

Chapter IV

An accurate analysis of influences of Buddhism in Modern Thai society

Introduction

In this chapter I emphasized mainly, through an attentive and critical analysis, the influences of Buddhism in Modern Thai society with its own main education, culture and structural inter-relationship between Sangha and Thai State. As we know, the history of Buddhism would show the evolution of Buddhist education on the part of monks in Thailand, from Sri Lanka period to the present time. In modern Thai society, Sangha provide education for monks and novices through Dhamma studies and Pali, whereas the education of princes and nobles around the middle of the nineteenth century would still lay very much in traditional patterns, despite occasional instances of Western-language or scientific instruction.¹

During the time of King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, Thailand 'rules actively set about transforming every facet of national life, with its education and relationship between Kings and Sangha. They entered into a creative process of national development at the time when the impact of the West was at its greatest, yet maintained their national identity. In dealing with the problems of educational reform, Thailand's rulers came to realize that education was a prerequisite for, or at least a concomitant of, political, economic, and social development.'²

Nowadays, the most of Thai people still are Buddhist and this system of beliefs, influences, and the main supportive factors of Buddhism, played an important role in the Thai education, learning, culture, arts, history, tradition, custom and

¹ National Identity Board, Office of the Prime Minister, *Plan, Problem and Respect* (Bangkok Press, 1982), in <http://www.Wikipedia.com>. (10 June 2009).

² 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), p.32.

character of the people. Besides, there is a monastery in nearly every village, and others numerous forest monasteries where monks may go for extended meditation. This fact itself demonstrates more than anything else how influential Buddhism was in Thailand, even with its own strong changing in modern Thai period.³

As a matter of fact, and for the sake of the truth, I should say, before open this chapter, especially on the education, that the Buddha realized that culture and education was an indispensable adjunct to the progress of the state and the religious group, being the only element by which a person's talent may be developed and his work more effectively could be accomplished, and without the principles of the learning and discipline well-digested, many people would be like a blind bull wandering, helplessly, in the forest.

4.1 Education

Firstly, the most visible influence is the education of the Theravada school of Buddhism, imported from Sri Lanka. While there are significant local and regional variations, the Theravada school provides most of the major themes of Thai Buddhism. In order to understand the influences of Buddhism in Modern Thai society, with the history of modern Thai education in Thailand, the parameters of the modern period need to be addressed. There is a trend in Southeast Asian studies to focus on the rupture between present and past, the early modern and modern, the pre-colonial and postcolonial, and the pre-printing press and printing press period. For the Buddhist history, the question of when the modernity in Thailand began is complicated. Although, there was influence from America Christian missionaries, and by British, Dutch, and French from sixteenth century until the nineteenth century, industrialization, global advertising, and tourism did not seriously impact the region until the late twentieth century. The use of Pali's influence, and its relation to the modernization of society, as well as the monastic education are more useful ways of

³ Stuart Martin-Fox, *Southeast Asian Studies* (Published: University of Queensland 30th January 2006), p.20.

discussing the emergence of modernity. Steven Collin, states that in some cases it was the reaction to Western colonialism and science, but more importantly that the modern period began when Pali ceased to be an obvious and viable linguistic and textual medium to express contemporary Buddhism. This is the period when Pali became both a learned and dead language: somewhere, depending on local circumstances, between the beginning of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. This observation offers scholars a new to think about the link between Westernization and modernity and to examine alternative modernity, rhizomatic participatory ways of being modern.

Pali text in both the pre-modern and modern periods were used for different purposes, like: prestige, power, display, ritual performance, ethical inquiry, cadastral technology ,protective magic, philosophical reflection, psychological copying ,etc., and in different ritual, private, and educational contexts. The line between literacy and illiteracy is vague. Historically, entirely new texts were rarely composed in Pali after mid sixteenth century; however, the need to gloss, comment on invoke, and instruct Pali terms and abridge texts in specific ways persisted and persist. This is where the language of Pali happens. The line between the death and life of Pali is blurry and remains so to this day in monastic education and religious scholarship.⁴

Thus, by traditions, Pāli is the language of religion in Thailand. Scriptures are recorded in Pāli, using either the modern Thai script or the older Khom and Tham scripts. As we seen above, Pāli is also used in religious liturgy, despite the fact that most Thais understand very little of this ancient language. The Pāli Tipitaka is the primary religious text of Thailand, though many local texts have been composed in order to summarise the vast number of teachings found in the Tipitaka. The monastic code (Patimokkha) followed by Thai monks is taken from the Pāli Theravada—something that has provided a point of controversy during recent attempts to resurrect the Bhikkhuni lineage in Thailand. Again, in modern Thai society, to provide education for monks and novices, the Supreme Sangha Council takes responsibility

⁴ McDaniel, Justin Thomas, *Gathering leaves & lifting words; histories of Buddhist monastic education in Laos and Thailand.* (U.S.A: University of Washington press,2008),p.97.

for maintaining a traditional system of education consisting of Dhamma studies and Pali, the language in which the Theravada scriptures are written.⁵

In modern Thai society, town and village monasteries have been, for Thais of all classes, centers of education, both religious and secular. There, basic subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic were taught to boys. The Thais have also developed a custom of temporary ordination. Every young man is expected to stay for a period of about three months (usually in the rainy season) in a monastery as a monk. Here it is education for socializing male members of the society, as they are expected to join the monkhood to undergo monastic and cultural training before running families and assuming other civic responsibilities, including civil and military services, as learned ex-monks. This custom has, however, been on the decline during the last half of the century.⁶

Again, most of students in modern secular system of education also were recruited from the privileged classes, with the son of the poor peasants that lived in remote area, to study together in the wat or monasteries as monks and novices. Thus, in spite of the loss of the intellectual leadership, the monkhood still play an important educational role for the modern Thai society.⁷ A Wat also contains a bell tower and sometimes a drum tower as well, and the bell or drum is used to summon the monks or the congregation to their religious devotions, or to assemble them for other purposes. Beside some of the bigger Wats have a library to house the Tripitaka or Buddhist scripture.

As I said, in modern Thai society, the influence of Buddhism was so strong that Wat would serves the Thai community as school, community and recreation centre, dispensary, social work and welfare agency as well as village clock, rest house, news agency and information centre, and the Abbot was the head of the Wat and he has been responsible for the maintenance of the wat discipline, ritual and religious services, and the general welfare of the inmate. So, the Buddhist

⁵ Karuna Kusalasaya, *Understanding Thai Buddhism*, p 34.

⁶ Prayudh Payutto, *The Ideal World Community* (Bangkok, Thailand, 1986), In <http://www.dharmaweb.org> (10-June 2009).

⁷ Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*, p.109.

monasteries have been the centers of social activities, where people assemble in large gatherings, both on religious and on civic occasions, including temple fairs. Since the introduction of the modern Western system of education to the country about a century ago, Thailand has been experiencing the problem of inequality of opportunity in education, as large numbers of poor and underprivileged youngsters in the upcountry villages cannot get access to public and higher education.

So, the monasteries have done much to help ease the situation as the monkhood has been the channel of education for these sons of the peasants and villagers from distant areas.⁸ Looking at the study of Thai Buddhist education, the most supportive factors of Buddhism that have influenced Thai society, perhaps the most common markers for change from the post-modern to the modern are the reforms of King Chulalongkorn and Prince Wajiranana, culminating in the Sangha Act of 1902. The main crux of this act was the formalization and centralization of Thai Buddhist education and administration. In the nineteenth century the Siamese King Rama IV, Mongkut, and Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, made great efforts to formalize the Buddhist ecclesiastical system and educational practices in Siam. This was part of the nation-building and social control process to suppress regionalism, strengthen the country against foreign missionary influences, formalize the curriculum, and modernize the entire education system.⁹

According to the history, His Majesty the King Rama V had strong faith in Buddhism and decided to support education for monks, for the security, prosperity and peace in Siam by saying: “During my reign, I intend to consistently support Buddhism and monks. I want to make some commitments that as long as I live, I will always support Buddhism”. So, it was during the time of the Kings Mongkut and his son King Chulalongkorn as well as with the Prince Wajiranana that the modernization-Westernization dilemma first began or present itself as the Thai government began consciously to import Western institutions on a grand scale, at the

⁸ Phya Anuman Rajadon, *Popular Buddhism in Siam* (Bangkok: Chareonwit Printing Ltd, 1986.), pp.27-28.

⁹ McDaniel, Justin Thomas, *Gathering leaves & lifting words; histories of Buddhist monastic education in Laos and Thailand*. (U.S.A: University of Washington press, 2008), pp.99-100.

same time as Western political pressure was reaching it height.¹⁰ The year 1898 marks the dawn of the king's realization that educational modernization could be accomplished without damage to the Thai national identity, and, on the contrary, that it could shape and brighten that ideal in a form acceptable both to traditional sensitivities and to the West.¹¹

The education of princes and nobles around the middle of the nineteenth century still lay very much in traditional patterns, despite occasional instances of Western-language or scientific instruction. Young men were expected to gain a minimal competence in reading and writing, and exposure to Pali language and the principles of their religion, and a systematic vocational training in the profession of their class, the business of governing. All of them acquired this education, to a greater or lesser degree, as Chulalongkorn had, in the same sequence and at the same ages. He was the exceptional boy who continued his studies beyond the elementary stage in the arts and sciences, for most boys, particularly in the developing Siam of the nineteenth century, found ample opportunities for satisfying employment in the growing government bureaucracy.

However, in the reign of King Chualalongkorn, a thorough training in the reading and writing was not considered necessary for boys of the upper classes, for they would always have clerks to conduct their correspondence. These patterns showed signs of change in the Third Reign, when men, particularly of the nobility, began to seek instruction in foreign languages and sciences from the American missionaries. King Chualalongkorn, who had himself had extensive English instruction in his youth, had decided to establish regular, modern-style schools in Thailand even before his first trip abroad.¹² The quality of these enduring values and institutions became evident when Prince Damrong began his educational activities early in the 1880s. First in founding Suankulap School and then in promoting the

¹⁰ Wyatt, David K. *Thailand A Short History*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), in <http://www.Wikipedia.com>. (30 July 2009).

¹¹ B. J. Terwiel, 'A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942' (University of Queensland Press, Australia 1983), in <http://www.Wikipedia.com>. (12 June 2009).

¹² 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.64-65.

development of modern style monastery education, Prince Damrong clearly indicated that it was his intention to turn these modern educational instruments to the service of traditional, culturally acceptable functions. Suankulap's origin thus tied it to the social and political functions formerly served by the Royal Pages Corps and monastery education. initially there was only a slight distortion of the traditional institutions and more a reaffirmation of traditional values of government service and Buddhist laymanship than and introduction of new values. The guiding theme in these developments was the elevation of Thai society to a new plane, with a heightened degree of competence in dealing with its own changing world; but at this point in time, competence still enjoyed a general definition, the "liberal education" of Thai tradition.¹³

Chualalongkorn, influenced by Buddhism in 1873, he became a monk. Moreover, he held the higher ordination ceremony every year which shows his strong faith and supporting in Buddhism. Besides, the Act states by the King Rama V, with its supportive factors, claimed that abbots and higher-ranking monks are responsible for supporting education. This also synchronizes with the announcement of the formal education for children in up-country in 1898. It requires that education be started at various temples and monks are in charge of the teaching. School textbooks were also printed for monks to teach various subjects and Dhamma, to the lay community, as well as monastic examination, the Pali Buddhist canon, and the teachers approved from Bangkok and central Siam were disseminated to the rural and urban area in Siam and its holding.¹⁴

In 1902, King Chulalongkorn, and prince Wajiranana, removed the role to educate the Thai people from the Sangha and regulated the organization of monastic education. Both of them, working with half brother prince Damrong, released the act on the administration of the Sangha which later adaptations in 1941, 1962, and 2002. Before the Sangha Act, with its own influences, monastic education and administration in Thailand was neither formal nor centralized. It depended largely on the aims of the

¹³ B. J. Terwiel, 'A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942' (University of Queensland Press, Australia 1983), in <http://www.Wikipedia.com>. (12 June 2009).

¹⁴ Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Popular Buddhism in Siam* (Bangkok: Chareonwit Printing Ltd, 1986.), pp.27-28.

monks of each monastery, in service to the nation, and to deflect criticism from European missionaries and Japanese envoys who denounced the poor and idiosyncratic state of Thai Buddhist education and organization.

As we seen above, together with the other reform of the early years of the reign of King Mongkut and Chualalongkorn, one of young Siam's interests was the introduction of Western style education. Building and elaborating on long- established themes, practices, and patterns, the king and his party began almost immediately to attempt to provide education for the monks as well as for the young men, and the benefits they had themselves gained from informal tutelage in the Fourth Reign, by establishing regular, Western-style schools teaching Thai and English within the walls of the Grand Palace. Within a few years they had in hand a program for extending at least the rudiments of such secular, Western education throughout the kingdom.¹⁵

In Thailand were about 30,000 Wats or monasteries where 339,648 monks and novices would live, and all them reflected Thai education, culture, art and architecture. The over 30,000 monasteries are also classified into two categories of royal monasteries and private or community ones. Royal monasteries are those erected by the King or having obtained his recognition and his supporting as we seen above. They are usually large and contain imposing edifices. Community monasteries are mostly smaller and simple. Only about 200 monasteries are royal and most of them are in the capital, while the majority are private or community ones scattered in the villages throughout the country.¹⁶

Thus, monasteries have been seats of Thai education and Buddhism has been a foundation of the Thai culture. Arts and architecture have been developed and preserved in the monasteries. A large number of Thai words, especially almost all technical terms, are derived from Pali and Sanskrit. Thai literature has been based to a large extent on Buddhist literature. In fact, most of the Thai literary works in the past were Buddhist in nature and were written by monks in the monasteries. There are also “temple boy” in Wats, who assist monks and novices and several ways such as

¹⁵ Wyatt, David K, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, p.63

¹⁶ Ministry of Education. *Department of Religious Affairs*. In [http:// www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov). (12 June 2009).

cleaning dormitories, bringing and arranging food washing yellow robes and so on, and these boys, are also related to resident monks and their state is free of charge. The census taken in 1954 reveals that there are 119,000 “temple boys” in Thailand, which is not small figure. So as I mentioned above, the Wats or monasteries are donated by royalty and wealthy people and also it represents the gift of Buddhism and contributes of the progress and social welfare of the Thai Buddhist and public in general. The act of donates of building a Wat as centers of education is regarded as meritorious and as praiseworthy sacrifice of time, labor, and wealth, and it can be also considerate as the great desire of every Thai, from the King down to the common people to build a Wat, individually or cooperatively, in order to gain the great merit and the approval of his compatriots.¹⁷

When a Wat has been built and consecrated, monks from another Wat or several Wats are invited to take up their Abode in it as nucleus of new Wat. The monk who is going to be the abbot of the new Wat is usually selected by the village or community, and his designation is fixed beforehand on certain auspicious day and at a time calculated according to the knowledge of astrology and so on. The Wats in the village or rural area are seen as occasions for people, especially the younger, to enjoy themselves in feast, party and festivities, during the religious ritual, ceremonies and social activities. Whether, private or public, in most of ceremonies and rituals, the monks' cooperation is seen as important and indispensable, as factors of Buddhism that has always influenced Thai society, and the monks are considerate or seen in Thai society as philosopher, friends, or simple guide of the common people. Monks help the promotion of moral and ethic stability among different members of the Thai society, by preaching to masses through radio, television or simply by speaking face to face as another way of communication or dialogue. By acting morally and ethically as example in society, the monks are venerated and respected as authority in Thai society, seeing them as spiritual teaching of the Buddha, remaining so very close to the problems and heart of the majority of the common people.

¹⁷ Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Popular Buddhism in Siam*, p.29.

Most importantly, in Thai society there are three levels of Dhamma studies and nine levels of Pali studies as influence of Buddhism. The three levels of Dhamma studies, taught in Thai are intended as basic education for monks novices and laymen. Those passing such examinations are termed “Nak Dharma”, literally meaning one who knows the Dhamma. The latter, i.e. the studies of Pali has seven grades, starting with the third and ending with the ninth grade. Students passing Pali examinations are called “Parian” that means “penetrative knowledge. The State, however, recognizes level nine, the highest level of achievement, as equivalent only to a Bachelors' degree. Generally the Dhamma and the Pali studies go hand to hand and take at least seven years to complete. In modern Thai society, when living was less competitive than now, passing of even lower Dhamma and Pali examinations used to be of much value in securing good government posts. But now things are quite different, even those successful in the highest Pali examination, the 9th Grade, find it difficult to get suitable employment. Today, over 2500 years of the passing away of the Buddha, though the ideal of becoming a monk still remains very lofty among Buddhist of all lands, yet in practice it must be admitted that there have been many deviations from the Master's original admonitions with regard to the whys of man's entering monkhood. With the time, as is only natural, many of the ideals and practices of the early followers of the Buddha also underwent modification, but without changing the original idea of men's entering monkhood for achieving or attaining the liberation from worldly existence or Nirvana, in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha. In Thailand there are also many that join the Sangha through genuine love for a religious life and religious studies, as well as the monks called Thudong Bhikkhus who follow the ancient way of austere living embodied in the strict observance.¹⁸

However, strict traditionalism on the part of the Sangha and the Thai society as a whole has both directly and indirectly caused reactions, conflicts and new developments in private sectors. A number of the Elders, in an effort to respond to the long-felt but ignored need to produce Buddhist monks equipped with modern knowledge relevant to the contemporary world, revived the plan for Buddhist higher

¹⁸ Karuna Kusalasaya, *Understanding Thai Buddhism*, pp. 35- 36-38.

education in Thai society. Thus, Buddhist's influence, with its supportive factors, on education in modern Thai society, was provided by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and Mahamakut Rajavidyalay University, which came back to life as the two Buddhist universities of Thailand in 2489/1946 and 2490/1947 respectively, and according to the history, monks from recently pacified north, northeast, and south were brought to Bangkok to study in these two monastic university. The vast majority of monks in the capital still took the old Pali exams and were trained in these major universities. During the time of Prince Wajiranana's system was standard for all monks in the kingdom. By his death in 1921, the examinations were held at eleven Bangkok monasteries. This worked well for nation building since any monk who wanted a national ranking had to travel to and was usually trained in Bangkok. These ranks were important because they could lead to employment after a monk disrobed.¹⁹ In these two universities, some lay intellectuals found interest in Buddhist thought through their independent study or casual reading of writings on Buddhism by Western scholars. Some of them have helped in the attempt to connect Buddhism thought, education and culture with modern scientific, intellectual and social developments.²⁰

Both of these institutions were organized on a modern and state universities, receiving financial support from the Thai government, and both seem to be making satisfactory progress towards that direction. Also, some secular subjects not incompatible with monks are include in the curriculum, to give a more wide education to monks in order to enable them to be of better service to the cause of Buddhism amidst modern condition. More than that, Thai Kingdom endeavors to raise the educational and moral level of the Sangha, and to produce monks who can teach the Buddhadhamma accurately into the modern Thai society, and who can intelligently discuss the Dhamma along with contemporary concerns and current affairs. In other words, the curriculum is designed to produce monks who can address the concerns of their communities.

¹⁹ McDaniel, Justin Thomas, *Gathering leaves & lifting words; histories of Buddhist monastic education in Laos and Thailand.*, p.104

²⁰ Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*, p.107.

In modern Thai society, in order to provide Buddhist education in the schools, the Thai Sangha has persuaded the Ministry of Education to mandate the teaching of Buddhism to all students from grade 1-12. such as: the life of the Buddha, Jataka stories, the basic teachings of the Buddha, and an introduction to the Tipitaka and to Buddhist vocabulary. It is designed impart an understanding of the Sangha and of the Duties and roles of monks. Besides the educational value will promote Buddhism by exposing the children to its precious teachings, and will protect Buddhism by ensuring that the children are given an accurate account of those teachings. However, local school districts, were left to formulate their own curriculum, although the level of understanding of Buddhism in the local districts may be quite informal and even inaccurate in some cases.²¹ One of the most significant feature of Buddhism's influence in modern Thai society is apparently well-organized and centralized institutional structure. Since Siam, later know as Thailand, has been the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized; the nation-building project in which religious reform with its education played a major part could be considered a success.

4.2 Culture

As I mentioned above, there is a historical influences, and strong relationship between Buddhism and indigenous Thai art, that would influence widely with the time Thai monarchy and its Kingdom. When the Thai came within the orbit of Hinduism and Buddhism, it is easy to imagine that the Khmer art in relation to these two great religions was gradually transfused into the spirit of the Thai people, and through their inborn aesthetic sense for art and racial characteristics the Thai were able to create their own personality in art, quite distinct from that of the old background. Buddhism would have an immense influence on Thai art and culture. In fact, the emergence of Thai art reflects the integration of Buddhist components into cultural, political and societal Thai systems, and mostly in the way that Buddhism has

²¹ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin, (USA : Boston, November 2002), in <http://www.ibiblio.org>. (9 June 2009).

been represented from generation to generation and in the way people have shown devotion; Buddhist components such as Buddha images, Buddhist monks, and Buddhist activities (e.g., festivals and ceremonies) have been acknowledged as significant components of Thai culture.²²

In fact, to the traditional Thai society and to the traditional personality of modern Thai society, Buddhism usually takes the form of merit-making acts and Buddhist festival and ceremonies. To the old-fashioned or the more traditional, this usually extends to include the faithful observance of some basic rules of morality. Few of the later traditional Buddhists, however, have intellectual knowledge of the Buddha's teaching or care to learn about them. The majority of them are given to celebrations and temple fairs and festivals, and also by blessing religious ceremonies, and by preaching and inducing the adherents to make donations for a monastic building. In modern society, superstition and astrology would play an important part, as well as in present time, in their lives, both individual and social.²³

4.2.1 Thai art and Hinduism belief

By making a more accurate, profound and critical analysis, I can say that the influence of Buddhism in modern Thai society and its culture, has been really systematic and direct from the beginning of the Sukhothai Kingdom, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, (as already I would mention on Thai Kings and Art) with Thai art like: architecture, literature, and probably music and drama. Subsequently, the indigenous art forms and styles engaged in the representation of Buddhism were integrated into the Thai cultural mainstream during the early Rattanakosin era, creating aesthetic art forms, which have been classified into “classical Thai art”, such as mural painting, sculpture and Chang-sip-moo, and “folk art”. Such influence of

²² Ministry of Education Department of Religious Affairs.

²³ Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*, p.107.

Buddhism on historical Thai art is relevant in the context of scrutinizing the relationship between Buddhism and Thai art.²⁴

This communication is aimed at pointing out the long-standing role of Buddhism in the development of Thai art in the past, especially the integration of the Buddhist context, which has led to the creation and the birth of indigenous Thai arts with the styles of “classical Thai art” and “folk art”, both of which are genuinely Thai. It is tenable that the study of historical Thai art with regard to the influence of Buddhism would lead to understanding of the development of current contemporary and modern Thai art.²⁵ The other sources are the Buddhist objects and manuscripts used for spreading Buddhism. The strong characteristics of early Thai architecture reflect its Buddhist themes and elements, and are seen in holy buildings such as palaces and temples. The early city of Sukhothai includes a large concentration of monastic buildings such as a meeting hall (*vihan*), a hall for the ordination of monks (*ubosoth*) and stupa (*jedi*) containing relics or holy images. These were built for Buddhist uses and filled with Buddhist elements. For instance, a stupa was built outside the walls of Sukhothai to house a colossal thirteenth-century plaster image of the Buddha Maravijaya Phra Achana. Whilst Buddhism so directly influenced Thai architecture, it has nevertheless developed a form that is uniquely Thai and continued this development from era to era with a similar focus on visual Buddhist identity.

In Thai history, Buddhist elements such as the three-dimensional image of the Buddha have been a key subject of representation. Buddha imagery was a primary motive in Buddhist iconography and the earliest form of Buddha imagery was in sculptural form. The sculpting of Buddha statues has been practiced since the beginnings of Thai history and the making of Buddha statues has been highly significant in all Buddhist cultures. Sculptures and relief works were produced extensively from early in the twelfth century AD. It has been a general impression that diverse art styles pre-existing in the region contributed to the formation of Thai culture during the Sukhothai period.

²⁴ Phya Anuman, Rajadhon, *Popular Buddhism in Siam*, p.16.

²⁵ Phillips HP, *The integrative art of modern Thailand*. (Berkeley : University of California at Berkeley; 1992), in [http:// www.booksandcollectibles.com](http://www.booksandcollectibles.com). (29 June 2009).

The Sukhothai Buddha image indicates that there was a serious integration of aesthetic form with the spiritualism of Buddhist sculpture. Early Thai culture with its art style, that now reflects completely, the influences of modern Thai society, has its origins in Buddhism within the development of the Thai state and its emerging culture. With the reference to Thai art, mention must be made of the various branches of the decorative art such as lacquer work, silver and gold work, and pottery. In all branches of this art Thailand never lacks beautiful objects of high artistic value. Whilst Buddhism is now the state religion in Thailand, and the identity of the nation has been based on the two sanctified institutions, Buddhism and the Thai monarchy, in an historical Thai context, the original role of Thai culture and art, during the period from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries was to show devotion to Buddhism alone, by displaying its sanctity and religious content for the purposes of teaching and spreading the belief. Through its preoccupation with Buddhist elements, with serving the Thai monarchy and with the emerging historical and cultural identity of its people.²⁶

The traditional character of Thai people which finds expression in her art, literature, and so on, is now tending to change under the influence of the modern industrial world of mechanism and science, because Thailand has become a member of the great family of nations, and has adopted a universal culture which certainly has affected the tradition one. The old must be adapted and incorporated into the new if it is to live and at the same time to preserve its own identity. Thailand has to face and for which a solution has to be found in order to preserve her own identity as a member in the society of the United States.²⁷

Another major influence, as synonymous of history and culture, on modern Thai society is Hindu beliefs received from Cambodia, particularly during the Sukhothai period. Vedic Hinduism played a strong role in the early Thai institution of kingship, just as it did in Cambodia, and exerted influence in the creation of laws and order for Thai society as well as Thai religion. Certain rituals practiced in modern

²⁶ Boisselier J, *The wisdom of Buddha* (London : Thames and Hudson, Ltd;1993),in [http://www. books.google.co.th](http://www.books.google.co.th). (29 June 2009).

²⁷ Phya Anuman, Rajadhon , *Popular Buddhism in Siam*, p.22.

Thailand, either by monks or by Hindu ritual specialists, are either explicitly identified as Hindu in origin, or are easily seen to be derived from Hindu practices. While the visibility of Hinduism in Thai society has been diminished substantially during the Chakri dynasty, Hindu influences, particularly shrines to the god Brahma, continue to be seen in and around Buddhist institutions and ceremonies. A Buddhist Monk chants evening prayers inside a monastery located near the town of Kantharalak, Thailand.

4.2.2 Folk belief and rituals practices

Folk religion is seen as another form of influence of Buddhism in modern Thai society, that attempts to propitiate and attract the favor of local spirits known as phi . While Western observers (as well as urbane and Western-educated Thais) have often drawn a clear line between Thai Buddhism and folk religious practices, this distinction is rarely observed in more rural locales. Spiritual power derived from the observance of Buddhist precepts and rituals is employed in attempting to appease local nature spirits. Many restrictions observed by rural Buddhist monks are derived not from the orthodox Vinaya, but from taboos derived from the practice of folk magic.²⁸ Astrology, numerology, and the creation of talismans and charms also play a prominent role in modern Buddhism as practiced by the average Thai—topics that are, if not proscribed, at least marginalized in Buddhist texts.²⁹

Other strong influences and rituals practiced by rural Buddhist monks, in modern Thai society, are visible during the funeral's ceremony. The kings of Ayudhya, beginning 600 years ago, were much influenced by Brahminism, and Brahmin advisers were consulted in cultural and administrative affairs. Consequently, Brahminical rites and ceremonies have continued in state activities side by side with the Buddhist ones. This has sometimes led to the mingling of the two. At the village

²⁸ Terwiel , B.J. *A Model for the Syudy of Thai Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: Sotsri-Saritwong Foundation, 2003), in <http://www.en.wikipedia.org> (29June 2009).

²⁹ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

level, the populace has been more or less attached to animistic beliefs and practices. Through the monks' association with these villagers, some animistic elements have crept into Buddhism. With the integration of animistic and Brahminical elements into Buddhism in the process of assimilation, there has developed a form of popular Buddhism, in which rites and ceremonies are predominant and superstitious beliefs and practices are prevalent.

Let me explain briefly through animism, ancestor practice, also known as ancestor veneration (ancestorism) or folk belief what happen in Thailand during this suggestive ceremony. First of all I would like to say that it is a religious practice based on the belief that deceased family members have a continued existence, take an interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living. All cultures attach ritual significance to the passing of loved ones, but this is not equivalent to ancestor worship. The goal of ancestor worship is to ensure the ancestors' continued well-being and positive disposition towards the living and sometimes to ask for special favors or assistance.

The social or non-religious function of ancestor worship is to cultivate kinship values like filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage. While far from universal, ancestor worship or ancestor veneration occurs in societies with every degree of social, political, and technological complexity, and it remains an important component of various religious practices in modern times. For Thai people, ancestor practices are not the same as the worship of the gods. When a person worships a god at a local temple, it is to ask for some favour that can be granted by the powerful spirit. Generally speaking, however, the purpose of ancestor worship is not to ask for favors but to do one's filial duty. Some people believe that their ancestors actually need to be provided for by their descendants. Others do not believe that the ancestors are even aware of what their descendants do for them, but that the expression of filial piety is what is important. Whether or not the ancestor receives what is offered is not the issue. However, in other cultures, this act of "worship" does not confer any belief that the departed ancestors have become some kind of deity. Rather the act is a way to respect, honor and look after ancestors in their afterlives as

well as possibly seek their guidance for their living descendants. In this regard, many cultures and religions have similar practices.³⁰

After this brief and short introduction and dissertation of animism and ancestorism, let me explain again to you the relative ceremony's influence and relation that it have with the phenomenon above described. The funeral rites in Thailand are the most elaborate of all the life-cycle ceremonies and the ones entered into most fully by the monks. It is a basic teaching of Buddhism that existence is suffering, whether birth, daily living, old age or dying. This teaching is never in a stronger position than when death enters a home. Indeed Buddhism may have won its way the more easily in Thailand because it had more to say about death and the hereafter than had animism. Besides, the people influenced by this ancient practice, as sign of profound and rooted culture, rely upon monks to chant the sutras that will benefit also the deceased, and to conduct all funeral rites and memorial services. To conduct the rites for the dead may be considered the one indispensable service rendered the community by the monks. For this reason the crematory in each large temple has no rival in secular society.

The idea, and eradicated influence that death is suffering, relieved only by the knowledge that it is universal, gives an underlying mood of resignation to funerals: Among a choice few, there is the hope of Nibbana with the extinction of personal striving; among the vast majority there is the expectation of rebirth either in this world, in the heaven of Indra or some other, or in another plane of existence, possibly as a spirit. Over the basic mood of gloom there has grown up a feeling that meritorious acts can aid the condition of the departed. Not all the teaching of Anatta (not self) can quite eradicate anxiety lest the deceased exist as pretas or as beings suffering torment. For this reason relatives do what they can to ameliorate their condition.

According to tradition, culture, influence and customs of Thai people, when a person is dying an effort should be made to fix his mind upon the Buddhist scriptures or to get him to repeat one of the names of Buddha, such as Phra Arahant.

³⁰ Ibid., Inc 51 Franklin

The name may be whispered in his ear if the person is far gone. Sometimes four syllables which are considered the heart of the Abhidharma, ci, ce, ru, and ni, representing "heart, mental concepts, form and Nibbana" are written on a piece of paper and put in the mouth of the dying man. It is hoped that if the last thoughts of the patient are directed to Buddha and the precepts, that the fruit of this meritorious act will bring good to the deceased in his new existence. In a village, at the moment of death, the relatives may set up a wailing both to express sorrow and to notify the neighbors who will then come to be of help.

At an ordinary funeral in northern Thailand the cremation takes place within three days. The neighbors gather nightly to feast, visit, attend the services and play games with cards and huge dominoes. The final night is the one following the cremation. On the day of the funeral an orchestra is employed and every effort is made to banish sorrow, loneliness and the fear of spirits by means of music and fellowship. Before the funeral procession begins the monks chant a service at the home and then precede the coffin down the steps of the house, - stairs which are sometimes carpeted with banana leaves. It is felt that the body should not leave the house by the usual route, but instead of removing the coffin through a hole in the wall or floor, which is sometimes done, the front stairs are covered with green leaves to make that route unusual.

Frequently the bodies of prominent or wealthy persons are kept for a year or more in a special building at a temple. Cremations are deferred this long to show love and respect for the deceased and to perform religious rites which will benefit the departed. In such cases a series of memorial services are held on the seventh, fiftieth, and hundredth days after the death. In one instance a wealthy merchant did not cremate the body of his daughter until he had spent all her inheritance in merit-making services for her. Another merchant spent the ten thousand baht insurance money received on the death of his small son entirely for religious ceremonies.

As long as the body is present the spirit can benefit by the gifts presented, the sermons preached and the chants uttered before it. This thought lies behind the use of the bhusa yhong ribbon which extends from the body within the coffin to the chanting monks before it. The dead may thus have contact with the holy sutras. When the body is cremated the spirit is more definitely cut off from the world, it is best

therefore not to force that spirit to enter the world, finally and irrevocably, until it has had the benefit of a number of religious services designed to improve its status. Finally, at cremations it is quite common for wealthy people to have printed for distribution books and pamphlets setting forth Buddhist teachings in the form of essays, translation of the sutras, historical sketches and explanations of ceremonies. Such books, numbering in the thousands, are not only a tribute to the dead and a means of making merit but they have practical value as well.³¹

Another major issue, or religious practice related to the influence of Buddhist activities, in modern Thai society and so on, is meditation practice. In Thailand, meditation is taught to, and practiced by, both ordained and lay Buddhists, at various centers and monasteries throughout the country as well as at home. There are both forest monasteries and city monasteries in Thailand. The monks in forest monasteries, the aranyavasi, dedicate their time to meditation, both Samatha and Vipassana. The monks in city monasteries, the kamavasi, devote their time to study and tend to become Sangha administrators. The separation of forest from city monasteries means that monks and novices who study, rarely meditate, and monks and novices who meditate, rarely study. Understanding religious practice in terms of observing the Vinaya for ordained and pancasila for laity, we have to admit the fact that rapid modernization has brought about social disintegration and a precipitous decline in personal morality. Buddhists are not immune to this, and rampant sexual misconduct, violence, crime, and drug abuse, indicates that the laity are no longer able to keep sila or moral way, very well. It is necessary, in Thai society, to call for a return to personal morality and self-discipline. The fact that the decline in morality is precipitated by rapid changes in the social order indicates that calls for greater self-discipline are necessary. There is ample material in the Theravada tradition that can be brought to bear on contemporary problems-but we have to make the effort to rethink it, to interpret and apply the tradition to new situations.

I understand practice also in terms of addressing social problems-the Buddha himself insisted that a modicum of comfort and well being was a prerequisite to hearing the Dhamma and we can do no less than to attempt to address the basic

³¹ Prime Minister , The National Identity Board Office.

needs of those who might benefit from the Dhamma. The Thai Sangha has done much in this area. For example, there have been significant activities in the North in addressing the AIDS pandemic both in combating the disease itself through education and in ameliorating the social problems that come from it.³²

Additional, more minor influences can be observed stemming from contact with the culture of Mahayana Buddhism. Early Buddhism in Thailand is thought to have been derived from an unknown Mahayana tradition. While Mahayana Buddhism was gradually eclipsed in Thailand, certain features of Thai Buddhism—such as the appearance of the bodhisattva Lokeshvara in some Thai religious architecture, and the belief that the king of Thailand is a bodhisattva himself—reveal the influence of Mahayana concepts. The only other bodhisattva prominent in Thai religion is Maitreya; Maitreya is called (Thai: Phra Sangkrachai), from a verb meaning to beam, emit, radiate, broadcast. Statues of Phra Sangkrachai can be found in most Thai Buddhist temples and on amulets as well. Thais sometimes pray to be reborn during the time of Maitreya, or dedicate merit from worship activities to that end. In modern times, additional Mahayana influence has stemmed from the presence of Chinese immigrants in Thai society. While some Chinese have "converted" to Thai-style Theravada Buddhism, many others maintain their own separate temples in the East Asian Mahayana tradition. The growing popularity of the goddess Kuan Yin in Thailand (a form of Avalokitesvara) may be attributed to the Chinese Mahayanist presence in Thailand. In present time, Thailand can be seen as a Theravada Buddhist country even though there are few Mahayana monks and monasteries' influence, but they are confined mostly to the Chinese communities, which all of them live peacefully and harmoniously, cooperating so for long time with each other.³³

³² Thepsophon, Mahachulalongkorn. *A speech at International Conferenc On Buddhasasana in Theravada Buddhism countries* (Colombo:Sri Lanka, January 15,2003),in <http://www.vesakday.net> (29 June 2009).

³³ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

4.3 Structural Inter-Relationship between the Sangha and Thai State

The study that follows is concerned with another aspect of influence of Buddhism in modern Thai society, and more specifically the inter-relationship between religion and other areas and dimension of human life. It focuses in particular on interaction between the religious and political sectors, especially on the role of political leaders in stimulating and fostering religious reforms. Encouragement and support by the government officials have often contributed decisively to the success of a particular religious reform. At the same time participation in religious affairs by government leaders has frequently served to legitimate and strengthen the political power of those leader. However, this has not always been the result of such involvement .Becoming identified with a new form of religiousness can have the opposite effect; it may serve to delegitimize a ruler or potential ruler's authority and thereby contribute to his or her political downfall. In this study that follows references will be made to just such a case. We shall also examine another case in which a political leader sought and gained legitimacy in part through his active participation in the religious reform of his country.

Structural Inter-Relationship between the Sangha and Thai State focuses on events that took place in Thailand at the end of the eighteenth-nineteenth century. Probably, this was an unusually difficult period in Thai history, during which many important and significant changes, including major religious reforms, took place in modern Thai society. After surveying the background and nature of some of these changing and reforms, we shall discuss the role of the Thai king and his relationship in modern time with the Sangha as well as the promotion and protection of Buddhism in Thailand, and the role of other members of the royal family in helping to bring about religious change. My discussion will conclude with some comment on present day religious reform in Thailand and the significance of government and its role and involvement, control and supervision over the Sangha.³⁴

³⁴ John W. Butt, *Thai Kingship and Religious Reform* (Published: the University of Chicago Press 1981), p.35.

4.3.1 The first moral bound between Sangha and the State

Firstly I would like to start this chapter by claiming that it was the Buddha himself who established the first link between Buddhism and political power in North India, through the accommodation he sought with the rising power of Magadha and its king, Ajatasattu. The Buddha came from a warrior caste and was naturally brought into association with kings, princes and ministers. From its origins Buddhism was an urban phenomenon: it drew its support from householders from the ksatriya and vaisya classes (varnas). The Sangha established the sites of its Lenten retreats close to towns, where monks could obtain alms, or be supplied by wealthy patrons. Though the organisation of the Sangha is believed to be based on the republican institutions of government of the Buddha's own Sakya tribe, historically Buddhism has provided legitimation for political power, especially authoritarian political power in the form of absolute monarchy.

The ideal Buddhist ruler is the cakravartin, or universal emperor, whose historical model is Asoka Maurya. Ideally the cakravartin creates his empire solely through 'righteous, or dharmic, conquest' (dharmavijaya); that is, through the example of his superior karma and rule as dharmaraja, in accordance with Buddhist moral precepts. Lesser rulers voluntarily acknowledge the moral superiority of the cakravartin and bring their kingdoms within the universal empire, whose justification lies in the opportunity it provides though just and ordered government for all individuals to pursue their spiritual path towards nirvana (liberation from the cycle of rebirth).

Asoka was proclaimed by Buddhist historians as the ideal king, because he turned away from bloody conquest after his Kalinga campaign to rule his extensive empire in accordance with Buddhist moral principles. In his edicts he praised the 'three gems' of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and established rules to ensure that the Sangha was 'purified', in the sense of not providing a refuge for rebels or criminals. He also gave generously to the Sangha, and is supposed to have assembled the third great Buddhist council, around 250 BCE. So was established the reciprocal

relationship between ruler and Sangha that became characteristic of all Theravada kingdoms in Southeast Asia.³⁵ Nowadays, Thailand is currently a constitutional monarchy, it inherited a strong Southeast Asian tradition of Buddhist kingship that tied the legitimacy of the State to its protection and support for Buddhist institutions or Sangha. This connection has been maintained into the modern era, with Buddhist institutions and clergy being granted special benefits by the government, as well as being subjected to a certain amount of government oversight.³⁶

So, in this chapter, I will investigate the relationship between the Sangha and the State and its structural inter-relationship. It is my hypothesis here that: First, the Sangha is likely to be hampered in its socio-political role if it receives recognition and support from the political authority.

Second, the Sangha provides the integrative principle in the social and cultural life of the people, exercising some form of control; and finally, it needs to develop an effective internal organization, ideally an ecclesiastical hierarchy by which it could exert influence in a co-ordinated manner over the government and ruler, but this would not specifically happen in Thailand.

4.3.2 The promotion, protection and legitimation of Buddhism and Sangha

To promote and protect Buddhism and the Sangha, in Thailand has been a traditional function of the Thai ruler, like the King or Government. Like its neighbors, Thailand borrowed from India the major element of its classical world view. Although from a formal point of view the Thai world view is identified with Theravada Buddhism and Sangha, as the dominant religion in the country since the fourteenth century, it represents an amalgam of cosmological ideas and moral value drawn from

³⁵ S. Suksamaran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Thailand: Bangkok, 1977), p.19.

³⁶ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

Brahmanism and indigenous tradition, as well as Buddhism.³⁷ It is therefore my responsibility to examine and investigate now, the important moral value and factors of Buddhism and the Sangha to the State.

According to Buddhism's influences, in Thailand, as well as in Southeast Asia, those with the right to rule were kings who stood at the apex of civil society, and their right to rule was legitimized in two ways. The first was by descent: kings were either sons of brothers of previous kings, or could demonstrate their descent from some earlier ruler, and the other one was the notions of karma and rebirth, that provided a second powerful source of legitimation by propagating the belief that everyone was reborn into the position in society determined by their karma. To be reborn into the royal family in the position of crown prince required accumulation of positive karma over innumerable lifetimes, and thus to be well on the way towards Buddhahood.

From this came the idea of the cakravartin as bodhisattva, which is what King Taksin of Siam claimed to be. He became convinced for example, that through his meditation he would eventually be transformed into a divine or divine-like being, and his blood would turn white like that of the gods.³⁸ The Thai Buddhist world view was systematized by King Lu Tai who, in 1347, came to the throne of Sukhothai and composed The Three Worlds, or Buddhist Cosmology. In fact, traditionally karma and rebirth went hand-in-hand with Buddhist cosmology, as outlined in the very influential 14th century Thai text known also as the Traiphum Phra Ruang. Although the treatise accepts the traditional Theravada view of the five stages of the deterioration of history, Lu Tai's intention was not to utilize this depressing view of cosmic time to promote religious piety, but rather to affirm the meaningfulness of karmically calculated human lives within a given multi-tiered universe. The

³⁷ Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia* (London: Wellington House, 1999), p.195.

³⁸ John W. Butt, *Thai Kingship and Religious Reform*, pp.38-39.

Traiphum Phra Ruan ,exhorts its listeners to lead a moral life and by so doing reap the appropriate heavenly reward.³⁹

From this situation of moral life and good karma, we can see that the reciprocal relationship between monarch and Sangha benefits both. The king gains legitimacy in the eyes of his subjects, who accept his accumulation of wealth and power as his right by virtue of his own moral stature, good karma, and just rule, while the Sangha gains prestige, influence and a comfortable existence (within the limits imposed by monastic discipline – the 227 rules listed in the Vinaya). Relations between Sangha and crown were close. Abbots of major monasteries were often royal appointees and served as royal advisors. As the Sangha was the sole organization providing education (and the only one offering a degree of social mobility), it provided the principal means by which the key elements of the Buddhist worldview were transmitted from generation to generation. At times of division within the Sangha, or when monastic discipline became lax, kings took it upon themselves to ‘purify’ the Sangha in order to enhance its status, and so also its effectiveness in legitimizing royal power. 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).

Belief in karma and rebirth provides a singular worldview that pervades Thai Kingdom, as well as Theravada Buddhist countries. Its importance should never be underestimated because it provides explanations for events that color attitudes 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. Therefore, political leadership

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Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia*, p.197.

often rests on individual qualities, karma or charisma rather than on some organizational or ideological basis.

So, according to the history, if look back to the tradition, from the Sukhothai period up to the present, Buddhism has served as a socializing and acculturating force giving coherence to the nation, as well as profound influence over Thai culture, together with tradition, history, learning and so on. Besides, Buddhism in Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Nakorn Si Thammarat and Chiang Mai, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries until the unified modern nation-state has been a constant factor in the politic of Thailand, from the formation of the major Thai city-states.

We can see nowadays in Thailand, thank probably this kind of positive political situation (between Buddhism or Sangha and the State) that there are or exist three traditional main institutions as the pillars of freedom, such as: Thai Government; Buddhism Religion, and the King, (Chart, Sasana, Pramaha kasat in Thai), representing a form of threefold moral bond of cohesion, integrity and prosperity. All of these can not be separated from each other, because national and religious stability has dominated an integral and wide part of National life of Thai people.

Also, in Thailand the feeling on mutual respect, identification and integrity, in Buddhism Religion is the primary base, seeing it as the most important one as symbol convention in Thai society. Furthermore, a number of special rights are conferred upon Buddhist monks by Government officials and the royal family as support and recognition, in the form of formal gift to monasteries. They are granted free passage on public transportation, and most train stations and airports have special seating sections reserved for a members of the clergy. Contrarily, ordained monastics are forbidden from standing for office or voting in election. More than that, to the ecclesiastic leadership of monastic order, assembly, community or Sangha, a secular government ministry, and the King supervised Buddhist temples and the monks, and very recently, Buddhism and Sangha have been also used as government agency by the two pillars for the carrying out particular policies, as force to counteract communism and to unify all classes within society. The two main pillars with the Sangha, normally co-operate with each other, to set the moral tone of the nation as an

effective communication between all of them and the vast majority of population that living in the rural area, villages and in the city.⁴⁰

According to the recent facts, occurred in 2007 called have been made by some Thais for Buddhism to be recognized in the new national constitution as a state religion. This suggestion was initially rejected by the committee charged with drafting the new constitution. This move prompted a number of protests from supporters of the initiative, including a number of marches on the capital and a hunger strike by twelve Buddhist monks. Some critics of the plan, including scholar and social critic Sulak Sivaraksa, have claimed that the movement to declare Buddhism a national religion is motivated by political gain, and may be being manipulated by supporters of ex Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The Constitution Drafting Committee later voted against the special status of Buddhism, provoking the religious groups. The groups condemned the Committee and the constitution draft. On August 11, Sirikit, the Queen of Thailand, expressed her concern over the issue. According to her birthday speech, Buddhism is beyond politics. Some Buddhist organizations announced the break of the campaigns a day after.⁴¹

4.3.3 The King and the promotion and protection of Buddhism in Thailand

“This part will analysis Buddhism and Thai State in modern Thailand from a dialectical perspective that includes the reform movement as well as the mutually symbiotic dimensions of that relationship from the reign of King Mongkut up to the present moment” or vice versa .

In Thailand, for instance, being a king and being a Buddhist are almost synonymous. However, one should not be misled that Buddhism only is dignified to deserve the Royal Patronage. Because one of the most obligation virtues of the Thai King as the Buddhist suggests that he is trained in practicing generosity and religious

⁴⁰ S. Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia* , p.23.

⁴¹ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

tolerance. It is traditionally stated in the Constitution of Thailand that the King is the Buddhist and obligatory to the patronage of all religions in his kingdom.⁴² Thus, according to the Constitution of Thailand, King's stability and Buddhism's stability can not be separated, and that their relationship exists in term of good morality and cohesion by adhering to Dharma. Therefore, the stability, tranquility and prosperity of Thai people and Buddhism mostly depend on the morality of the king and his citizens, subordinated to the laws of the Government and of the King.

The king was, and still is the patron of the faith, by promoting Buddhism and the Sangha. The King, thereby would encourage Buddhists at all levels-personal, community, and national to return to the values of Buddhism, and to base economic activity and policy on the Buddha's teachings. In doing so His Majesty the King has shown that the Buddha's teachings can be relevant in the contemporary world. Besides, his Majesty the King of Thailand, not only strongly held, taught and enthusiastically practiced Buddhism in moral and ethic way, but also he contribute economically to sustain and support the Supreme Patriarch and senior monks who were more proficient in learning and propagating Buddhism as way of life.

Moreover, his Majesty the King of Thailand supported this economic program for the Buddhist principles of self-reliance and the Middle Path. His program, called self-sufficiency economics, is not only a plan of recovery but also of extended sustainability in which economy would be geared to meeting needs at a sufficient level rather than to ever increasing levels of wealth fuelled by greed. It is an economy in which people and nations would be satisfied at a reasonable level of wealth and in which wealth would never be accumulated at the expense of other.

The King, has also established monasteries, in co-operation with the Sangha, staffed by missionary monks in many Western countries. In Thailand there are monasteries and meditation centers at which lay people of all nationalities can learn and practice meditation. According to the history of Thailand, the Buddhist tradition of kingship emphasized the ruler's function as the defender of the faith, the

⁴² Siddhi B.Indr, *Buddhism in Thailand* (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University, 1973), p.15.

builder of the Wat and other places of worship, the patron and protector of religion and the Sangha.

Again, if we look back to the tradition of Buddhism in Thailand, we can notice that Sukkhothai king, followed by the policy of Ayuthyan king, in promoting and protecting Buddhism and the Sangha, all of them regularly were giving alms to the monks, built and adorned temples, pagodas and places for worship. Monks were encouraged to study Buddhist scriptures and were awarded with ecclesiastical titles if they were successfully. Also, in that period after the destruction of Ayuthya, Buddhism slowly lost its ground and decline, and some religious monks like Phra Phang and Phra Maha Da, became rebels, attempting to exploit that critic situation and period of instability and crisis of Buddhism for making themselves kings.

Only with the king Rama I in 1782, something really would improve. He tried to re-stabilize the Thai nation which had been neglected in the past half century of internal disputes, jealousies and revolution. Among the first problems that he thought to solve and settle were the monastic practice of clergy, and the revision and collection of Tripitaka, but moreover to revise the moral degradation of the laity, especially those armed with official privileges. From the earliest days of Thai history, Buddhism also has served as a socializing and acculturating force giving coherence to the Thai nation, and it would have a very profound influence over Thai culture, learning philosophy, tradition, custom, including even Thai kingship.

Besides, among the chief characteristics of Thai kingdoms and principalities in the centuries before 1800 were the tendency to expand and contract, problems of succession, and the changing scope of the king's authority. In effect, some Thai kings had greater power over larger territories, others less, and almost invariably a king who sought successfully to expand his power also exercised greater control over the Sangha. That control was coupled with greater support and patronage of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. When a king was weak, however, protection and supervision of the Sangha also weakened, and the Sangha declined. This fluctuating

pattern appears to have continued until the emergence of the Chakkri Dynasty in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.⁴³

By the nineteenth century, and especially with the coming to power in 1851 of King Mongkut, a grandson of Rama I, his reform movement, like those of his grandfather were an attempt to reestablish in their pure and pristine forms the religious practices and beliefs which he believed to be part of the original Buddhist tradition. What made his reforms appear more radical and controversial than those of his grandfather was that his model for pure and true Buddhist religion went back even farther into history than had the one used by Rama I.

King Mongkut who had been a monk himself for twenty-seven years, the Sangha, like the kingdom, became steadily more centralized and hierarchical in nature and its links to the state more institutionalized. As a monk, Mongkut was a distinguished scholar of Pali Buddhist scripture. He advocated a more rigorous adherence to the study of Pali, the canonical language of the Theravada scriptures, and a proficiency in meditation. At that time the immigration of numbers of monks from Burma was introducing the more rigorous discipline characteristic of the Mon Sangha, which he considered to be the older and therefore purer and truer than those held by the Thai. Influenced by the Mon and guided by his own understanding of the Tipitaka, Mongkut began a reform movement that later became the basis for the Dhammayuttika order of monks. His efforts at religious reform resulted in improving monastic discipline in a effort to bring it closer to the Vinaya, and he also demythologized many traditional Thai teaching.⁴⁴

I can say that Mongkut was frequently accused of supporting radically innovative changes in Buddhist faith and life. In fact, many changes he sought to bring about were based upon religious tradition that were more ancient than those then being followed in Thailand. Although Rama I and Mongkut differ in using different models of reform, they were similar in looking to the past as a guide to what the religious situation should be and striving to return to an older and therefore, in

⁴³ T. Stanley, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), in [http://www. www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). (15 June 2009)

⁴⁴ Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politic in Twentieth Century*, p.200.

their opinion, more authentic form of Buddhist religion.⁴⁵ So, under these reforms, all practices having no authority other than custom were to be abandoned, canonical regulations were to be followed not mechanically but in spirit, and acts intended to improve an individual's standing on the road to Nirvana but having no social value were rejected.

This more rigorous discipline was adopted in its entirety by only a small minority of monasteries and monks. The Mahanikaya order, perhaps somewhat influenced by Mongkut's reforms but with a less exacting discipline than the Dhammayuttika order, comprised about 95 percent of all monks in 1970 and probably about the same percentage in the late 1980s. In any case, Mongkut was in a position to regularize and tighten the relations between monarchy and Sangha at a time when the monarchy was expanding its control over the country in general and developing the kind of bureaucracy necessary to such control.⁴⁶ This orientation towards the past has been shared by the most, if not all, of the major Thai religious thinkers and reformers since the end of the eighteenth century.

Although stimulated by the changes taking places in the modern world and though sometimes incorporating elements of these changes, Thai religious reform have continued to have as their central trusted the restoration and conservation of earlier traditions. Even the contemporary Thai Buddhist monk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, whom many now see as an important new religious innovator and reformer, as to a very great extent calling for a return to a form of faith and a style of life that are representative of the past. The question remains, however, whether this religious orientation towards the past will be capable of producing forms of Buddhist faith that will be viable for modern Thai society and life, or whether the Buddhist community in Thailand has reached a time when reforms of a more innovation and future oriented nature are appropriate and necessary.⁴⁷

The administrative and Sangha reforms that Mongkut started were continued by his successor. The most significant religious reformer of the early

⁴⁵ John W. Butt, *Thai Kingship and Religious Reform*, p.45.

⁴⁶ T. Stanley, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*.

⁴⁷ John W. Butt, *Thai Kingship and Religious Reform*, p.47.

twenty century, and probably of modern times was with the King Rama V (Chulalongkorn). Under the Patriarch Vajiranana's leadership and guidance and with support and encouragement of king Chulalongkorn many of the reform begun by Mongkut were continued and institutionalized. Parallel with the implementation of reforms designed to integrate provincial areas politically into the emergent Thai nation-state, King Chulalongkorn also initiated policies to incorporate all Buddhists within the kingdom into a single national organization. The principles that established the basis for a national Sangha were embodied in the Sangha Administration Act of 1902. Thus In 1902 King Chulalongkorn, made the new Sangha hierarchy formal and permanent through the Sangha Law of 1902, which remained the foundation of Sangha Administration in modern Thailand.⁴⁸ The more important future of the Sangha Administration were: 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.

As stipulated in this third principle of the 1902 Sangha Administration Act, education was a central feature in King Chulalongkorn's program of national development and integration. Monastic education was also improved by standardizing the monastic curriculum throughout the country and stipulating the content of nine levels of Pali language study. It is worth emphasizing that the revitalization of Thai Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries was initiated as consequences of royal leader Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, Wajirayan and Damrong, who recognized that monks and monasteries constituted an institutional structure and educational network that extended throughout Siam.⁴⁹ So, we can see that the promotion and protection and reform of Buddhism and the Sangha, have been always a traditional duty of the King, and religion and kingship cannot be separated and are interdependent, and this is why Thai kings have always been deeply involved in matter regarding the Sangha and religion.

Today, the king still plays an important function, though mainly symbolic role in Thai Buddhism, being at the same time both the high protector and promoter of

⁴⁸ T. Stanley, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*.

⁴⁹ Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia*, p.203.

Buddhism and the constitutional head of government, and the King and Buddhism try their best in the application of Buddhist philosophy to their political policies of government and to all their activities for the good, welfare, prosperity and happiness of the people.⁵⁰ It is always remembered, that under the Buddhist principle of righteousness the Thai king lives for the people, that because Buddhism has dominated the vast majority of Thai people, and because Buddhism is the most important symbol as integral part of Thai national life, and primary base for the feeling of mutual identification and unity with the other nations.⁵¹

The final key of the King's activities in Thailand, is the protection of Buddhism. Much of what we have already discussed serves to protect Buddhism, moreover from misunderstandings, controversy and threats. One of the most obvious threats to Buddhism is the aggressive conversion tactics of some religions. These aggressive efforts are of concern not only to Buddhism but also to many other religions as well. One way of meeting these threats is by ensuring that the monks, as the Sangha are properly fulfilling their duties toward the laity-that is, providing education guidance and concern, while themselves returning to a rigorous observance of the Vinaya.⁵²

In my last analysis, I can say, that the King as constitutional monarchy, unlike the absolute monarchy before the 1932 Revolution, where promotion and protection of religion and the Sangha was a prerogative, acts in accordance with the decision of the Cabinet, and every Thai king appreciates the Buddhist values in its nobility and necessity for Thai kingship.

⁵⁰ S. Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, p.26.

⁵¹ Siddhi B.Indr, *Buddhism in Thailand*, p.23.

⁵² Phra Thepsophon Ractor Mahachulalongkorn, Speech at the International Conference on Buddhasasana in Theravada Buddhist countries: (Colombo, Sri Lanka, January 15, 2003), in <http://www.ecurriculum.mv.ac.th> (30-June 2009)

4.3.4 Government's promotion and protection of Buddhism and the Sangha

In Thailand the responsibility of the Government is to recognize, protect and defend the religion freedom, as well as the Sangha. The involvement of the government in religious affair, especially Buddhism, can be expressed as follows:

- 1) the promotion and protection of Buddhism has been one of the chief of responsibility of every Thai government;
- 2) the government's promotion of Buddhism would help to end or, at least, lessen lawlessness and disorder in the country and to strengthen the nation's moral fiber;
- 3) as the effect of the spread of Communist ideology and activity is to empower national security, ensuring the healthy condition of Buddhism in the most effective countermeasure.

Besides, they are three main institutions or department that provide the security, protection, supporting, and guide of Buddhism and Sangha, known as : Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education; Department of Local Government Administration, Ministry of Interior; and Department of Medical Service, Ministry of Public Health. Department of Religious Affairs, is the centre of all government, and it is organized into several divisions and sections, with the main duties and responsibility such as:

- 1) To give support to the Buddhist Religion as well as to control and supervise the Sangha.
- 2) To serve the Ecclesiastical policy of the Sangha Supreme Council.
- 3) To implement government patronage of religion, as well as to manage Ecclesiastical properties, and so on.

Furthermore, the Department of Medical Service, Ministry of Public Health, provides and offers health services to the member of the Sangha, and it is responsible for running the Monks Hospital in Bangkok; whereas the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, is responsible for Mosques and Christian

Churches present in Thailand, and for their registration as well as for the administration of the Government Policy.⁵³

4.3.5 Government Control and supervision over the Sangha

As I mentioned above, Thailand is currently a constitutional monarchy (is a form of monarchy government established under a constitutional system which acknowledges an elected or hereditary monarch as head of state), and it inherited a strong Southeast Asian tradition of Buddhist kingship that tied the legitimacy of the state to its protection and support for Buddhist institutions and Sangha. This connection has been maintained into the modern era, with Buddhist institutions and clergy being granted special benefits by the government, as well as being subjected to a certain amount of government oversight. Thai governments have been always conscious of the importance of a prosperous and vital factors of Sangha, and as a necessity or moral duty, it would exercise political authority over the assembly or Sangha, like religion organization.⁵⁴

In Thailand, as elsewhere, there has always been a close relationship between state power and the Sangha – to the extent that the organization of state power has been reflected in the organization of the Sangha. As we know, in Thailand after his reforms of the state bureaucracy in the 1890s King Chulalongkorn restructured the Sangha administration in 1902 to provide for a parallel centralization of bureaucratic control over all Buddhist monks in the country. The 1902 Sangha Act by King Chulalongkorn went hand in hand with the civil bureaucratic reforms of the time. It stipulated that there be a body of monks, called the Council of Elders (*mahatherasamakhom*), which would oversee Sangha affairs and represent different regions of the country. This Act, interestingly, left out the office of the Supreme Patriarch, thus giving the King the last word of approval in matters pertaining to the Sangha. But nine years after the 1932 revolution, Chulalongkorn's centralized Sangha

⁵³ S. Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, p.29.

⁵⁴ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

administration was replaced by a system of Sangha councils and ministers modeled on the democratic patterns of the revolutionary government. The more democratic Sangha Act of 1941 seemed to come as a delayed response to the revolution of 1932 and the end of the absolute monarchy. A more decentralized approach was taken; instead of a Council of Elders, power was separated into various “ministries” or committees (*ongkan*) that decided on the activities of the Sangha.

The Act stipulated a Supreme Patriarch, but his decisions were subject to the approval of the members of the various committees. However democratic the Act may have appeared, the Supreme Patriarch was still appointed by the king who, as a constitutional monarch, acted on the advice of the government. Five years after Sarit Thanarat assumed power in a military coup in 1957 and instituted his highly centralised form of military authoritarianism and 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. So, the Sangha Act of 1962 was linked with the rise of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and his skepticism regarding the effectiveness of democracy for Thailand. Again, Sangha law reflects this. Along with Sarit’s dissolving the parliament, and doing away with the constitution and political parties, came reforms of the Sangha. Sarit alleged discord within the Sangha and claimed that a tightly organized monkhood would be necessary for the development and advancement of the nation. The office of the Supreme Patriarch was maintained and the Council of Elders re-established. This Act kept the hierarchical administration — from the larger regional structures all the way down to the village level — intact. This Act is still in effect today, and this structure of the Sangha continues to parallel the secular government. It is within this structure that an intricate and often confusing system of honorific rank-titles developed, which continues to play an important role in determining a monk’s identity and status. To this one might add that after the reintroduction of democratic government in the 1990s, the hierarchical structure of the Sangha has been challenged by reformists who object to its authoritarian controls and cosy relationship with conservative political elites.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Peter A. Jackson, “Withering Centre, Flourishing Margin,” in *Political Change in*

Now let first let me briefly outline earlier attempts by the Thai state to use Buddhism to pursue its own political agenda. The return of military government in Thailand after 1948 coincided with the Cold War, in which Thailand aligned itself with the West and against communism. Bangkok became the headquarters of SEATO; Thai 'volunteer' units fought Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces in Laos; while domestically the Thai army waged a relentless struggle against the Thai Communist Party, mainly in the north and northeast of the country. A version of this ideological struggle even took place within the Sangha itself, which resulted in the expulsion of leftwing monks labeled as communist. Conservatives claimed that the CPT was deliberately infiltrating the Sangha, with the intention of destroying Buddhism. As local monks wielded great influence in the villages, the military government coopted them into promoting these government programs, through mobilizing villagers to contribute their labour to them. Some monks were reluctant to become closely identified with an increasingly (by the early 1970s) unpopular military regime and with its American backers. Others felt that promoting social programs compromised their spiritual credentials. The strongest monastic support came from Thammayuttika Nikaya monks, in the name of the monarchy, which by then had been co-opted by the military for its own anticommunist aims.⁵⁶

Thailand's 'experiment with democracy' between 1973 and 1976 polarized opinions within the Thai Sangha, just as it did within Thai society. The sudden freedom to discuss politics and demonstrate led to the politicization of young monks. One group confined itself to Sangha reform, but others argued that Buddhists had a social responsibility to work for a peaceful and just society. A number even ran for parliament for leftwing parties. The most radical was the Young Monk's Front of Thailand. Some argued that monks should not involve themselves in any mundane affairs. Others opposed leftwing influence more directly, through argument and pamphlets and demonstrations. Debate focused on two areas: Sangha reform, and Buddhism as providing a model for society (for example, through the 'republican' structure of the early Sangha). Reform Buddhism also went back to the Tripitaka in

⁵⁶ Martin Stuart-Fox, *Southeast Asian Studies* (USA: University of Queensland 30th January 2006), p.15.

search of an interpretation that would be relevant to a modern society. This quest had been initiated by King Monkut, but within the context of traditional Buddhist cosmology and relations between Sangha and monarchy. The world had moved on, however, and Thailand with it, and something more radical was required to wed religion, science, personal development and politics. This was provided by the teachings of the very influential monk, and Thailand's most significant Buddhist philosopher of the 20th century, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.⁵⁷

Like Socrates he taught self-knowledge and critical reflection as the way to living a good life that is selfless, compassionate and socially concerned. It was a message the rising middle class in Thailand found conducive to its own interests and concerns. Buddhadasa attracted followers to his monastery in southern Thailand, but it was the movement known as Santi Asoke that took his ideas and codified them into a way of life followed by thousands. He soon fell out with the Sangha hierarchy, however, so repudiated its authority and founded his own order of monks, whom he ordained himself. The community he founded was strict in its observances of Buddhist morality, vegetarianism, and the work ethic. It rejected all forms of supernaturalism and the rituals associated with it performed by most village monks. Santi Asoke communities stress cooperation and oppose all forms of materialism. They are, in fact, "self-sufficient, organic farming communities" that are attractive to peasant families. But they are equally attractive to those seeking an escape from urban consumerism, immorality, and stress. The most prominent politician influenced by the Santi Asoke movement was Maj-Gen Chamlong Srimuang, the popular, clean-living, governor of Bangkok, whose Palang Dharma party was backed by Santi Asoke. In fact in the 1988 municipal elections, fully half of the 300 or so candidates running for Palang Dharma were ordained members of the Santi Asoke. This was the highpoint of the movement's political involvement, however, and since then it has been more politically circumspect, if just as socially active.⁵⁸ However, in return for the promotion, and supervision of the Sangha's affair, the Government, expects to

⁵⁷ Harris, Ian, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia*, p.209.

⁵⁸ Martin Stuart-Fox, *Southeast Asian Studies*, p.16.

exercise control and supervision in many other fields or spheres, particularly in the case of Santi Asoke which was legally forbidden from calling itself a Buddhist denomination, and in the case of the ordination of women- monks attempting to revive the Theravada bhikkhuni lineage have been prosecuted as though attempting to impersonate members of the clergy. Primarily, the aims of the government is not only the supervision and control of the Sangha but even the protection of the monks against themselves, and of some monks to become corrupt, negligent, and to forget their primary duties by maintaining diligence in religious learning. More than that, Thai government would take any kind of prevention from not see the monks involving in politic affairs, and so also ranking within the secular system of social stratification, and compete for rights and privileges in the political marketplace, influencing always actively the Sangha.

In addition to state support and recognition - in the form of formal gifts to monasteries made by government officials and the royal family - number of special rights are conferred upon Buddhist monks. They are granted free passage on public transportation, and most train stations and airports have special seating sections reserved for members of the clergy. Conversely, ordained monastics are forbidden from standing for office or voting in elections. Accordingly, control over the Sangha and the quality of its life are of vital concern to the government. The Buddhist Government, usually has not only the control and protection of the Sangha, but also enact secular laws to supplement Ecclesiastical government, because as a learned and eminent monk asserts, the traditional Vinaya “the monastic rules of conduct” does not cover certain kinds of misconduct by monks, and the presence and supervision of the government on the Sangha and in the community ,it is justified, for ensuring civil harmony, order, prosperity and peace. The government exercises its controlling power through a number of governmental departments, closely associated with the Sangha administrative hierarchy, and most important, is the Department of Religious affairs, whose mandate is to assist and promote the affairs of the Sangha and other religious organizations. The Department carries out bureaucratic services for the Sangha and in order to control the Sangha, approves the appointment of many ecclesiastical functionaries. The department provides ecclesiastical educational material, arranges for religious festivals, provides religious propaganda for

dissemination among monks and the general public, and regulates ecclesiastical school and universities. It is also this department which is responsible for allocating a subsidy to the monasteries, and for arranging a monthly stipend for monks who have administrative responsibilities.

The system of giving honorific titles and paying salaries to monks helps the government to gain loyalty from those monks who are in a position to influence the rank and file of the Order. This loyalty is expressed by the Sangha's active co-operation with the government in launching modernization programmes and in adapting itself to the policy of the government. In 2007, calls were made by some Thais for Buddhism to be recognized in the new national constitution as a state religion. This suggestion was initially rejected by the committee charged with drafting the new constitution. This move prompted a number of protests from supporters of the initiative, including a number of marches on the capital and a hunger strike by twelve Buddhist monks. Some critics of the plan, including scholar and social critic Sulak Sivaraksa (the founder and director of the Thai non governmental organization) have claimed that the movement to declare Buddhism a national religion is motivated by political gain, and may be being manipulated by supporters of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra.⁵⁹

The Constitution Drafting Committee later voted against the special status of Buddhism, provoking the religious groups. The groups condemned the Committee and the constitution draft. On August 11, Sirikit (the wife and Queen consort of Bhumibol Adulyadej, King of Thailand), the Queen of Thailand, expressed her concern over the issue. According to her birthday speech, Buddhism is beyond politics. Some Buddhist organizations announced the break of the campaigns a day after.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ S. Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, p.30.

⁶⁰ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

4.3.6 The Administration of the Sangha

Although the ecclesiastical authority of the Sangha, or the Buddhist Order, rests with an administrative body in the Sangha itself, the government is also responsible for the affairs of the Sangha. But it confines its responsibility only for the matters connected with the state and laity. Its aim is to promote unity and joint action between the Sangha and the state, and to provide a channel through which the Sangha can communicate with government authorities. In reality, there has always been harmonious cooperation between the Sangha and the state. Because the prosperity or stagnation of the Sangha depends mainly on its administration, the system of administering the Sangha claims the first and foremost attention.⁶¹

In former days, the King of Thailand, as the Upholder of Religion, regulated and supervised the Sangha himself, as the Sangha became bigger and better established with a large body of learned bhikkhus, it became more autonomous because the king let it run its own affairs through an administrative body called the "Thera". However, to achieve perfect harmony between the Sangha and the state, the "constitution" of the Sangha, which consists of a series of laws, was enacted by the state. Furthermore, the state sees that the constitution will go well with these laws, and has from time to time brought them up to date.

The laws relating to the Sangha that have been passed are

(a) The Administration of the Sangha Act, 1903;

(b) The Sangha Act of 1941;

(c) The Sangha Act of 1962; and

(d) The Sangha Act of 1992.

⁶¹ S. Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, p. 32.

Under the Sangha Act of 1941, the organization of the Sangha was patterned after the parliamentary government adopted by the state. The doctrine of the separation of powers was applied and the balance of powers was designed to be attained by checks and balances between the three organs of the Sangha, namely, the Sangha Sahha as the legislature, the Sangha Mont" as the executive, and the Binayadhara as the judiciary. Although the system worked with some degree of success, a discordant note sounded in some quarters to the effect that ecclesiastical matters should not fall within the sphere of politics. These matters should, (it was suggested), be left entirely to the administrative of Sangha, known as the "Thera" or the "Elders" as they were in the days gone by. As a result, a radical change in organization of the Sangha was made by the Sangha Act of 1962 which came into force on January 1, 1963. And consequently the Mahathera Samakhum, the Sangha Supreme Council, was established.

At the opening ceremony of the first session of the Mahathera Samakhoni on 21 January 1963, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the late Prime Minister, mentioned in his message to Somdet Phra Sangharaj, the Supreme Patriarch, its President, that it was the intention of the government that the Sangha Act of 1962 should be passed in order to reintroduce the organization of the Sangha as similar as possible to that in the Buddha's lifetime, and Thai it was the intention of the government to give support in every possible way to Buddhism which has been the state religion from time immemorial and whose culture is deeply ingrained in the national character. Under the Sangha Acts of 1962 and 1992, the administration of the Sangha is divided into central and local.⁶²

4.3.6.1 The Central Administration of the Sangha

His Majesty the King appoints a selected "Thera" or "Elder" to be the Supreme Patriarch, Head of the Buddhist Order. He is responsible for all ecclesiastical affairs of the order. Under the Sangha Act of 1962, the Sangha Supreme Council, the Mahathera Samakhom, serves as the Consultative Council, to the

⁶² Ibid, pp. 35-36.

Supreme Patriarch who, according to the law possesses absolute power. In reality, he never makes use of such power, but listens to every suggestion presented by members of the council and calls for votes if the matter is controversial.

This council is the sole executive and administrative body of the Sangha and it consists of all Somdet Phra Raja Khanas (i.e. high dignitaries in the hierarchy of the order next in rank to the Supreme Patriarch) as ex officio member, and not more than twelve nominated by the Supreme Patriarch from Phra Raja Khanas (i.e. high dignitaries below the rank of Somdet Phra Raja Khana) to hold office as nominated members for a term of two years.

Both ex officio and nominated members act as advisers to the Supreme Patriarch in the council. As for formal relations between the government and the Sangha, the Director General of the Department of Religious Affairs becomes the ex-officio Secretary General to the Council of Elders. At this top level of the Sangha's Hierarchy the whole of Sangha affairs are closely supervised and controlled through the ex-officio secretary General by the government.

4.3.6.2 Present Members of the Mahathera Samakhom

(1) Somdet Phra Phulthakhosaeahan

(2) Somdet Phra Wannarat

(3) Somdet Phra Phutthapachanabodi

(4) Somdet Phra Mahamuniwong

(5) Somdet Phra Phutthachan

(6) Somdet Phra Mahathirad

(7) Somdet Phra Mahawirawong

(8) Somdei Phra Maharachamangkhalachan

According to the Sangha Acts of 1962 and 1992, the Director-General of the Department of Religious Affairs is the ex officio Secretary-General to the Mahathera Samakhom, the office of which is at the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education.

4.3.7 The Local Administration of the Sangha

The administration of the Sangha at the local level, is divided up into regions, provinces, districts, and precincts, corresponding to the divisions of the country by the state for administrative purposes. The Chao Khana Yai (Sangha Regional Supervisor) supervises the assigned regions which are under the control of the Chao Khana Phak (Sangha Regional Governor). The Sangha Governor General is guided by a chief monk and he is also responsible for facilitating the administration of the Sangha Governor whereas the other head monk takes charge of his commune. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the abbot who is responsible for all administrative tasks of his Wat.

From the preceding discussion it will be seen that the organization of the Sangha and its administrative structure parallel pointed by the Supreme Patriarch and the former appoints the Sangha Regional Supervisors. At the provincial level, the chief monks is the Sangha Governor or Chao Kana Changwat who is appointed by, and responsible to, the Sangha Regional Supervisors. In addition, to being generally responsible for administration in accordance with the Sangha Act, the Sangha Governor is also responsible for all services and activities performed by Sangha officials in his assigned province.

Below provincial level is district level. At this level the Chao Kana Amphur, or district head monk, appointed by the Sangha Governor, is responsible for controlling and supervising the Chao Kana Tambon s, are closely integrated into that of the civil government, and that the Sangha is effectively incorporated into the governmental structure at the higher and administrative levels in such a manner that the government can exercise effective control over Sangha policy and procedure at the

higher administrative levels. The government, through the Ministry of Education, controls the nominations of Somdet Phrarajakana and Phrarajakana, who hold all the administrative offices, as well as controlling their monetary rewards, while the legal set-up, with respect to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior, guarantees that the Sangha keeps in line with government policy.⁶³

4.3.7.1 Monasteries construction according to the Sangha Supreme Council

Buddhism in Thailand is an enormous institution within itself; nearly 95% of Thailand's population is Buddhist. Characterized by tall golden stupas, the Buddhist architecture of Thailand the Buddhist monasteries in Thailand are its ultimate attractions. Similar to the other Southeast Asian countries, Buddhism in Thailand is mainly compared with Cambodia and Laos Thailand Buddhist Temples. Buddhism in Thailand has integrated with folk beliefs as the ancestors worship the Chinese religions from this vast Thai-Chinese population. There are 40,717 Buddhist temples (Wat) or Monasteries in Thailand that have festooned the arena of Thailand, recorded in 31 December 2004. According to the Office of National Buddhism there remain 33,902 temples which are currently in use. Out of the 33,902 active temples, 31,890 located in the Maha Nikaya and 1,987 in the Dhammayuttika Nikaya orders of the Theravada school.

Buddhist monasteries are constructed from charitable contributions from the general public. In order to obtain a permit to build a monastery, the promoters must submit a detailed proposal of the construction to the Sangha Supreme Council through the Department of Religious Affairs. After the Sangha Council has gained a permit, the monastery can be built but it will retain the status of a bhikkhus' lodging, it will be granted a Visungamasima (Supra), and will become a juristic person when the promoters of the monastery have certified to the Sangha Supreme Council Thai the

⁶³ S. Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, p.45.

construction of the monastery has substantially been completed and that Bhikkhus continuously stay for Lent at the monastery. The Sangha Act stipulates that any monastery where the bhikkhus no longer reside is regarded as an uninhabited monastery. Its utility is to be transferred to the General Fund of the Buddhist Order from which expenses for the general promotion of Buddhism may be drawn.⁶⁴

4.3.7.2 Distribution of the Buddhist Population by Order and Discipline in 1998

Bhikkhus (Phra) : 265,956

Seminaries : 87,695

Buddhist Monasteries: 30,678

Thai Temples Abroad :125

(around the world)

4.3.7.3 The Present Ecclesiastical (Sangha) Organisational Structure is formed by

The Supreme Patriarch

Sangha Supreme Council

(Mahathera Samakhom)

Sangha Regional Supervisor

(The Chao Khana Yai)

⁶⁴ National Identity Board, Office of the Prime Minister, *Plan, Problem and Respect* (Bangkok Press, 1982), p.112.

Sangha Regional Governor

(The Chao Khana Pak)

Sangha Provincial Governor

(The Chao Khana Changwat)

Sangha District Officer

(The Chao Khana Amphoe)

Sangha Village Officer

(The Chao Khana Tambon)

Temple's Abbot

(The Chao Avasa)⁶⁵

All in all, Thailand, has been the only country in Southeast Asia, differently from Laos, Cambodia and Burma, that was never colonized, or was never subject to European colonial rule, in which religious reform movements, with its education, culture, and structural inter relationship between Sangha and Thai State, played a major, outstanding and important key for its success, development and modernization, as significant future for Buddhism in modern Thai society.

⁶⁵ National Identity Board, Office of the Prime Minister, p.113.