Maharaj* (The Great Beloved King).<sup>11</sup>

Thailand, during the first contact with European countries in the reign of King Rama III, (A.D. 1798-A.D.1851) under the shadow of colonialism, became

<sup>9</sup> Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politic in Twentieth Century Asia* (London: Wellington House, 1999), p.199.

<sup>10</sup> Wyatt, David K, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> B. J. Terwiel, 'A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942'.

aware of western advancement in the fields of education, economy, social, political and cultural development. The young king Chulalongkorn, was well aware of the world wide social, political and cultural development, made intention to make study visits to countries in Asia and Europe, in order to learn, to meet and to exchange opinions and experience with the ruler and outstanding officials of each country. He visited Singapore, Jawa (Indonesia) India and Burma (then). He visited European countries twice, in B.E.2440 (A.D 1897) and B.E. 2449 (A.D 1906). He was given glorious welcome wherever he went. The experience and knowledge gained from the visits, were utilized for the reformation and modernization the country, providing data on solving problems and establishment of modern society.<sup>12</sup>

Again, Thailand is one of only a handful of Asian countries to have survived the most dangerous epoch of Western colonial expansion, between the middle of the nineteenth century and World War I. The reasons for their respective survivals are dissimilar, as are the characteristics of each in transition. Thus, she had the rights to promulgate laws and carry out whatever policy she saw fit. She was free to initiate programmes for development in the areas of education, scientific advancement, social reformation, uphold human rights such as in the abolition of slavery, and to set up diplomatic relations with other countries of her choice. A feature of great significance for Thailand's survival, however, was the fact that the transformation of her society and government was accomplished largely through action from above, by leaders who were more than leaders; visionaries who were sensitive to the needs of the age and who forced change upon their nation and themselves directed and ordered its economic, social, and political development.

Buddhism in Thailand reached the modern period under warm support of the king and the people, without the interruption of colonial persecution or suppression. Side by side with the people, the monks came into encounter with Western civilization, and hand in hand with the secular government the monkhood started on modernization, with its ecclesiastic education too. So, under the King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) the structure of the secular government was changed to

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<sup>12</sup> Wyatt, David K. *Thailand A Short History*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), in [http://www. Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com). (30 July 2009).

adopt a new pattern and a modern Western system of public education was introduced. The Thai interacted with these new ideas, choosing from among them those aspects of the modern world that they deemed necessary, desirable, digestible, and workable; and by attempting- consciously or not- to distinguish the modern from the Western elements, they fused these modern elements with the enduring values of their heritage to create a modern nation.<sup>13</sup>

Chulalongkorn was the first Siamese king to send the royal princes to Europe to be educated. In nineteenth century Europe, nationalism flourished and there was a call for liberty. The princes, of course, had been influenced by the liberal ideas of democracy and elections. They encountered republics like France and constitutional monarchies like the United Kingdom. With the assistance of the King's half brother, the monk-prince Vajiranana-Varorasa, who later became a supreme patriarch, an important role in public education was established, and a foundation was laid for the modernization of ecclesiastical education. Vajiranana traveled to outlying provinces to ensure that monastic law was being properly obeyed.

He established the practice of having monks come to Bangkok for their higher studies, and often appointed central Thai monks to high positions in the provincial ecclesiastical hierarchies that were organized along lines parallel to the national political structure. Moreover, these developments were inflected by the nineteenth century political history of Thailand, when it collided with the West and lunched upon modernization. The impact of challenge of Western powers and the expanding agricultural and commercial horizons enabled the Thai polity to reach a position of strength and stability previously unknown under royal leadership, which various policies of national integration, centralization ,and modernization were lunched.<sup>14</sup>

His Majesty the King Rama V reigned the country for 42 years and he was the longest reigning monarch at that time. It is worthy of mentioning that he successfully and peacefully abolished the slavery in 1905 without bloodshed. He

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<sup>13</sup> Wyatt, David K, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, pp.376-377.

<sup>14</sup> S.J.Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976)*,p. 5.

associated the abolition of slavery in the United States with the bloodshed of the American Civil War. Chulalongkorn, to prevent such a bloodbath in Siam, provided several steps towards the abolition of slavery, not an extreme turn point from servitude to total freedom. In fact, American and Siamese slaves were not on the same basis, as American slavery was racial in nature whereas Siamese slavery was economic in nature. Those who found themselves unable to live on their own poverty sold themselves into slavery of rich noblemen. Likewise, when a debt was defaulted the borrower would become a slave of the lender. If the debt was redeemed, one's freedom was regained.

Chulalongkorn also abolished the traditional Nakorn Bala methods of tortures in judiciary process, which was seen as inhumane and barbaric by Western and Modern views, and introduced the Western code. His Belgian advisor, Rolin-Jaequemyns, played a great role in the development of modern Siamese law and judicial system. His Majesty the King Rama V made enormous reforms with regard to law, civil organization, education and religion. After that, with the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, things changed for the worse. The process of modernization continued on the part of secular sector, but on the ecclesiastical side it was kept going for only a short period of time and then waned. The monkhood was put in losing position. Monks were retired from their role in public education, though most of the public schools were still housed in monastery compounds and the monks still collected donation for the building of these schools. Preliminary arrangements for modern higher Buddhist education were set aside and the plans were not undertaken. The monks fell into inactivity and became attached to traditionalism, and also they became underemployed and many developed the habit of idleness, living only on the rich inheritance of traditional popular support.<sup>15</sup>

According to the history, in 1932 revolution, Chulalongkorn's centralized Sangha administration was replaced by a system of Sangha councils and ministers modeled on the democratic patterns of the revolutionary government. Five years after Sarit Thanarat assumed power in a military coup in 1957 and instituted his highly

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<sup>15</sup> Phra Rajavaramuni. *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress press, 1984), p.106.

centralized form of military authoritarianism the democratic Sangha structure established in 1941 was abolished and replaced with a recentralized administrative system which closely resembled the structure originally established by King Chulalongkorn in 1902. Again, as we saw above, Thailand, the only democratic Buddhist country in Southeast Asia, and it is the only country, differently from Laos, Cambodia and Burma, that was never colonized, or was never subject to European colonial rule leaving intact a relatively unified Thai Sangha that has been in place from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, and also the Thai monarchy was a symbol of national unity and supporter of the Buddhism which would maintain its viability from the late eighteenth century with its capital at Bangkok. Although Thailand has been subject to the trends of the international market economy, as we seen above, however it has been economically stable and has prospered throughout much of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

King Chulalongkorn was regarded by UNESCO in 2001 as an important figure in the history of the world. He was cited by UNESCO at its 31<sup>st</sup> General Conference on November 2, 2001, as the world's outstanding person in the fields of education, culture, social science, social development, anthropology and communication. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth was celebrated by UNESCO in 2003. The abolition of slavery through legal and peaceful means is a unique undertaking that should be widely remembered as an act of a humanistic world leader. In recent years, nearly a century after his death he has been much revered in Thailand as a great and beloved king who laid the foundation for the country in all areas concerned. A personality cult has developed after the 1997 economic crisis when he became revered as a deity, in the tradition of ancestral worship. His pictures and small statues can be seen in most homes, offices and shops in Thailand today as people believe he will bring in good luck and protect them from harm. Every Tuesday, the day when the King was born, many people in Bangkok would gather at the equestrian statue in front of the old parliament building to offer him food and flowers and ask for his blessing. This spiritual bonding is a unique phenomenon, arising from the

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<sup>16</sup> Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politic in Twentieth Century Asia* (London: Wellington House, 1999), p.200.

knowledge they gained from the study of history what kind of a person he was and how he cared for his subjects.

The transformation and modernization of Thailand is an epic in the modern world. Poetic monsters which threatened human life, such as dragons existed in the forms of colonialism, poverty, ignorance, etc, threatening life, prosperity and happiness of individuals, communities, and countries. King Chulalongkorn's unflagging efforts in facing dangers wisely were recorded in the documents produced during his reign. These are worthy to be registered at world level because, in spite of all measures to set the world at peace, dangerous elements, caused by human beings and nature still exist. The documents cover many themes-like:

- 1) Respect of human right and freedom, abolition of slavery systems;
- 2) Promotion of education for all, regardless of social status;
- 3) Development of vocational education,- e.g. agriculture, medicine;
- 4) Land reform – irrigation system, land ownership for agricultural purposes; development of agricultural resources;
- 5) Replacement of the traditional administrative system by the establishment of 12 ministerial units;
- 6) Urban development, road building and urban beautification;
- 7) Improving diplomatic relationship with countries in Asia and Europe;
- 8) Reforming of laws and court system;
- 9) Reforming and strengthening military systems for safe-guarding the country;
- 10) Modernization of economic systems and international monetary market;
- 11) Reformation of government system, transferring absolute monarchy power to the council of state; greater participation in national administration by officials and younger generation;
- 12) Promotion of studying western knowledge, culture, and scientific advancement.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Wichai Sewamat. *The Abolition of Slavery in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*. (Bangkok: NIDA Research Institute: 1966), in [http://www. Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com). (30 July 2009).

Nowadays, Thailand it is the only country that has maintained an unbroken monarchy that still draws its political legitimation in large part from the Buddhist worldview of its citizens, who are 95% Buddhists, and the political legitimacy given to monarchy by the Buddhist worldview in Southeast Asia survives now only in Thailand (and to a lesser degree in Cambodia). Thailand now is the only functioning democracy out of the four states, the only one with a free press, an active civil society, and opportunities for free speech and association. It is the only one, in other words, where Buddhist activism is politically possible. In present time, King Bhumibol wields great political influence by virtue of the high esteem in which he is held by the Thai people. He holds that esteem because of the karmic merit he is believed to have accumulated, both to be born to succeed to the throne and from the good works he has performed since becoming king. That King Bhumibol is a constitutional monarch who uses his political power sparingly does not alter the fact that he possesses it, in a way that, for instance the Danish, Dutch, or even British monarchs do not. Anyone doubting the political power of the Thai monarch has only to recall how the King summoned generals Chamlong and Suchinda to put an end to the street violence of May 1992, when both men in the full glare of television advanced on their knees before the King. There will be no further coups while this King is alive, so it can be argued that credit for the political stability of Thai democracy is in large part due to King Bhumibol.

So, as I mentioned above, approximately 95% of Thai people are Buddhists (the rest are mostly Muslims and Christians). This fact itself demonstrates more than anything else how influential Buddhism is in Thailand. In their long history of existence the Thais seem to have been predominantly Buddhists, at least ever since they came into contact with the tenets of Buddhism. Furthermore, Thai people belief in karma and rebirth provides a singular worldview that pervades all four Theravada Buddhist countries. Its importance should never be underestimated because it provides explanations for events that color attitudes in modern Thai society, to both life and politics. Karma provides a ready explanation for anything that happens to a person in life, and one hears it frequently referred to. Everything from success in marriage to failure in business is put down to the workings of karma. Expressions of sympathy for someone's bad luck are met with a shrug and reference to his or her karma. Nothing

happens by chance. Political success and failure are accounted for in the same way. There is a suggestion of fate here. "No-one can escape one's karma, though effects may be delayed to a future lifetime".<sup>18</sup> All the Thai kings in the recorded history of present-day Thailand have been adherents of Buddhism. The country's constitution specifies that the King of Thailand must be a Buddhist and the Upholder of Buddhism. The term "The Land of Yellow Robes" has not been inappropriately applied to Thailand, for two things strike most foreigners as soon as they set foot in that country.

One is the Buddhist temple with its characteristic architecture, and the other is the sight of yellow-clad Buddhist monks and novices who are to be seen everywhere, especially in the early hours of dawn when they go out in great numbers for alms. The two sights inevitably remind the foreigners that here is a country where Buddhism is a dominant force in the people's life. Indeed, to the Thai nation as a whole, Buddhism has been the main spring from which flow its culture and philosophy, its art and literature, its ethics and morality, and many of its folkways and festivals. Also, Buddhism as system of beliefs played an important role in the modern Thai society, like education, culture, tradition and character of the people and so on..<sup>19</sup>

Besides, there is a monastery in nearly every village that provides education for boys, as well as for the laity community, and others numerous forest monasteries where monks may go for extended meditation. Schools are often located on monastery grounds, and the Sangha is actively involved in the efforts of the state to rise the educational level and the culture of the people as a whole. Buddhism and the Sangha, therefore, in modern Thai society are deeply intertwined with the daily lives of the people of Thailand.<sup>20</sup> Now, for convenience and more clarity I should present some of them beneath, as representation of modern Thai society , divided in two main

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Martin-Fox, *Southeast Asian Studies* (Published: University of Queensland 30<sup>th</sup> January 2006), p.20.

<sup>19</sup> National Identity Board, Office of the Prime Minister, *Plan, Problem and Respect* (Bangkok Press, 1982), in <http://www.Wikipedia.com>. (10 June 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Unity Progress press, 1984), p.11.

part, such as: The Laity community, the Bikkhu Sangha organization and its reform movement, as well as the benefit of Buddhism in Thai society.

### 3.1 Bikkhu Sangha Organization and reforms in modern Thai society

As we all know well, two months after the Enlightenment, on the full moon of the eighth lunar month, the Buddha preached his First Sermon at the Deer Park in Isipatana. The First Sermon is called the *Dhammacakkappavattana-Sutta* or the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma. On hearing this, Kondanna, one of the five ascetics who had waited upon the Bodhisattva when he was practicing self-mortification, gained the Eye of Truth (*Dhamma-cakkhu*), or the Wisdom Eye, as a first glimpse of *Nibbana*. Kondanna asked the Buddha for ordination and was admitted as a Bhikkhu, becoming the first member of the Sangha, or the Buddhist Order of monks. He is thus generally known as the Buddha's *First Disciple*. As until that time there had appeared in the world only the Buddha and the Dhamma, this event marks the completion of the Triple Gem of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

What should be noted here is the arising of the Sangha. Strictly speaking, it was the arising of the first member of the Sangha. That is, Kondanna, who since then became known as Annakondanna, was the first man to see the Truth after the Buddha and also the first to be admitted as a Bhikkhu. When Kondanna gained the Eye of Truth, he became the first member of the Noble Sangha. When he was ordained a Bhikkhu, he became the first member of the Conventional Sangha. Thus, the event of the First Sermon marks the beginning both of the Noble Sangha of disciples and of the Conventional Sangha of monks.

The four types of persons who form the Noble Sangha are the *Sotapanna* or Stream-Enterers (those who have entered the stream leading to *Nibbana*), the *Sakadagami* or Once-Returners (those who will return only once more to the vicissitudes of this world), the *Anagami* or Non-Returners (those who will never come again to the dubious conditions of this world), and the *Arahants* or Worthy Ones (those who have achieved the ideal of perfection and attained to the goal of *Nibbana*).

The Sotapanna has achieved perfection in morality and has abandoned the three fetters of self-illusion, uncertainty and clinging to mere rules and ritual. The Sakadagami has in addition mitigated lust, hatred and delusion. The Anagami has achieved perfection in mental discipline and further eradicated the fetters of sensual lust and ill will. The Arahant has achieved perfection in wisdom and put an end to five more fetters, namely, attachment to fine-material existence, attachment to immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance.

Obviously, it is the purpose of the Buddha, in his conduct for the well-being of the world, to teach all people to progress along these lines of development to become Sotapanna, Sakadagami, Anagami and Arahants. In other words, he wants them to be members of the Noble Sangha. The ideal is surely to turn the world into a community of noble or truly civilized people. To achieve this, however, a sound concrete organization is needed, and it is for this reason that the Conventional Sangha of monks was founded. Truly, the Sangha of monks or Bhikkhu-Sangha has been vested with the main function of teaching all people, regardless of caste, class, sex and nationality, the Dhamma that will help them in their self-development to become *Ariya* or *Arya* (noble or truly civilized). The monks thus lead the people in creating the universal community of noble, enlightened and truly civilized people.

Even when the Bhikkhu-Sangha had been newly established, and it was then a very small community consisting of only sixty monks, the Buddha sent all of its members in all directions to propagate the Dhamma. The community was then only three months old. Here, the spirit of acting for the good of the people is strongly evident. The words of the Buddha in sending out his disciples at that time reflect very well the ideal of erecting the world Noble Sangha.

The Sangha of monks or Bhikkhu-Sangha has been set up, both as the instrument and as the starting point and the stronghold, for working out the idea of establishing the universal Sangha of Dhammically civilized people. The main function of this conventional Sangha is, as mentioned earlier, to expound the Dhamma and spread it far and wide, in such a way that the common people may understand and practice it, developing themselves in their progress along the path of being *Ariya* (noble or Dhammically civilized) and thus joining the Noble Sangha or civilized

world community.<sup>21</sup> Since Buddhism was introduced in Thailand, through the time of King Asoka when, around B.E.234 (310 B.C.E.), nine missions of monks were sent out as Dhamma messengers to propagate the Dhamma in different countries, the Bhikkhu Sangha of Buddhist monks has been existent in this place.

The modern tradition of Thai monastic Sangha was established under the full support of the King who himself invited the head monk from afar to found it and since then, throughout the different periods of over 700 years, it has enjoyed the status of the national Sangha under royal patronage and state protection. The Sangha was dramatically restructured in 1902 parallel to and under the jurisdiction of King Chulalongkorn's new bureaucracy, bringing it under even greater state control and giving it a strongly hierarchical and centralized structure. In fact, the Sangha Act was first enacted by King Chulalongkorn on June 16, (1902) and was announced publicly in the government gazette of June 29. According to the Act, the Sangha Supreme Council was granted authorities to rule and settle all the disputes and conflicts. The Sangha administration was divided into hierarchical levels: Regional, Provincial, District and Sub-district level respectively. The promulgation of the Sangha Act of 1902 could be regarded as the ratification of the "first modern law pertaining to the Sangha (the community of monks)". Since 1902, Thailand has had three Sangha Acts, those of 1902, 1941 and 1962, as well as two minor amendments in 1992 and 2004. There are varying interpretations of the functions and roles of the Sangha Acts in the history of Thailand.<sup>22</sup> State control over Buddhism increased markedly during the second half of the nineteenth century. This occurred in concert with the introduction of the commercial rice production and Thai participation in the world market economy, and in parallel with the expansion of the Bangkok government's political controls. The Sangha Act of 1902 passed by King Chulalongkorn enabled the political authority to keep tighter control over the Sangha organization. Somboon Suksamran pointed out that the 1902 Act reflected the traditional notion that the "progress and prosperity of the nation and Buddhism were interrelated". Indeed, the Sangha Act of 1902 brought

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<sup>21</sup> Prayudh Payutto, *The Ideal World Community* (Bangkok, Thailand, 1986), in <http://www.dharmaweb.org>. (10-June 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), p. 69.

the Sangha and their monasteries under a standardized state control for the first time. This led to a reform of the administrative structure of the Sangha that paralleled the reforms of the secular bureaucracy that King Chulalongkorn had established in 1892. Thus, a systematic and unified national Sangha hierarchy was created for the first time in Thai history and had made it easier for the central government to establish a centralized authority to control the decisions of the monastic community.<sup>23</sup>

The 1932 Revolution marked the end of absolute monarchy in Thailand, replacing it with the Western model of constitutional monarchy. After the Revolution, the Sangha became increasingly influenced by the Western idea of democracy. Hence, a “democratic spirit” penetrated many monks from the *Mahanikaya* Order. Sangha protests increased in the 1930s to rally for a more democratic system of Sangha administration. In 1933, a group of young *Mahanikaya* monks organized the ‘Group to Restore the Religion’ in opposition to the Sangha Act of 1902. The group proposed to repeal the 1902 Act and replace it with a new Sangha Act based on “equity and democratic” principles. The proposal was rejected by the Sangha leadership and the monks from the opposition group were forced to disrobe under the order of the *Sangharaja* (Supreme Patriarch), Prince Chinaworasiriwat. After him passed away and was replaced by Somdet Phra Phutthajan, a senior monk from the *Mahanikaya* Order, the government was able to ratify a new Sangha Act in 1941 based on democratic principles, in line with the governing principles of a constitutional state. S. J. Tambiah interprets the legislation of the Sangha Act of 1941 as the government’s intention to “liberalize and democratize the system of Sangha administration”. So, the 1932 revolution was followed in 1941 by a democratization of the Sangha structure and greater independence from the state; Sarit’s 1962 Sangha Act reintroduced a high degree of state control, centralization and a hierarchal structure. Furthermore, Sarit mobilized the Sangha for his goals of national development, “national integration”, and anticommunism.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, this illustrates that the traditional functions of the Sangha’s reformation were solely political. Whenever a new Sangha Act was enacted,

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<sup>23</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 67,70,71.

<sup>24</sup> S.J.Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 242.*

it was intended to serve two main political functions. First, the Sangha Acts functioned as a political tool which allowed the political leaders to make the Sangha an instrument for the promotion of the government's national policies. Second, the Acts allowed the political authorities to exert their political control over the Sangha. The formalized legislations provided the authorities with the legislative power and the justification to do so.

In modern time, the large Thai monastic community would consist of about 340,000 monks and novices who are accommodated in more than 30,000 monasteries all over the country. Elder monks work as teachers on religious and some secular subjects, as meditation masters and practitioners, as preachers, and as ecclesiastical administrators, and sometimes as counselors of the villagers, especially on spiritual matters. The monk or Bhikkhu Sangha of Thailand have to observe carefully the same rules and discipline observed from other Bhikkhu Sanghas in other Theravada countries such as; Ceylon, Laos, Cambodia and Burma. Further, the entire burden and expenses for supporting the Sangha, normally, in modern Thai society, is sustained by the common people or Thai rural family as ranging from 5 to 10 percents, of its annual cash income, even though the government allots a yearly budget for the maintenance. It may be added here that the report concerns the average Thai rural family, and not the urban dwellers the majority of whom in Thailand as elsewhere, are less religious inclined than the country folked.

### 3.2 Two Sects of Nikaya

Brief introduction of Thai Sangha: Thai monastic Sangha has been divided into two denominations or suborders of the *Maha Nikaya* and the *Dhammayuttika Nikaya*, the whole monastic community is still unified under one and the same governing body, called the Council of Elders, or the Sangha Supreme Council, presided over by the Supreme Patriarch. The State has enacted laws forming a Constitution under which the monastic Sangha governs itself. According to the present act of B.E. 2505 (1962 C.E.), the Sangha administration is based on the

process of centralization. The Supreme Patriarch, who is appointed by the King, has absolute power to govern the whole monastic community and to direct all ecclesiastical affairs. Under him is the Sangha Supreme Council, which serves him as the Consultative Council. Under this highest governing body, at the local administrative level, 73 ecclesiastical provincial governors are responsible for provincial affairs of the Sangha, each in his respective province. In modern Thai society, there were present two sects or Nikayas of the Buddhist Order in Thailand, known as the Maha Nikaya and the Dhammayuttika Nikaya. The Maha Nikaya is the older and by far the larger and traces its lineage directly to the Lankan establishment of the Sangha during the Sukhothai period.

The Dhammayuttika Nikaya was established in 1833 A.D., by King Mongkut, who ruled Thailand from 1851 to 1868 A.D., as a smaller Nikaya dedicated to a more strict observance of the Vinaya. The express desire of the King in founding the Dhammayuttika Sects was to enable the monks to lead a more disciplined and scholarly life in accordance with the pristine teaching of the Buddha.<sup>25</sup> Monks of both sects follow the same 227 Vinaya rules as laid down in the Patimokkha of the Vinaya Pitaka (the Basket of the Discipline), without great differences between both of two Nikayas, concerning only matters of discipline, and never of the Doctrine, and both of them receive in the same manner, the esteem from the public. Both Nikayas come under the direction of the Supreme Sangha Council and the Supreme Patriarch and subsequent internal reforms have greatly reduced the differences between them. Over the last century, the Sangha in Thailand has governed itself under the regulations of the first Sangha Act (1902), the second Sangha Act (1941), and the current Sangha Act, enacted in 1962 and amended in 1992.

Two major divisions are recognized by law, the Mahayana division with Chinese and Vietnamese sects, and the Theravada division with the Maha Nikaya and Dhammayuttika Nikaya. Both divisions come under direction of the Supreme Patriarch, or Sangharaja, who is appointed by the King from one of the Theravada Nikayas and who serves for life. The Supreme Patriarch is assisted by the Supreme

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<sup>25</sup> Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress press, 1984.), p.15.

Sangha Council, or Mahathera Samagama, (Council of the Elder) which has eight permanent members of the two sects of the Nikaya, and 12 rotating members appointed by the Supreme Patriarch.

The Supreme Sangha Council, led by the Supreme Patriarch has the duty and the authority to command the Sangha, to issue rules and regulations, and to appoint Sangha administrators from both Nikayas. Sangha administration is assisted by the National Bureau of Buddhism whose office serves as the secretariat of the Supreme Sangha Council. The National Bureau of Buddhism functions as a liaison office to achieve harmonious cooperation between the Sangha and the State. It is responsible for the care of monks and monasteries by budgeting financial support from government funds and by assisting Sangha officers with their administrative duties.

As regulated by the Sangha Act, the Thai Sangha is well organized. Many thousands of monasteries and a quarter million monks and novices come under centralized administration and the Sangha enjoys the recognition and support of the State. There is uniformity in Sangha affairs, education and rite. With a centralized hierarchy, Sangha activities can be closely supervised, discipline maintained and there is a channel of communication between the central administration and the outlying provinces.

With such an organization, cooperation and concord with the State have been maintained and the monks have been able to contribute to the unity of the people and to national security. On the other hand, such a centralized organization may be excessively dependent on a small leadership, which, in turn may not be able to respond quickly to changing social conditions. There is currently need for a new law, and a Sangha reform act is being drafted and debated. The general administrative structure of the Sangha will be changed in such a way that the absolute power of the Supreme Sangha Council will be delegated to an executive committee called Mahaganisra.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Karuna Kusalasaya , *Buddhism in Thailand* (Bangkok: Chomthong, 200 ), p.28.

### 3.3 The Laity Community

We have made a brief outline of the basis of Sangha in Thailand, as well as the monks in the temple in modern Thai society, and how they live according to the essential core of the Buddhist world. But what about those Buddhists who were not monks, and what about the laity without whom the monks could not possibly carry on their meditation? And what do the monks do for them?

The existence of Buddhism over 2500 years, has been closely connected with lay community, and right from the time of its founder, there have been numerous Upasakas, like Anathapindika, Visakha, Ashoka, and Kanishka, and Upasikas, whose faith in the Teachings of the Master had contributed largely to the dissemination of the Doctrines. Also Buddhism in India, the land of its birth, has received unstinted support from people of all classes, especially the ruling class. In fact, the history of Buddhism movement in places like Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, as well as China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, Mongolia, Vietnam etc, amply justifies this statement.

The Buddha himself, in one of his discourses, exhorted his followers to discharge their duties, so as to enable the Dhamma to endure long in the world. One of the duties of the lay followers, as taught by the Master, is to look after the need of the monks. In modern society, the cooperation between the laity and the Bhikkhu Sangha in Thailand was close and spontaneous, as the Buddha has taught. In the teaching of Buddhism, to do good is the cardinal point and consequently the idea of performing meritorious deeds is very deeply ingrained in the mind of Buddhist. So, the Buddhist religion offers to a layman four avenues to increase his store of merit by doing so:

- 1) He must be generous to the monks, and give as much as possible to them, not only for their maintenance, but also for religious buildings inhabited by no one. To some extent the merit produced by gifts depends on the spiritual endowments of the recipient, and therefore the follower of Buddhism and in particular the Arhats, are the best possible “field for planting merit”.

2) He must have devotion for the Three Treasures,(Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and faith is the virtue opposite to householder's state of life. But this faith is not an exclusive one and doesn't entail a rejection of his ancestral beliefs and of the Brahmanic religious usage of his social environment.

3) He must observe the five precepts,(not kill, not steal, no be unchaste, not drink alcohol or intoxicant and not lie),or at least some of them. Furthermore, among Buddhist doctrines there are two most important ones such as: avoiding of doing harm to others as well as to be active in benevolence towards humankind.

4) He may worship the relics of the Buddha. The actual attitude of the Buddhists to these teeth and bones is difficult to describe in terms readily understood in the West, because it is impossible for them to "pray" to the Buddha, for the reason that He is no longer there, being in Nirvana ,i.e. extinct as far as this world is concerned. If the layman will observe these four precepts, he probably will be more happy in this life, and after his death he will be reborn in heaven or paradise.

More than that, a man gains merit each time he gives alms to monks or contributes to any religious rituals. To get ordination into monkhood even for a short period of time, bring much merit, as well as realizing caged birds or freeing caught fishes, plastering gold leaf on Buddha statues and as I said already, contributing to the construction of a new temple or repairing the old one temple.

Now I ask myself what kind of benefit then does the monk bestow upon the laymen? Probably, the monk increases both their spiritual and their material welfare. He promotes the first by sermons on those aspects of the doctrine which are intelligible and relevant to the laity, as well as by the example of a holy life which will give courage and zest to those still tied to the world and give them a glimpse of the freedom and serenity they may achieve in a future life.

Most important thing, if Buddhism started from tenets of the first period, it was widely the work of the laity, through their pressure which did much to bring about the reforms of the second and third period of history of Buddhism. Also in the third period, the monks became more manifestly useful to laymen, inserting themselves into their magical beliefs and acted as exorciser, astrologers, weather makers, doctors and so on. But I can say that, probably laymen were more useful, outstanding and important during the Mahayana period rather than with Theravada

Buddhism. Mahayana could count on much popular support for its opinion that people are as important as dharmas, for its attacks on the selfishness of monks who think only of their own welfare, for its censure of “haughty” and “conceited” monks and for its stories of wealthy householders.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.4 The benefits of Buddhism in modern Thai society

The subject that I’m going to talk now is the benefit of Buddhism and how it helps to relieve suffering, pain and unraveling problems, or get rid of ourselves from unsatisfactory or grief and thereby attaining satisfactory state attainable by man.

I would like to start this paragraph by saying that through Buddhism we can relief any kind of pain, grief, sorrowful, and unsatisfactory life because it is based on rationalism, morality, and insight. There is no need to propitiate gods or priests, no blind adherence to useless dogmas, rituals, holy books, or myths. The foundations of Buddhism, are not so much tenets of faith as demonstrable principles of perceptual science. Buddhism can be approached in many different ways. It is commonly referred to as a religion, and it can be used in that way to feel a connection to divinity and inspire faith. But because Buddhism does not include the idea of worshipping a creator God, some people do not see it as a religion in the normal, Western sense, but instead as a philosophy.

Despite the variety of approaches to Buddhism, the teachings are clear about the ultimate goal of all Buddhist writing and practice. It presents the most effective possible method for a person to transform themselves and to end one's suffering and secure lasting happiness. Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development leading to Insight into the true nature of life. Buddhist practices such as meditation are means of changing oneself in order to develop the qualities of awareness, kindness, and wisdom. The experience developed within the Buddhist tradition over thousands of years has created an incomparable resource and benefit for

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Conze , *Buddhism* (England: Oxford, 2000), pp.35-36.

all those who wish to follow a path - a path which ultimately culminates in Enlightenment or Buddhahood.

The basic tenets of Buddhist teaching are straightforward and practical: nothing is fixed or permanent; actions have consequences; change is possible. Thus Buddhism addresses itself to all people irrespective of race, nationality, or gender. It teaches practical methods (such as meditation) which enable people to realize and utilize its teachings in order to transform their experience, to be fully responsible for their lives and to develop the qualities of Wisdom and Compassion. The Buddha's teachings have made sense out of a difficult world, they have given meaning to what would otherwise be a senseless life, they give a humane and compassionate ethics with which to lead life and they show how you can attain a state of purity and perfection.<sup>28</sup>

In this moment, I ask myself if we wouldn't have Buddhism what could happen to us, and which benefits were lacking here, to the humankind, and in any part of the world, and not only in Thailand. Probably, without Buddhism, there would be not lay devotees, Upasakas, Upasikas, or monks and novices, as we now see them sitting in the rear. Also, we could not be what we are now, with our Knowledge and information, useful to defeat and make ourselves calm and peaceful.

Thus, let me say that without Buddhism there might not be benefit, influences, culture, education, advantage, nothing aforementioned, including Suanmokkhabalaram or Garden of Liberation. We need to recognize that we have received a big gift of the Dharma from two main disciples like Sona and Uttara Theras, from India, that brought Buddhism to this part of the world under the leadership of great king Ashoka. They brought more than Buddhism; they carried here in Thailand, Brahmnism as well as Buddhism, and both Brahmanism and Buddhism belongs their culture and values.

So, Indian culture came to the basis of Thai culture. In other words, the culture of Thailand has the culture of India as it source. Thailand would benefit in worldly affairs in everything that could concern or regard the culture, costume, usage

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<sup>28</sup> Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin ( USA : Boston, November 2002), in <http://www.ibiblio.org>. (19 June 2009).

of language as Pali language and its traditions as mainly due to the teachings of Buddhism that came from the Indian land, or Sri Lanka. Buddhism, is the basis of the Thai culture, and it not only taught us how to overcome suffering, and sorrow in this life, but it also provided to free ourselves from the bondage of defilement, ignorance and craving through the knowledge of the four Noble Truth, as well as the Path of Middle Way between ascetic or self-mortification and self-indulgence, in accordance with the Noble Eight Fold Path.

Nowadays, I'm studying Buddhism academically in Chiang Mai University, and I'm practicing Buddhism everyday in my life, and as a result, I have finally, understood the cause and cessation of my suffering rooted in attachment, desire, Kilesa, and ignorance, as well as the basics of the three characteristics of existence, such as: Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta, as ultimate state of freedom from all suffering, and it is enough for me, to prove that we are not only happy with Buddhism by understanding all of those characteristics of existence, but able to go ahead and challenge our live continuously, with the task of advancing and wonderful Buddhism. Besides, what I discovered really important in my life the main benefit that came from Buddhist practice or meditation. Through meditation we can undo our busy thought habits, and gradually make the gap in the clouds grow bigger and last longer, until in time the clouds disappear completely. The main benefit is that when our mind is peaceful happiness naturally develops in our hearts.

However, there are many other benefits to be experienced along the way. Studies have shown meditation to reduce stress, normalize blood pressure and help people to feel more relaxed. With our mind at peace we are more understanding of others and our relationships improve. From my personal experience, I can say that immediately meditation can help us to improve the quality of our mind and help our physical health. However, the benefits of meditation go far beyond developing short term rewards. By using meditation to understand the true nature of reality we can develop an experience of inner peace and happiness that is always with us regardless of our external circumstances. It is this permanent freedom from difficulties and problems that Buddhism offers.

More than that, the benefits of studying Buddhism with a qualified teacher in CMU, such as a Buddhist or Chinese monk include:

A moderate lifestyle;

A set of ethics or an engagement with ethical discourse;

A concerned mentor;

A sense of belonging to a community;

Personal development;

Education in the sacred books of Buddhism

Training in religious practice and spiritual development;

Counseling for grief and loss.

So, our continuing practice of Buddhism enables us to improve our skill in recognizing the life for what it is really, increase our own knowledge, and enable us to get together with monks and novices Buddhist, as well as find ourselves in satisfactory state, due to the teaching of Buddhism existent in this country.<sup>29</sup>

Buddhism is relevant to all stages of life and its teachings on death and dying are especially helpful in our modern society where such things are often treated as taboo. By emphasizing living well - with care, helping, not harming - Buddhism assists dying with peace. Buddhism has been hidden from the West in remote places like the mountains of Tibet and the jungles of Thailand. At the end of the twentieth century it has come out of its hiding place.

Buddhism is not only the basis of Thai culture, but it has also its roots in Indian culture, and Thai people, received benefits both by Buddhism and Brahmanism from India, by studying and practicing Buddhism as religion,

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<sup>29</sup> Sakya Pandita , Geshe, Wangyal ; and Brian, Cutillo , Illuminations, A Guide to Essential Buddhist Practices ( USA: California, 1988), pp.39-40.

philosophy, psychology, or way of life, for their benefits and for fulfill the spiritual needs of they daily life.<sup>30</sup>



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<sup>30</sup> Venerable Bhuddadasa Bikkhu ,and Karuna,Kusalasaya.,*Buddhism in Thailand* (Bangkok: Chomthong, 2001),pp.58-59.