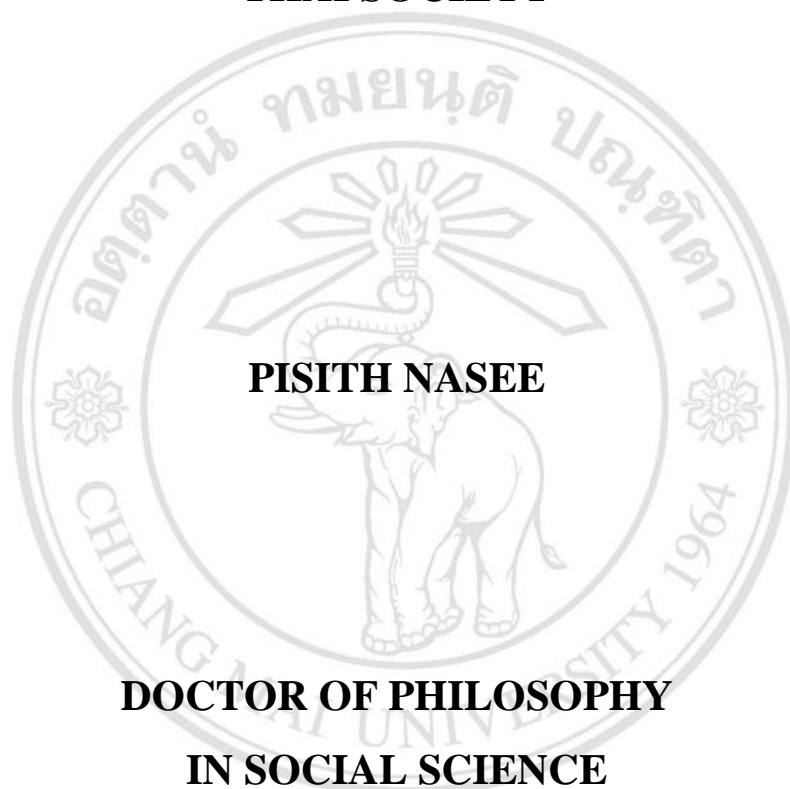


**CONSTRUCTING *KHRUBA*'S CHARISMA AND
RELIGIOUS NETWORK IN CONTEMPORARY
THAI SOCIETY**



PISITH NASEE

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN SOCIAL SCIENCE**

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**GRADUATE SCHOOL
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FEBRUARY 2018**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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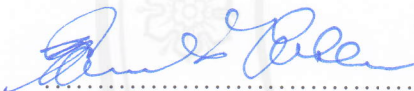
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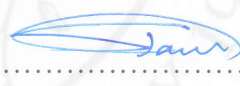
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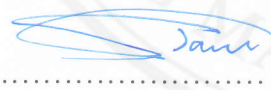
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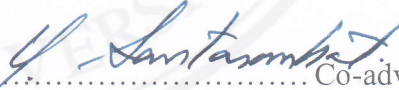

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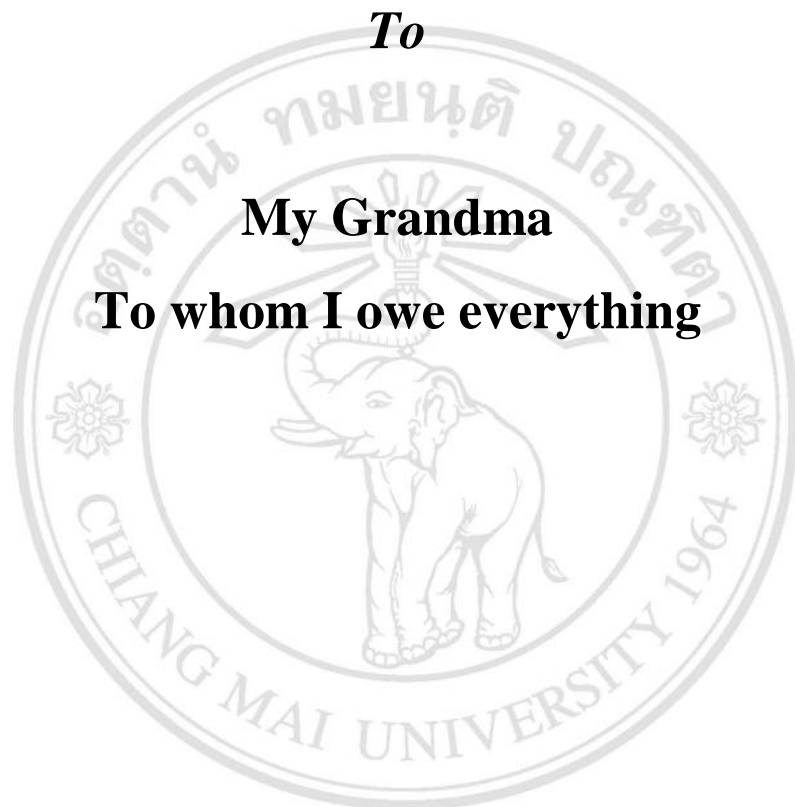

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To

My Grandma

To whom I owe everything

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Pisith Nasee



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หัวข้อคดียุติพนธ์	การสร้างบารมีของพระครูบาและเครือข่ายทางศาสนาในสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย	
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บทคัดย่อ

คดียุติพนธ์เรื่องนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษา (1) กระบวนการสร้างบารมีของพระครูบาสมัยใหม่ (2) ความเปลี่ยนแปลงในวัตรปฏิบัติและกิจกรรมทางศาสนาของพระครูบาสมัยใหม่ และ (3) บทบาทของเครือข่ายทางศาสนาในสังคมไทยร่วมสมัย การศึกษาได้เสนอว่า “ครูบา” ควรได้รับการพิจารณาใหม่ในฐานะผู้กระทำการในระดับท้องถิ่นที่แสดงให้เห็นการปะทะประสานระหว่างจารีตพุทธแบบล้านนาและโลกโลกาภิวัตน์ พระครูบามีบทบาทสำคัญมาอย่างยาวนานในชุมชนพุทธท้องถิ่นภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย ในขณะที่ปัจจุบันพระครูบายังคงนำเสนอตัวตนของการเป็นผู้สืบทอดจารีตครูบาและพุทธศาสนาแบบล้านนา แต่ในความเป็นจริง ในช่วงสามทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา พระครูบาได้เดินทางผ่านช่วงเวลาของความเฟื่องฟูที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความเชื่อและการปฏิบัติทางศาสนาที่แตกต่างหลากหลาย ทั้งนี้เพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรม และตอบสนองต่อความต้องการที่หลากหลายของผู้คน พระครูบาสมัยใหม่จึงอาศัยการปฏิบัติทางศาสนาและกิจกรรมที่หลากหลายมากกว่าการเคร่งครัดในวัตรปฏิบัติและกิจกรรมการก่อสร้างทางศาสนาที่เคยถูกอธิบายว่าเป็นแหล่งบารมีของครูบาในพุทธศาสนาแบบล้านนาในอดีต บารมีของพระครูบาสมัยใหม่ถูกทำให้สามารถรับรู้และตีความได้อย่างหลากหลายโดยคนกลุ่มต่าง ๆ ทำให้มีเครือข่ายที่กว้างขวางและมีความสัมพันธ์ที่ซับซ้อนขึ้น สิ่งนี้ทำให้พระครูบาก้าวข้ามพรมแดนทางวัฒนธรรมของล้านนาและกลายเป็นพระครูบาของผู้เชื่อถือศรัทธาทั่วโลก คดียุติพนธ์เรื่องนี้มีข้อเสนอหลักสี่ประการ ได้แก่ (1) พระครูบาสมัยใหม่มีลักษณะทวิลักษณ์ คือ เป็นตัวแทนความต่อเนื่องของจารีตครูบาและพุทธศาสนาแบบล้านนา โดยเฉพาะการรับรู้ผ่านครูบาศรีวิชัย

แต่ในขณะที่เดียวกันก็แสดงให้เห็นความแตกแยกจากอดีตผ่านการตีความ ประเมินค่าครูบาและอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมในรูปแบบใหม่ ๆ เพื่อตอบสนองต่อความเปลี่ยนแปลงและความต้องการของผู้คนที่หลากหลายในสังคมพุทธร่วมสมัย (2) แนวคิดครูบาไม่เคยมีรูปแบบและความหมายที่ตายตัว แต่กลับเปลี่ยนแปลงอยู่ตลอดเวลา ดังนั้นบารมีของครูบาในยุคปัจจุบันจึงถูกนิยาม ตีความและรับรู้ได้อย่างลื่นไหลและมีหลายเหลี่ยมมุม การศึกษานี้เสนอสามเหลี่ยมมุมหลักที่อาจคาบเกี่ยวกันอยู่ คือ ต้นบุญแห่งความมั่งคั่ง เกจิอมขมังเวทย์ และพระนักพัฒนา โดยขึ้นอยู่กับว่า เหลี่ยมมุมไหนของแต่ละพระครูบาจะถูกจับเน้นมากกว่ากัน (3) วัตรปฏิบัติและกิจกรรมทางศาสนาในปัจจุบัน แสดงให้เห็นความสามารถในการปรับตัวให้เข้ากับสถานการณ์สำหรับการเป็นพระครูบาของผู้เชื่อถือศรัทธาทั่วโลก นอกจากนี้ยังทำให้เห็นความสำคัญที่มากขึ้นของวัดดงมดและพิธีกรรมเพื่อความมั่งคั่งร่ำรวยโดยอาศัยความเชื่อในพลังอำนาจเหนือธรรมชาติของพระครูบา และ (4) เครื่อง่ายของพระครูบาสมัยใหม่ขยายตัวออกไปได้อย่างกว้างขวาง อีกทั้งยังมีลักษณะข้ามพรมแดนทั้งรัฐชาติ ศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม ในขณะที่การเชื่อมต้อมีความลื่นไหลและยืดหยุ่น โดยไม่จำเป็นต้องมีศูนย์กลางอยู่ ณ ที่ใดที่หนึ่ง แต่อาจเป็นหน่วยเชื่อมต่อย่อยต่าง ๆ ที่กระจัดกระจายอยู่ในพื้นที่ทั่วโลก นอกจากนี้วัดดงมดของพระครูบายังได้กลายมาเป็นตัวแทนที่สำคัญในการเชื่อมต่อและสร้างความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างผู้คนกับวัตถุและระหว่างผู้คนด้วยกัน เช่นเดียวกับตัวแทนที่เป็นมนุษย์ ทำให้บารมีและเครื่อง่ายของพระครูบาแผ่ขยายออกไปในวงกว้างมากขึ้น

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Dissertation Title	Constructing <i>Khruba's</i> Charisma and Religious Network in Contemporary Thai Society	
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to investigate (1) the process of constructing the charisma of modern *khruba*, (2) the transformation in *dhamma* practices and religious activities of modern *khruba*, and (3) the role of networks in contemporary Thai society. Conducted through qualitative research, the dissertation posits that *khruba* should be reconceptualized as actors in the local Lan Na region who have demonstrated the articulation of the local Buddhist tradition and the globalized world. *Khruba* have consistently played a meaningful role in local Buddhist communities of northern Thai culture for generations. While today's *khruba* continue to represent themselves as followers of Khruba Siwichai and Lan Na Buddhism, in fact, over the past three decades they have undergone a period of flourishing that involves integration of heterogeneous beliefs and practices. In order to respond to social and cultural transformation and to fit different expectations on the part of devotees, modern *khruba* have relied on different practices and activities besides the strictness in *dhamma* practices and the construction and renovation of religious monuments that were formerly used to explain sources of *khruba's* charisma in Lan Na Buddhism. The charisma of *Khruba* has been redefined and re-interpreted to allow it to be perceived and consumed by diverse groups of people while their networks have expanded widely and become more complicated. These changes have brought modern *khruba* out of Lan Na cultural boundary to become sacred figures for global devotees. This dissertation

has argued four major points: 1) Modern *khru*ba have a dual identity which consists of both the continuation of and the departure from the *khru*ba tradition and the Lan Na Buddhism idealized by Khruba Siwichai. 2) The *khru*ba concept has never been linear and static, but ephemeral. *Khru*ba's charisma is, therefore, multifaceted because it is consumed, reconstructed, and redefined by modern *khru*ba and diverse groups of followers in three main separable yet overlapping facets: prosperity *ton bun*, magic monk, and development monk. 3) *Dhamma* practices and religious activities have demonstrated the adaptability and flexibility of modern *khru*ba for being *khru*ba for global devotees. Moreover, these practices and activities shed light on the increasing importance of sacred-magic objects and prosperity rituals which rely heavily on a belief in supernatural powers of modern *khru*ba. 4) Networks of modern *khru*ba have become diverse, transnational, and transreligio-cultural. The networks are de-centered because connections can be formed in a flexible and fluid pattern through nodes which are located in many different locations around the world. Significantly, sacred-magic objects of *khru*ba have been recognized as active agents in the ability to connect and form relationships between people and objects, as well as between people and people, the same as human agents. These agents have made *khru*ba's charisma and their networks more spread out.

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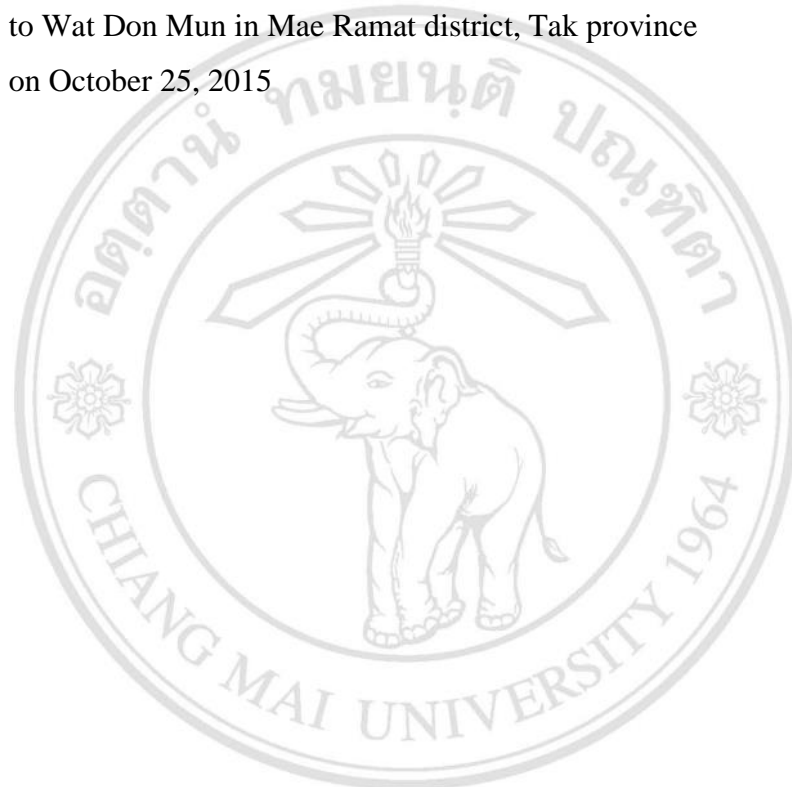
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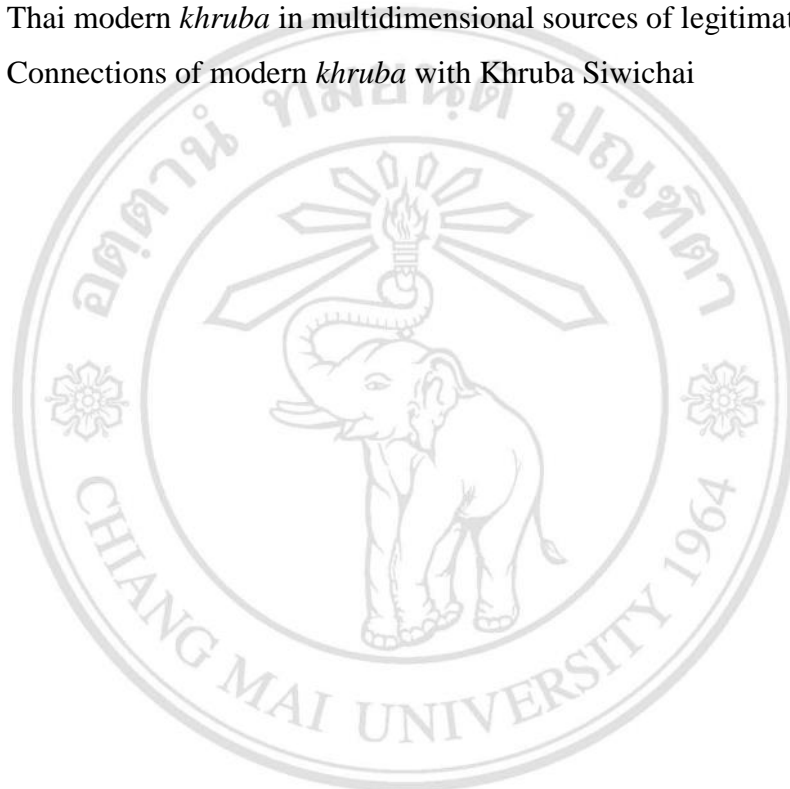
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ข้อความแห่งการริเริ่ม

ผู้วิจัยขอรับรองว่า เนื้อหาของคุยฉินิพนธ์ฉบับนี้เป็นผลงานของผู้วิจัย คุยฉินิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มิได้เสนอเพื่อสำเร็จการศึกษาในระดับอื่น ๆ



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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that the best of my knowledge, the content of this dissertation is my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted previously for any degree.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Khruba (venerable monks) have played a meaningful role in local Buddhist communities of Northern Thai culture for generations. The rise of *khruba* during the past three decades is very interesting both in social life and academia. This implies that the term *khruba* is still meaningful and plays a crucial role in Thai Buddhist society. Nonetheless, the rise of *khruba* is a complex phenomenon that has never been linear or static and has emerged from the practices of *khruba* in the specific context of a modern and globalized society. Kwanchewan (2002) pointed out that nowadays there are a few monks who are popularly called *khruba*. Based on her long-term experience studying *khruba* in the North of Thailand¹, Kwanchewan has categorized *khruba* of recent times into two groups. The first group are those esteemed senior monks who have stayed in the monkhood for a long time, are seen as meritorious and sacred, and whose knowledge and practices are in the traditional Northern Thai style. *Khruba* in the second group are characterized by *ton bun*² attributes and their relationship with former *ton bun* such as Khruba Siwichai³ and Khruba Khao Pi⁴.

¹ Her seminal work on the Khruba Khao Pi movement and their Karen following in 1988 has strongly influenced later studies about *khruba* movements in the North.

² *Ton bun* (literally “person of merit”) is a form of holy men whose quality is rested on great merit compiled in past lives, meditative practice, and religious constructions, such as Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi in the past. As a result of this merit, they were believed to possess supernatural powers (Tambiah 1987, 115-16 cited in Bowie 2014a, 687; Kwanchewan 2010, 2).

³ In English literature, his name is also spelled *Sivichai*.

⁴ The closest disciple of Khruba Siwichai.

Unlike those in the first group, they carry out monastery construction, are in some cases very young, and are known widely across many communities (ibid., 265-266).

In this study, however, I view the phenomenon of *khru*ba during the past three decades in a more flexible way. Based on my observations, there are many monks who have been recently called *khru*ba. The length of time they have been a monk, whether short or long, is irrelevant. Even though *ton bun* attributes are still meaningful, many other sources of charisma have increasingly played an important role. *Khru*ba charisma now draws upon not only meditative practices and religious construction, but also expertise in magical subjects, wealth-luck enhancing rituals, and amulets. Modern *khru*ba attract large numbers of followers as well as large sums of monetary donations. This evidence indicates that there are now many types of *khru*ba who do not fit into either of the two categories described above. It also implies that *khru*ba have undergone a period of flourishing that involves heterogeneous beliefs and practices in response to social and cultural transformation and to meet diverse expectations of people.

The rise of modern *khru*ba represents heterogeneity or disjuncture, to use a term of Appadurai (1996) regarding religious practices, even though they continue to represent themselves as followers of a local Buddhist tradition: *Lan Na Buddhism*. Generally, modern *khru*ba manifest two characteristics, which are 1) the reproduction of the external elements, or what is thought to be authentic, of *Khru*ba Siwichai's monastic style, and 2) self-interpretations of the concept of *khru*ba which are diverse but which sometimes overlap one another. Therefore, the situation of *khru*ba is very complex.

In order to understand the phenomenon of modern *khru*ba, in this study, one must understand modern Thai religiosity and the constructing of charisma in today's globalized world.

In regard to social context, the term *khru*ba is well known among Northerners as well as among other Tai-speaking communities in the Upper Mekong region, sometimes referred to as the Lan Na cultural area, which covers the area of today's Northern Thailand, the eastern Shan State of Myanmar, Northern Laos and Xishuangbanna (Thai: *Sipsong Panna*) in southwestern China. It is also known among Thais in other parts of the country, but to a lesser degree. *Khru*ba literally means "great teacher," "teacher of

teachers,” and one who has advanced knowledge and attained spiritual perfection. This term is used as an honorary title either conferred or awarded to certain Buddhist monks, specifically among the Tai Buddhist communities in the Upper Mekong region. Cohen (2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002) has defined the *khru*ba tradition as a unique practice in the Theravada Buddhism of this area, so-called *Yuan Buddhism*. However, Ashley (2013 cited in Cohen 2017, 3) has pointed out that this term is problematic since it implies that this tradition is restricted to the Tai Yuan (Thai: *khon mueang*) of Northern Thailand. Cohen later uses Lan Na Buddhism to cover the cultural area of Lan Na (see Cohen 2017).

Lan Na Buddhism is characterized by a belief in *ton bun* combined with ideas regarding Ariya Metteyya (Thai: *Phra Si Ariya Mettrai*), the fifth Buddha to come. The most renowned *khru*ba in Thai Buddhist history is Khruba Siwichai (1878-1938), who led a movement to revitalize Buddhism across the Lan Na region and to counter Bangkok’s authority during the centralization at the turn of the twentieth century (see e.g., Sopha 1991; Isara 2011; Easum 2013; Bowie 2014a, 2014b). He received the title *Nak Bun haeng Lan Na*, or the saint of Lan Na, who is highly respected by Thais in all walks of life even until today.

Statues of Khruba Siwichai, large and small, have been created for worship in many places throughout the North, especially in Chiang Mai and Lamphun provinces. In 2016, the construction of Khruba Siwichai images was underway in many places, such as an 18-meter high standing image (27.99 meters high including the base) at Wat Phrathat Doi Ku in Doi Saket district, Chiang Mai province⁵. Images like this can be found both inside and outside of monasteries. The most popular one is located at the foot of Doi Suthep Mountain just outside the city of Chiang Mai.

⁵ The reliquary (Thai: *chedi*) in this monastery was renovated by Khruba Siwichai in 1931. After his demise, his remains were enshrined in another *chedi* in this monastery, too. The statue construction has begun in 2010 which was the 72nd anniversary of his demise. The monastery, in association with Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Chiang Mai campus), took 72 as an auspicious number since the sum of 7+2 is nine which is a close homonym of the word for progress, advancement and prosperity in Thai Buddhist world. Additionally, the statue was designed to have number nine in many elements, such as the height of the statue is 18 meters or 9 when it is divided by two. If includes the basement, the total height is 27.99 or 9.99 as the sum of 2+7 (Thairath online 2010; see also Irwin [2017, 93-94] on the significance of *dhammic* design elements).

After Khruba Siwichai's passing away, his practices and teachings were presumably carried on by his disciples, such as Khruba Khao Pi (1889-1977) and Khruba Wong (1913-2000), who recently have been regarded as successors to Khruba Siwichai's lineage. These three *khruba* are now highly revered by Northerners as the three greatest *khruba* of Lan Na. They were from the same hometown, the Li district of Lamphun province. The last and living *khruba* who is known as a successor of Siwichai's lineage is Khruba Phan (1928-present) of Wat Phraphutthabat Huai Tom (henceforth, Wat Huai Tom) in the same town. However, there were many other *khruba* who claimed to have been Siwichai's disciples, such as Khruba Chum of Wat Wang Mui-Chai Mongkhon (henceforth, Wat Wang Mui) in Mueang district, Lamphun province (died in 1976), Khruba Duang Di of Wat Tha Cham Pi in San Pa Tong district, Chiang Mai province (died in 2010), and currently Khruba Ariyachat⁶ of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan in Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province (1981- present).

In studying *khruba*, social science scholars have employed various approaches to examine a particular *khruba*. Three prominent approaches are millenarianism (e.g., Keyes 1981; Tambiah 1984; Sopha 1991; Kwanchewan 1998, 2002; Bowie 2014a), religious revivalism (e.g., Tanabe 2012 [an original version in 1992], 2004 [the first edition in 1986]; Cohen 2000b, 2001; Irwin 2017), and social memory (e.g., Turton 2006; Wasan, 2013).

With regard to *khruba*'s reputation and popularity, the concept of charisma has been employed. The studies of Khruba Siwichai and his close disciples, such as Khruba Khao Pi, show that their charismatic power relied to a great extent on meditation practice and construction projects. Nonetheless, studies of contemporary Thai Buddhism reveal that the religiosity of lay Buddhists has changed dramatically through the course of modernization (see Jackson 1999a, 1999b; Pattana 1999, 2012; Stengs 2009; McDaniel 2011). A deterritorialized world, transnationalities, and the capitalist market have had considerable significance in shaping the modern-day religiosity of Thai Buddhists as well as in shaping the *dhamma* practices of the monks. Similarly, in the case of modern *khruba*, although they still represent Lan Na Buddhism, to some extent

⁶ Khruba Ariyachat claims to be a disciple in line of Khruba Chum of Wat Wang Mui.

dhamma practices have changed in response to social and cultural transformation and in order to meet the widened expectations of diverse kinds of people. Therefore, the charisma of modern *khru*ba must be constructed through various means apart from meditation practice, construction and renovation works or any kinds of movements, which were the circumstances in the cases of the former *khru*ba.

However, our knowledge about the *khru*ba's charisma as well as their *dhamma* practices in the modern period is limited, because all of the previous studies have focused on the millenarian movement, Buddhist revivalism, Buddhist utopianism, ethnic identity, social memory, or network relationships. Therefore, I argue that the previous approaches do not inadequately explain the current phenomenon of modern *khru*ba. We need to look at the proliferation of *khru*ba from a new perspective. In the context of modern Thai society, *khru*ba cannot be viewed as homogenous, even though they are called by the same term, *khru*ba. Modern *khru*ba have their own ways of being *khru*ba. Their practices have changed to serve the heterogeneous expectations of their followers, and their networks have expanded worldwide, assisted by the technology of the modern world (e.g., the Internet and social media).

This study investigates the processes of constructing charisma and the role of networks of modern *khru*ba. This is to postulate that the charisma of *khru*ba in contemporary Thai society is diverse and complex. Modern *khru*ba represent the continuation of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition, or local knowledge of the particular locality, while also demonstrating a divergence from the conventional role of former *khru*ba. The concept of *khru*ba is not something fixed and static, and the charisma of *khru*ba also includes other sources and practices, such as wealth-luck oriented practices, luck-enhancing protective ritual services, and mass production of sacred-magic objects, in order to be accepted and consumed by different groups of people (Amporn [2016, 2017] uses the term “floating signifiers”). The study of the construction of charisma and the network of modern *khru*ba here shed light on a dimension of social life and articulated value resulting from the practices of actors in specific circumstances.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.2.1 How has the charisma of *khru*ba been constructed through various meanings of charisma and by different religious networks in the context of modern Thai society?
- 1.2.2 How have the *dhamma* practices of contemporary *khru*ba been developed or transformed in order to fit widened expectations by heterogeneous people, including the middle classes, in the context of modern Buddhist society?
- 1.2.3 How have *khru*ba's religious networks been built through the circulation of sacred-magic objects as crucial tools to enhance the processes of constructing charisma?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are the following:

- 1.3.1 To investigate the processes of constructing the charisma of modern *khru*ba that illuminate changes in the concept of *khru*ba from the past to the present, to understand the multifaceted charisma of modern *khru*ba expected and consumed by diverse groups of followers, and to explore how modern *khru*ba have been actively involved in the articulating process of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition and Buddhist religiosity of the laity in modern society by employing many different strategies;
- 1.3.2 To investigate the *dhamma* practices of modern *khru*ba, which have been transformed as the articulating process to respond to current situations and to meet different expectations of followers, especially the middle classes;
- 1.3.3 To examine the role of networks among modern *khru*ba which have been key mechanisms in drawing, maintaining, and expanding groups of followers and *khru*ba's charisma, and to examine the networks themselves through the expectations and imagination of followers regarding modern *khru*ba and their sacred-magic objects in order to understand the relationships between people, between information and people, and between people and objects.

1.4 REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS

1.4.1 *Khruba* Terminology

There are three ideas regarding the derivation and use of the term *khruba*. All three are based on Pali terms, as follows.

- (1) *guru + pacariya*
- (2) *guru + upajjhaya*
- (3) *guru + para*

According to Singkha (cited in Isara 2011, 7-8) the term *khruba* is a combination of [Lan Na Pali form] *khuru* > *khru* which is derived from Pali, *guru* (venerable, revered, teacher) (Davids and Stede 2004, 253 cited in Khamindra and Pisith 2015) and *pacariya* (“teacher upon teacher” or “teacher and teacher of teacher”) (ibid.). Here only *pa* is taken from *pacariya* and then changed from *pa* to *ba* in the local pronunciation. Then, *ba* is joined with the word *khru* which becomes the new term *khruba*. The etymology of *khruba* is therefore from *khрупacariya*. According to this theory, the actual Pali form could have been *guru + pacariya = gurupacariya*, the equivalent status of modern professorship, or “grand great teacher.”

Next, there is also the combination of the two Pali terms *guru* (teacher) and *upajjhaya* (literally “one who is gone close up to”), which means a spiritual teacher or preceptor or master (ibid.). Thus, the words then become *gurupajjhaya*, meaning “a spiritual teacher who would not only teach but also advise disciples or followers on matters from general well-being to spiritual achievement and consultant.” Following the Lan Na Pali form, it may have been written as *khрупajjhaya*. Nevertheless, *upajjhaya* is not popularly used among the Lan Na people but *acariya* (*ajarn/acharn/ahjan*) is used widely. However, we should also keep in mind that this popular usage has no *p* in front, and *pacariya* is nowhere else to be found in use. Therefore, *upajjhaya* may be considered a possibility rather than *pacariya*.

Another possibility of the derivation of *khruba*, which gives the most comprehensive evidence in terms of meaning and linguistic analysis, is *gurupara*. Similar to the above two theories, this one also draws from the two Pali terms *guru* and *para*, *guru* (teacher)

and *para* “has gone beyond”, “has crossed over to”, or “has arrived at the other shore.” Therefore, *gurupara* means a teacher who has accomplished knowledge and attained spiritual achievement and has arrived at the end of the destination (liberation). The logical explanation of *khruva* runs as follows: from *gurupara* > *gurupar* > *khruapar* > *khruva*. People in Keng Tung and other parts of Shan State commonly pronounce it *khuva*.

Khamindra and Pisith (2015) add that an equivalent of the Burmese usage of *khruva* is *paragu*, literally “one who has gone beyond” or “one who has reached the other side/crossed over to the other shore.” Burmese usage of *paragu* is a reverse version of *gurupara*. In Burmese, however, *paragu* is not used as a title for a spiritual monk, but for anyone who has obtained a doctorate or completed a Ph.D. in a modern education system. And *paragu* is also used in the monastic education system still in practice today in Myanmar.

1.4.2 Theoretical Approaches to *Khruba* Studies

Based on the literature review, *khruva* in the North have long taken center stage in this area of study. *Khruba* and their movements were a focal point of study for decades, starting from the most renowned, Khruba Siwichai, at the turn of the twentieth century. Recently, we have very popular *ton bun*, like Khruba Bunchum (see Cohen 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Amporn 2016, 2017; Kataoka 2017). In this section, I would like to discuss three prominent approaches generally employed by scholars to investigate particular *khruva* as follows.

1) The *Khruba* Movement and Millenarian Perspective

The concept of millenarianism is employed by social science scholars to investigate *khruva* and their movements, whereby the concept of *ton bun*, which emerged in the context of social crisis, has been investigated in the same vein as the millenarian movement. Worsley (1957) on the *cargo cult* of Melanesia is a seminal work looking at the millenarian movement. He postulated that the *cargo cult* is a millenarian movement of a minority group that flourished as a result of economic and political tension. He uses

the term “millenarian” to include both those movements which anticipate that the millennium will occur solely as a result of supernatural intervention and those which envision that the action of human beings will be necessary.

Millenarian movements are the result of suffering, despairing conditions resulting from domination by a colonizer, or from the domination of the local ruling class. These are the movements of dominated, repressed groups against the dominators. They use supernatural discourse as a tool for expressing political discontent as a manifestation of being marginalized and having poor technical development. In fact, according to Marxist theory, there is and there has to be an evolution of religious movements into more proper political ones with the ultimate goal of changing society from the current state (ibid.). Socio-political relations under the crisis are considered as a source of political power.

This approach has had a great impact on the studies of movements around the world, especially those of dominated and marginalized groups. In the colonial times in Southeast Asia, for instance, the *Saya San* Rebellion in 1930-1932 in British Burma, the *phu mi bun* rebellion in the 1900s and earlier in Northeastern Thailand, and the Khruba Siwichai movement in the early twentieth century in Northern Thailand are exemplary cases examined by the millenarian approach. Specifically in the case of *khruha*, social scientists have pointed out that this phenomenon has the implications of the millenarian movement in the so-called Ariya Metteyya, or *ton bun* movement.

Exemplary works adopting the millenarian approach include Hinton (1979), Keyes (1981), Tambiah (1984), Sopha (1991), Kwanchewan (2002), and Bowie (2014a). In these works, the key points of analysis are 1) the changing socio-economy of the North resulting from centralization by the Siamese state along with intense enforcement of the *Sangha* Act (1902), and 2) the emergence of the *ton bun* savior who is marked by great merit and possession of supernatural power, the one who has come to save people from crisis and to prepare them for the age of Ariya Metteyya (Cohen 2000; Keyes 1977; Bowie 2014a). Keyes (1977) describes the millenarian movements in Thailand as being 1) caused primarily by a crisis centered on political power, and 2) the articulation of ideological resistance which has roots in the culture to which they adhere. Moreover,

Keyes asserts that “millenarianism appears to be most associated with the crisis in human relationships, and the most central of these relationships is the distribution of power within society” (ibid., 284).

2) **Buddhist Revivalism: A Theoretical Debate about Buddhist Millenarianism**

Cohen (2001) and Tanabe (2012) urge us to shift the theoretical perspective regarding *khruha* movements from millenarianism to Buddhist revivalism or active utopianism. According to Tanabe (2004, 2012), one of the concepts of the millenarian movement, belief in the coming of Ariya Metteyya Buddha, in the North as formerly suggested by Keyes (1977), led to the functionalist perspective. The main argument is that political power which has its roots in a social crisis has led us to emphasize socio-economy power which is different from the power which has its roots in the ideological practice of the people (Tanabe 2004, 177-178).

With regard to the concept of *ton bun*, Tanabe has argued that, on the level of ideological practice of the people, we did not find an ideological condition relevant to millenarianism in the Khruba Siwichai movement because the *ton bun* tradition rests on the basis of merit and morals, which always refute the exercise of power through magical and supernatural intervention. In other words, magical power and supernatural intervention are considered motives in the millenarian movement but not in the *ton bun* movement. (Tanabe 2004, 183-184; see also Cohen 2017, 12-14; and Irwin 2017, 93-96).

Hence, in the religious revivalist approach, acquiring *ton bun* charisma is not limited to times of crisis. It is quite clear that *khruha* movements ideologically precluded any political mobilization, even if upon the historical evidence their movements inevitably caused a number of conflicts between the central authority and the local monks. Khruba Siwichai’s ideal society appeared in a vision (Thai: *nimit*) and resulted in a strong desire to restore Buddhism from the state of decline. As we have seen, Khruba Siwichai’s *ton bun* quality relies on the practice of strict asceticism and lifelong activities for merit-making as fundamentally expressed in long-distance pilgrimages and the construction

and restoration of religious sites. Thus, the *ton bun* movement of Khruba Siwichai and his disciples reveal an orientation to this-worldly matters which are at odds with the goal of the millenarian movement.

Similarly, Cohen in his recent studies of the *ton bun* tradition (2000b, 2001), has also argued that the *ton bun* tradition of Khruba Siwichai could be more accurately described as a form of Buddhist revivalism or active utopianism, that is, the serious ascetic and meditative dimension of the modern *ton bun* tradition that has precluded magical, cataclysmic and militant manifestations of millenarianism. He adds that millenarianism is simply a language for expressing revivalist aspirations. The age of Ariya Metteyya provides a blueprint for the ideal Buddhist society, that is, one governed by Buddhist morality. In this endeavor, moral regeneration and the construction and repair of sacred things are intertwined; thus, the latter are not only important acts of merit-making but also occasions for moral instruction in the form of sermons (Cohen 2001, 241).

To sum up, both scholars have suggested that, either in the past or in modern times, *khruba* movements and *ton bun* attributes should be interpreted as forms of religious revivalism. From this approach, *khruba*, *ton bun*, and their followers are identified by a strong desire to revitalize Buddhism and to build a Buddha Land in the context of the regeneration of Buddhism amidst moral degradation.

3) From Buddhist Revivalism to Social Memory

This approach to examine the *khruba* phenomenon was introduced by Turton (2006) and followed by Wasan (2013) in his study of the role of the charismatic Lue monk, Khruba Khuean, and his transnational journeys for Buddhist revitalization in Lue communities. This approach is elaborated from the idea of Buddhist revivalism introduced by Cohen and Tanabe (see above). According to Wasan, the *khruba* was situated in the changing context of regional integration in the borderlands of the Upper Mekong region. Emphasizing the role of a Buddhist monk and his activities to revitalize Theravada Buddhism in northern Thailand and other Lue ethnic communities in the eastern Shan State of Myanmar and in Xishuangbanna of PRC has shed light on mnemonic practices among the Lue as members of a diaspora. In this sense, *ton bun*

is not simply a form of religious revivalism but is a “remembered person.”

Social memory has shifted from examining the life stories of *khrua-ton bun*, as done by many scholars such as Tambiah, Keyes, and Cohen, to investigating religious and regional journeys. *Khrua* in the Tai Buddhist world, as a remembered person with concrete memorials of that person, such as *chedi khrua*, the stupas enshrined with a great monk’s remains, statues, and ceremonies organized by the Buddhist laity at community festivals, are analyzed as the expressions of a community’s history. And religious restoration in the region is the construction process of a new sense of place and belonging among Tai ethnic groups who have long lived across national borders in the upper Mekong region. From this dimension, we can understand not only the significant changes that have taken place in those localities, but also the local memories and the history of those places. Social memory that revolves around a *khrua* and his religious sites is taken in the same line of Turton’s remembering with respect and Connerton’s commemorative ceremonies (Wasan 2013, 37-38).

These three theoretical approaches have greatly contributed to and influenced the study of *khrua* until these days. However, new perspectives have also been employed by scholars to look at *khrua* of the present time and their movements in a more comprehensive way under a more complicated situation, as shown in the state of *khrua* studies below.

1.4.3 State of *Khrua* Studies

Khrua Siwichai has always been the center of *khrua* studies. By the word “center” I mean first that he is the main figure in the study of charismatic monks and religious movements in the North. From the studies of Khrua Siwichai, other charismatic monks related to him have then been examined, such as Khrua Khao Pi and Khrua Wong. And, second, previous approaches employed in the studies of Khrua Siwichai have influenced the studies of *khrua* movements in recent times, such as those concerning Khrua Khuean, Khrua Thueang, and Khrua Bunchum. From the three prominent approaches above, this section gives an overview of the state of *khrua* studies which

also helps track down issues and theoretical approaches employed from the past to the present, as follows.

Keyes (1981), Tambiah (1984), Sopha (1991), Easum (2013), Bowie (2014a), and Cohen (2001) have investigated Khruba Siwichai and his disciples as charismatic leaders, or *ton bun*, who led a movement similar to the *phu mi bun* movement in the Northeast (see Keyes 1977), opposing the centralization of the state (by the Siamese authority). A paradoxical issue in his biography was also investigated when Khruba Siwichai began his vocation as a rebel but ended up as a Buddhist saint of the nation.

Tanabe (2012), Cohen (2002), and Somchai (2013) have examined Khruba Siwichai as a *phayatham*, or *bodhisatta*, who led a movement to revitalize Buddhism in Lan Na through the construction and renovation of religious monuments. His construction and renovation works were seen as part of a sacred campaign to save Lan Na Buddhism from extinction in the context of the half-way mark of the life of Buddhism according to the Buddhist prophecy⁷. This campaign was strategically carried out on an ideological level of the Lan Na people as many sites of construction were related to legends of the travels of the Buddha” (Thai: *tamnan phrachao liap lok*, the Buddha’s footprints, reliquaries and the years of birth, and reliquaries of the cities. Khruba Siwichai was then seen as a king who was the main patron of Buddhism, and *phayatham* who disseminated *dhamma* to laypeople and gave them opportunities to make merit in order to build the moral community to prepare for the coming of the future and the fifth Buddha. In addition, Charnnarong (1997) investigates the construction and renovation works of Khruba Siwichai in the field of art history.

Hinton (1979), Kwanchewan (1988), and Gravers (2012, 2017) have examined *khruba* movements and relationships with ethnic groups, especially the Karen, who had constituted the majority of followers in *khruba* movements (of Khruba Siwichai,

⁷ In one popular version of Thai Buddhist prophecy, it is believed that “there would be no female monks within 500 years after Buddha’s death. Within 1,000 years, there would be no *Arahant* (Buddhist saint) capable of travelling through the air. Over the next 2,000 years, things would get worse; no pundits would ever master the Tripitaka (Theravada Buddhist scriptures). Three thousand years later, the *sangha* (Buddhist monk order) would no longer exist. Four thousand years later, monks’ bowls and robes would disappear. Five thousand years after Buddha’s death, his religion would come to an end” (Pattana 2008, 141).

Khruba Khao Pi, and Khruba Wong) and contributed the majority of the workforce in religious constructions of *khruba* across the region. This exemplifies the large number of followers from non-Tai ethnic groups in *khruba* movements. What is interesting is the role of *khruba* as leaders of those Karen as well as expectations of Karen towards *khruba*, an ideology and imagination about religion and state of the Karen under the context of being subordinate and marginalized.

Additionally, there are certain works concerning unsettled issues about Khruba Siwichai. By using new and wider historical data, new findings are presented, such as the latest work of Bowie (2014b) that shifts the perspective on the controversies with the centralized state from internal conflict with the Thai monastic order to changes in state policies regarding military conscription that aimed to restrict the traditional rights of the northerners to ordain and expand state access to manpower. Moreover, issues of religious practices and monastic lineage, amulets, art and architectural style of religious monuments, networks, or even sites to enshrine Khruba Siwichai's remains are still reinvestigated by scholars, such as Isara (2011), Sirisak (2016), and Pensupa (forthcoming⁸). Moreover, there is a work on religious communities and networks formed by the former *khruba* (Khao Pi and Wong) and changes after their demise. The work concerns how the communities and networks of *khruba* are maintained, especially among the Karen in the changing socio-economic context, including a new connection with a cross-border charismatic monk in recent times, U Tuzana, as found in Kwanchewan (2014).

Irwin (2017) has investigated how *barami* is a key concept in the construction-centric religious life of northern Thai Buddhism through a case study of two charismatic monks of Chiang Rai province, Khruba Kham La and Khruba Intha. These *khruba* led a campaign together to build or renovate over twenty temples between 1953 and 1979 throughout the North. They were celebrated as *phra khu barami haeng Lan Na* or the *barami* partners of Lan Na while Khruba Kham La was also revered by locals as “the Khruba Siwichai of Chiang Rai”.

⁸ Pensupa Sukkata is the principal researcher conducting research on Khruba Siwichai for “Khrubachao Srivichai Institute Foundation.” Her book will be published soon.

For the study of contemporary *khru*ba, it is found that these *khru*ba have represented the continuation of the *khru*ba tradition in certain features: *ton bun* qualities, religious construction, and relations with ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, under the context of modernity and globalization, scholars have employed new analytical perspectives to show the complexity of the *khru*ba movements today. Transnational *khru*ba networks, ethnic and religious identity, and the floating meaning of *khru*ba are major issues in the studies of contemporary *khru*ba.

Under the context of globalization, which is characterized by transnationalized, mediatized and digitalized societies, and flows of people and information, a *khru*ba is regarded as a free agent mobilizing the transnational movements, connecting people along the borders of the nation-states in the Upper Mekong region. This kind of movement has not only demonstrated a desire to build a cross-border Buddha kingdom as an active utopian society, but has also led community members and diasporas to construct and reconstruct their ethnic identity, history and social memory. Their constructed history, identity, and social memory have recently become free from the confinement of borders of the modern nation-states, as found in the studies of Khruba Bunchum by Cohen (2000a, 2000b). In the case of Khruba Thueang and Dara'ang, or Silver Palaung, ethnic and religious identity is highlighted as a political force. Through a claim to be good members of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition and active devotees of *khru*ba movement, a cultural identity has been constructed and employed to negotiate with the mainstream discourse about ethnic minority of the Thai state. Dara'ang proclaim to be cultural citizens while their state citizenship is denied.

Kataoka (2017) has investigated the relationships of Khruba Bunchum's movement centered in the Thai-Myanmar borderland and the Lahu ethnic group. He discusses the process of meshing Buddhist concepts with traditional beliefs of the Lahu. Khruba Bunchum's activity to build up a Buddhist kingdom has served as a powerful prototype to Lahu utopian dream of wishing to be free from the power and exploitation of modern lowland states. Additionally, Amporn (2016, 2017) has touched on Khruba Bunchum's long solitary meditation and illuminates a semiotic approach, which signifies the effect of mass media in shaping people's imagination and reformulating religious practices.

In the context of transnationalization and advanced communication technology, Khruba Bunchum is able to mobilize a cross-border movement and has formed a network of different groups of followers, ranging from local Tais and hill tribe people to the upper middle classes in Thailand, Myanmar and Bhutan. The veneration of Khruba Bunchum by diverse groups of followers has illuminated the deterritorialized sacred realm since Khruba Bunchum has become a floating signifier who is not limited to a sacred realm as traditionally conceived. The floating signifier makes it possible for a sacred figure to be consumed and redefined by different groups of followers, such as being *ton bun* for traditional followers and a sort of pop culture icon for Thai middle classes.

Kwanchewan's study about U Tuzana, a Karen charismatic monk (2014, 2017), has emphasized connectivity across the Thai-Myanmar borderland. Owing to his transnational agency, U Tuzana has formed a complex network with different groups of people in Myanmar and Thailand: local Karen, Thai and Burmese millionaires, Karen migrant workers in the big cities of Thailand, and Thai and Karen followers of the former *khruba* (Siwichai, Khao Pi, and Wong). As his network and reputation are spreading, his ability to mobilize money and labor force for cross-border construction works is increasing.

However, the most recent study of *khruba* by Nattapong (2017) has taken on a different dimension. Nattapong is concerned with the proliferation of *khruba* in the North during the last three decades (1987- present). He coins the term “neo-*khruba*” in order to make a distinction between the former-day *khruba* and the contemporary ones. He points out that the proliferation of *khruba* is a consequence of localism in the North since 1987.

A wave of localism has made Khruba Siwichai widely perceived as a local hero and imagined ideal of *khruba*. From then on, certain aspects of Khruba Siwichai have been reproduced, such as external elements of his monastic style, by neo-*khruba* and used as a brand identity to attract devotees. At the same time, neo-*khruba* have employed many other techniques to respond to expectations of people. Thus, they can attract large numbers of followers and donations.

Through reviewing these sources, I have formed an approach to investigate modern *khru*ba to fit well with the objectives of this study as I shall elaborate in the following sections.

1.4.4 Modern *Khru*ba and Translocalities

By following Appadurai (1996) in the concept of modernity, I coin the term “modern *khru*ba” not in the sense to refer to *khru*ba who stand in opposition to traditional order in the pre-modern era or *khru*ba who are characterized as less mysterious and are more rational (by science and technology) as suggested by modernization theorists (e.g., Giddens 1990). “Modern *khru*ba”, here, rather relies on Appadurai’s concept of modernity (1996), which is about difference, disjuncture, and heterogenization that lead to the new emergence, re-evaluation, and re-intervention of cultural identities. Therefore, modern *khru*ba in this study refers to *khru*ba of the present time who represent heterogenization through re-evaluation, redefinition, and re-interpretation of the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism. Additionally, the term “modern *khru*ba” is used to represent the re-enchantment of the world in which diverse arrays of opposition subvert and undermine formal-rational logics and processes. The re-enchantment of magic-irrational makes two claims. The first is that there are more things in the universe than are imagined by rationalist epistemologies and ontologies of science. The second is the notion that formal rationality is always the best way is no longer dominant (see Jenkins 2000).

The heterogeneity of practices and sources of *khru*ba’s charisma could be viewed as a result of the articulation of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition, which is local knowledge of a particular locality, and the globalized world. The concept of *khru*ba is context generated. Thus, it is not a given but, ephemeral. As global culture flows, modern *khru*ba are formed by a series of interactions between the local and the global.

The *khru*ba is thus a dimension of social life, an articulated value which emerges from the practices of actors in a specific context (Appadurai 1996; Thirawuth 2004).

The reproduction of the *ton bun* narrative, prosperity-oriented practices, wealth-luck enhancing ritual services, mass production of amulets, and networks of multifaceted

charisma are intertwined in relations with the global context in order to meet widened expectations of heterogeneous peoples, especially the middle classes. Additionally, the *khruha* make use of modern technology, such as modern communication devices, mass media, and advanced transportation to convey information and sacred-magic objects to followers worldwide. In this way, modern *khruha* can become translocal actors crossing the boundaries of Lan Na ethno-cultural identity.

1.4.5 *Barami* and the Concept of Charisma in *Khruba* Studies

In social science literature, scholars have applied Weber's concept of charisma (see Weber 1988) to explain various social movements led by charismatic leaders. Similarly, in the studies of Buddhist movements led by monks or charismatic figures, charisma is often referred to by the term *barami* (Pali: *parami*) in the Buddhist conception, although in fact there is no Pali or Buddhist term that exactly translates to the Greek term *charisma* as used by Christians or in modern sociology. In Buddhism, *barami* means perfection or completeness of certain virtues which cultivates a way of purification while reaching the goal of enlightenment (Wisdom Library 2014; see also Irwin [2017, 90-92] for a detailed discussion on the concept of *barami* in Thai society). For Weber (1988), the legitimacy of charismatic authority rests on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and on the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him. He defines charisma itself as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Taylor 2012, 196-197).

The charisma of the former *khruha*, particularly in the light of millenarianism, was characterized as a combination of the two abovementioned concepts as we have seen in the case of *Khruba Siwichai*, who attained *barami* as a result of great merit, meditative practice and an ascetic mode of life. Consequently, this *barami* was used as a fundamental source for the success of his movement because his followers believed that he possessed supernatural powers or the ability to lead them to certain goals. Vested with this influence, he could mobilize large numbers of followers to carry out

construction and renovation works (for religion and for public services) throughout the North as well as to form a resistance movement against Bangkok's authority.

In particular, this study has adopted the Weberian concept of charisma to explain the construction of charisma of the modern *khruba* while employing *barami*, or charisma in Buddhist conceptions, in consideration of supernatural powers.

Regarding the Weberian concept of charisma, Ritzer (1988b) explains that although Weber did not deny that a charismatic leader may have outstanding characteristics, his sense of charisma was more dependent upon his group of disciples and the way they defined the charismatic leader. A charismatic leader, then, can be someone who is quite ordinary. What is crucial is the process by which such a leader is set apart from ordinary people and treated as if endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or qualities that are not accessible to the ordinary person (Miyahara 1983 cited in Ritzer 1988b, 120).

Charisma shall be understood to refer to an extraordinary quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed. "Charismatic authority," hence, shall refer to a rule over men, whether predominantly external or predominantly internal, to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific person (Weber 1946, 295).

Therefore, charisma is not only an individual's physical characteristics but also a relationship, a mutual blending of the selves of leader and followers. Lindholm (1990 [PDF version in 2002, 10]), in addition, states that charisma appears only in interaction with the vast majority of others who lack it. In other words, even though charisma is thought of as something intrinsic to the individual, a person cannot reveal this quality in isolation; it is evident only in interaction with those who have been affected by it.

Thus, if the charismatic person is able to compel, the followers have a matching capacity for being compelled. Significantly, Lindholm urges us to pay more attention to the sensual/emotional process that works as a crucial linkage between leader and followers, while Weber's concept of charisma does not focus enough on this. Hence, in Lindholm's model, the diverse social processes linked by emotional interchanges that surround charisma are highlighted. Leaders are charismatic when they can capture the

hearts and minds of their followers. Therefore, we need to contextualize any study of charisma in order to show the connection between circumstances and the anticipation of a charismatic relation, and this is an important aspect that I have adopted in this study.

Moreover, charisma can also be found in an object (Weber 1988, 2). A person or an object with charisma is believed to have extraordinary powers and capabilities which appear to or are recognized by other people. Weber includes both persons and objects in his idea of charisma, both natural and artificial capabilities. As illustrated in Tambiah's study (1984), charisma can be found in Buddhist saints, as well as in their amulets, teachings, or even their images.

However, *khru*ba charisma requires a specific explanation regarding the source of power within the context of the Lan Na Buddhist world. In the study of *khru*ba, the question of how they acquire charisma remains important. According to the literature review, I found the studies of Khruba Siwichai (and his disciple, Khruba Khao Pi) by Hinton (1979), Keyes (1981), Tambiah (1984), Sopa (1991), Kwanchewan (1998, 2002), Isara (2011), and Tanabe (2012). Other *khru*ba studied are Khruba Wong by Gravers (2012, 2017), Khruba Bunchum by Cohen (2001, 2002), Amporn (2016, 2017) and Kataoka (2017), Khruba Thueang by Ashley (2011, 2017), Khruba Wajiraphanya by Turton (2006), and Khruba Khuen by Wasan (2013), Khruba Kham La and Khruba Intha by Irwin (2017). With regard to charisma of *khru*ba, the studies above have consistently concluded that *khru*ba charisma rests upon 1) practicing the forest monk tradition and asceticism, or *thudong* (Pali: *dhutanga*), and 2) being actively involved in the world through their organization of major efforts to construct and/or repair Buddhist buildings and monuments or to create the Buddha Land.

Therefore, *khru*ba charisma of the former *khru*ba, especially Khruba Siwichai, has roots in the concept of mind training and meditative contemplation that leads to spiritual attainment or perfections (Thai: *kammathan*, Pali: *kammatthana*) and the concept of *ton bun*. *Ton bun* is a combination of the notions of *bodhisatta* and the coming of Ariya Metteyya Buddha. *Kammathan* and *ton bun* attributions are manifested through strict meditative practice, sacred campaigning for religious construction and renovation, and possession of supernatural powers (Pali: *iddhi*). Khruba Siwichai is most commonly

referred to as *ton bun haeng Lan Na*, or the saint of Lan Na. *Ton bun* or *nak bun* are often used interchangeably to explain the monks who are generally known for their supernatural powers. Supernatural powers include having a divine ear, a divine eye, and the ability to read minds, assume various forms, and recollect past lives. Khruba Siwichai was believed to have at least the first three of these powers and more (Tambiah 1987, 115-116 cited in Bowie 2014a, 687).

As for the question of why this study relies heavily on Khruba Siwichai, it is undoubtedly because he was the most renowned *khruba* in Thai Buddhist history and has an enduring importance in Lan Na society even today. He is highly respected as the Buddhist saint of Lan Na. His religious practices are treated as authentically belonging to the Lan Na Buddhist tradition. This study is concerned about the changes in the concept and meaning of *khruba* and *khruba*'s charisma and how it is manifested, what elements are newly constructed and how it is different from that of former *khruba*, especially Khruba Siwichai. The reason is that, according to Weber (Ritzer 1992), after the charismatic leader dies, the charismatic authority is on the way toward becoming traditional authority. It means that Khruba Siwichai's disciples, in direct or indirect ways, acquire *khruba*'s charisma in a traditional manner to retain the faith of followers. Traditional charisma of the successors is based on a claim by Khruba Siwichai and a belief on the part of the followers, that there is virtue in the sanctity of practices and charismatic power which is symbolically transferred to the next in line.

Therefore, constructing charisma in this study means the ongoing works of modern *khruba* in order to acquire *khruba* attributes considered as endowed with supernatural or exceptional powers and set apart from ordinary people as charismatic figures like their predecessors. In realizing that modern *khruba*, as successors, are unlikely to achieve the same aura as Khruba Siwichai, a set of rules and practices is developed to identify the next charismatic figure in line, such as *nirothakam*, or the retreat, *ton bun* characteristics, or the external elements of monastic style. Nonetheless, in order to respond to the globalized world and heterogeneous expectations of diverse groups of people, modern *khruba* cannot claim only the traditional charisma derived from Khruba Siwichai but must also employ many other techniques to construct their own *khruba* charisma.

The constructing of charisma shall also illustrate the transformation of *dhamma* practices of modern *khru*ba in contemporary Thai society.

1.4.6 *Dhamma* Practices in Modern Thai Society

In following up with the change in *dhamma* practices of *khru*ba in the modern era, surprisingly, I found that no scholarship has seriously touched on this issue.

I have come across a few works roughly discussing modern *khru*ba and their practices, e.g., Wilak (2002, n.d.), and Jirachat (2010). The main point of these works is to express their concerns about Buddhist practices of modern *khru*ba that are thought to be deviant from what *Khru*ba Siwichai and other former *khru*ba had practiced in the past. In fact, we know little about the *dhamma* practices of *khru*ba in the past. At that time, according to Isara (2011), *dhamma* practices of monks in this region belonged to the *Yogavacara* tradition, or Lan Na Buddhism (Cohen 2000, 2001, 2017). It is a combination of Buddhist and non-Buddhist practices, such as Theravada, Mahayana, and local beliefs in animism and spiritualism (Pisith 2015).

In the case of *Khru*ba Siwichai, he was a meditation practitioner and, of course, a meditation master for his disciples. Hagiographic writings relate that after an initial interest in black magic, he went to study meditation with the meditation master, *Khru*ba Upala, who kindly taught him the practice of *samatha kammathan* (concentration meditation) and *vipassana kammathan* (insight meditation). After *Khru*ba Siwichai profoundly learned from *Khru*ba Upala for the period of one *vassa* (Thai: *phansa*, a period in the monkhood), he then went on to learn more on *pariyat* and *patibat* (the doctrine of study and practice) with *Khru*ba Wat Doi Kham, and finally, he went back to Wat Ban Hong Luang to study with his preceptor, *Khru*ba Samana. Before *Khru*ba Siwichai began a building project, he would meditate at the site. His *dhamma* practices included an ascetic mode of life and strict vegetarianism, eating one meal a day and fasting on holy days. Moreover, he did not chew betel or tobacco. He lacked interest in material gain and did not speak ill of others (Sommai 2002 cited in Bowie 2014a, 688).

With regard to modern *khru*ba, Jirachat (2010) finds that during 1987- 2007, new *khru*ba have emerged trying earnestly to draw a connection with *Khru*ba Siwichai in

different degrees. This attempt implies the significance and influence of Khruba Siwichai who has been recently perceived as a *khruba* role model, one who had delineated the unique tradition to be followed. These modern *khruba* begin their monastic vocation by using this discourse to proclaim their authenticity. However, their practices are very diverse and deviant from *Vinaya* (Thai: *phra winai*) and the *khruba* tradition of Lan Na (Wilak n.d. and interview June 1, 2016). In their views, the modern *khruba*'s practices have changed considerably to serve intensified capitalist desires and the commercialization of Thai Buddhism (Thai: *phuttha phanit*, see Pattana 2008).

Studies of *khruba* after Khruba Siwichai have focused on the same direction, while *dhamma* practices have remained untouched, as I have described above. I would like to point out that these studies cannot catch up with the change in *dhamma* practices under the changing socio-economic context. This is because they are engaging in an essentialist point of view. Their studies are still revolving around the *khruba* who are characterized by traditional *ton bun* attributes, those who could gain a huge number of followers, especially among ethnic minorities, and carry out religious construction and renovation projects. Scholars are always seeking to investigate this kind of *khruba*, while other *khruba* who do not meet these criteria are eventually excluded.

This essentialist point of view may overshadow the transformation in *dhamma* practices of modern *khruba*.

Studies on Buddhism in contemporary society, e.g., Jackson (1999a, 1999b), Pattana (2008, 2012), McDaniel (2011), Rozenberg (2010) or even a seminal work of Apinya (1993, 1998) have shown that religious experiences and expectations of lay Buddhists in Thailand and other Theravada Buddhist communities throughout Asia have been transformed as a result of modernization and the proliferation of the money market. This idea has provided a basic understanding with which to look at the transformation of *dhamma* practices of the Buddhist monks. We assume that modernization and capitalism-consumerism, including globalization, have tremendous effects on everyday practices of modern *khruba* accordingly. Outwardly, they are still *khruba* who represent the uniquely Lan Na Buddhist tradition of Khruba Siwichai, but, at the same time, some of their *dhamma* practices must have been transformed in response to social and cultural transformation of the current situation.

It should be noted that the work of Nattapong (2017) has also touched on the flourishing of *khruaba* during the past three decades and their adaptation in order to respond to the current situation. Since his work was done in the same period of this study, thus some points of analysis overlap, particularly those on religious practices of modern *khruaba*. However, this study goes further by looking at other significant aspects of the phenomenon: the construction of charisma and the role of networks which make these two works different yet complementary.

1.4.7 Buddhist Religiosity in Modern Thai Society

Giddens (1996 cited in Pattana 1999, 30) conceptualizes modernity by stating that modernity and modern institutions have penetrating power into the issue of day-to-day life. In this penetration process, it is no doubt that the modern nation-state and capitalist market represent the most pervasive social institutions and forces impacting people's lives in the modern world. Religion is the cultural terrain in which the articulation between primordial beliefs and practices and rationalized religion is more noticeable. As expected by modernization theorists, modernity has caused the decline of religion and magical understanding, as what Weber calls the "disenchantment of the world" (Jenkins 2000).

However, Appadurai (1996) has argued that modernization may lead to creating awareness of difference, disjuncture, and heterogenization that lead to the new emergence, re-evaluation, and re-intervention of ethnic and cultural identities. Thus, to follow Appadurai, we can say that the promise of modernity to eliminate primordial religious beliefs and practices has never been realized. Rather, modernization has produced social and cultural forms which are quite different from "a level of organization and production along with belief systems, similar to those already achieved by industrial societies" (Kearney cited in Pattana 1999, 40). As Jenkins (2000) and Tanabe and Keyes (2002) have argued, secularization and disenchantment are not the same thing because they cannot be simply taken to mean that either that "supernatural" or "irrational" beliefs have necessarily declined in importance or that the established religion, Buddhism or Christianity, has necessarily been supplanted by other spiritualities. The current phenomenon of re-enchantment of magic, supernatural,

irrational beliefs in modern society has insisted that first, there are more things in the universe than are imagined by rationalist epistemologies and ontologies of science and that second, the notion that formal rationality is always the “best way” is no longer dominant (Jenkins, *ibid.*)

In Thai society, a number of scholars discuss how modernization (e.g., modern nation-state, institutionalized Buddhism, mass media, and capitalism-consumerism) have articulated with Buddhist religiosity, which obviously appears in various forms of beliefs and practices, such as spirit-medium cults, cults of national heroes and heroines, cults of amulets, including devotion to the Mahayana Buddhist *bodhisatta* Guanyin and movements surrounding Theravada Buddhist monks, both living and dead, reputed to possess supernatural power. These scholars believe that the modern nation-state, mass media and modern transportation, expansion of the Thai middle-class, capitalist economy and consumerism, and modernizing and urbanizing projects are the most important factors defining today’s Thai religiosity, and that these also reflect the fluid and irregular shapes of the nation’s religious landscape. This variety of beliefs and practices in contemporary Thai society thwarts the modernist-rationalist thesis in which the civil order produced by modernization and the nation-state would ultimately dissolve primordial attachment to religion.

Tanabe and Keyes (2002), by borrowing Simmel’s idea (1978), have suggested that the fundamental condition of modernity inevitably leads to a contradiction between the desire for abstract rationality and the resistant desire to retain particular values and elements previously assured. In this sense, modernity gives rise to fragmentation and has thus produced crises. The negative and positive consequences become embedded in the mind and body of the people in modernity. For Buddhist religiosity of modern Thai society, crises of modernity could be referred to the ongoing radical transformation of the nature of the Thai religious system as a result of the radical social and economic changes increasingly influenced by globalized economic and social institutions. Thailand has come to face crises that have made people insecure in the present and anxious about future. This term is also used to discuss a variety of individuals as agents, including Buddhist monks who have established for themselves new forms of religious

practices; meanwhile, laypersons from various backgrounds have created their own pieties to meet their everyday social, physical, mental, and economic needs.

Scholars have suggested that magic and superstition, as elements of primordial attachment to religion, still appear salient in Thai society. We have seen that the ruling class had attempted to cleanse the religious system by eliminating magical and superstitious elements and replacing them with state-approved religious ideology and practices. These attempts can be traced back to the very beginning of modernization projects during the reigns of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn (Rama IV, and Rama V, respectively). On the issue of Buddhism before the state reform that began in the early twentieth century, there had been different forms of Theravada Buddhist traditions and religious communities. In parallel with the Siam state's centralization of power and standardization of national cultures (see Thongchai 1994), local Buddhist traditions outside the capital had to be reformed and regulated by the then -new Bangkok-based *sangha*. The *Sangha* act of 1902 not only created the *sangha* bureaucracy but also created a modern ecclesiastical system with a hierarchy, royal titles, and a ranking system for monks. Buddhist schools and modern schooling, standard texts and everyday practices with a common language, state regulations and codes of conduct were introduced (Tambiah 1978). As a result, conflicts with local Buddhist traditions have inevitably occurred in many localities, such as those involving Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi of the Lan Na tradition in the North (see Sopha 1991; Kwanchewan 1988; Nuaon 2010) and the forest monk tradition in the Northeast (see Kamala 1997).

These modern reforms resulted in the creation of two official Buddhist sects, or *nikai*, commonly known in Thailand today as the Thammayut and Mahanikai.

The Thammayut (the order of “righteousness”), founded by King Mongkut, is an order which adheres to strict, rationalist interpretations of Buddhist teachings and doctrines and is hostile to traditional Buddhist mythology and ritual practices (Cohen 2001, see also Kamala 1997). However, this modernization project has not led to the total disappearance of local Buddhist traditions or magical, superstitious beliefs and practices. They have been merely excluded from the state-sponsored sects, but they have never been completely controlled or eliminated. Different varieties of Buddhist traditions and

magical practices are still found and have become salient for Thais. This state of affairs also displays the eminent capability of being integrated into the new politically and economically based power structure of these beliefs and practices (Jackson 1999b, 314). Apinya (1993, 1998) has discussed the flourishing of the new social movements, Wat Phra Thammakai and Santi Asoke, which have signified the transformation of culture in contemporary Thai society. These movements have emerged to serve the religiosity of people in the context of modern-urban society. Morris (1994) and Pattana (1999) have interpreted the phenomenal re-emergence of urban spirit-medium cults as the “return of the past to the present”, which has signified the processes of the revitalization, reconstruction, and reinterpretation of this practice relevant to present time politics and economy. Stengs (2009) has interpreted the articulation of modernity and religious experiences through the massive worship of King Chulalongkorn in the late 1980s. The King Chulalongkorn cult is interpreted as an instance where “social memory” is recalled by the Thai middle-class to answer the problems of daily life that have come with modernity. Pattana (2012) has discussed spirit-medium cults, magic monks, and cults of amulets in contemporary Thai society. The flourishing of Thailand’s prosperity religions is a result of the country’s rapid economic expansion during the past few decades, guided by national economic and social development plans since the 1960s, and their roots in the hybridity of Thai religion. Jackson (1999a, 1999b) has discussed “religion of prosperity” in Thailand, where wealth is more important than salvation. In these cults, multivocal religious elements coexist. In addition to animism, Theravada Buddhism and folk Hinduism have incorporated religious elements from Chinese religion (Guanyin and Chi Gong) as well as the worship of national heroes and heroines. The cults demonstrate roles of the mass media and market economy which have stimulated and influenced public religiosity.

To conceptualize the phenomenon, Stengs (2009) uses the term “popular Thai religiosity,” Pattana (2012) calls it “Thai popular Buddhism,” while Jackson uses the term “prosperity religions” (1999a, 1999b), and McDaniel (2011) regards it as the “Thai way of being Buddhist.” All of these terms indicate Thai Buddhism is fraught with seemingly conflicting practices: an ordained monk or nun may follow the monastic code strictly and preach about selflessness and the impermanence, while, at the same time,

produce amulets, offer gifts to ghosts, magically heal the sick, or use Pali chants to protect from harm.

1.4.8 *Khruba* Networks

This study aims to highlight new characteristics of the networks built by modern *khruba* as part of ongoing processes of constructing charisma. Network is taken into consideration as part of the construction of charisma following the approach of social network analysis. Drawing upon Castells's theory of network society, the network implies communication or flows of information in different locations linked or shared through human and non-human agents (sacred-magic objects) which have consequently contributed to the network expansion as well as the wide reputation of modern *khruba*. The use of the network concept is important in understanding the expectations and imaginations of followers and believers regarding modern *khruba* and sacred-magic objects. Moreover, the relationships between people, between information and people, and between people and objects, including their contributions to *khruba* networks, are also explored.

Flows of information revolving around an individual *khruba* and his sacred-magic objects are made possible through various channels and are assisted by modern communication technology. However, the term "social network" here is not to be confused with social media networking like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or many others available on the Internet. Yet, they are also included as today's powerful tools to enhance social networking and social capital and to induce popularizing images of modern *khruba* (see Amporn 2016, 2017).

Castells looks at dislocation or disjuncture and its effects on the individual and on social relations in cities, which has helped us to understand the nature of new social or civil society movements/organizations and related spatial arrangements. He argues that, essentially, the post-industrial or new societies consist of various forms and sequences of interaction and exchange in an integrated and networked space of flows.

These exchanges are undertaken through institutional and organizational networks (Castells 1996a, 29 cited in Taylor 2003, 6) that are not necessarily located only in cities

but everywhere in interaction with physical space. They are an expression of the dominant social logic found in the new Information or Network Society, which in turn, is formed by the “real virtuality” of the space of flows (Taylor 2003, 5-6).

The *khru*ba network is a form of social movement characterized by voluntary and horizontal patterns. Flexibility and fluidity are the main characteristics of the network in modern society. The network form is varying, whereby connections can be direct and indirect, and linkages can be centralized or decentralized with differing levels of segmentation. Therefore, the network could grow at any time and in any place.

The construction of *khru*ba’s charisma has involved many elements and many groups of people who have different backgrounds and expectations of *khru*ba. Consequently, they have formed networks of faith which can be separated yet which overlap. This study shall investigate the different groups of *khru*ba’s networks in order to highlight the multiplicity of the convergence through the connection made with other components and through the social interaction surrounding the multifaceted charisma of modern *khru*ba.

In the context of modern Thai society and the popular Buddhism (Pattana 2012), sacred-magic objects associated with *khru*ba are widely produced and consumed. These amulets and rituals, along with everything connected to them, are considered sacred and filled with magical power. Monks and lay followers use magic and amulets, aiming to bless or sustain the “spirit of capitalism” (ibid., 35). Tambiah (1984) has investigated the Thai craving for protective amulets and other fetishes in the 1970s and the early 1980s as the “propensities and preoccupations with the exercise of power.” Pattana (2012) has suggested that in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Thai perception of power was colored by desire and anxiety surrounding commodity consumption and material wealth. Additionally, amulet entrepreneurs employed many business strategies to stimulate interest and use some business networking and official connections to channel the amulets to potential customers through mass media and modern devices, penetrating people’s everyday life and conveying messages about charismatic power (ibid., 96).

While realizing that there are many other factors involved which have contributed to the success of modern *khru*ba, this study notices the increasing importance of these sacred-

magic objects in present-day prosperity religions and crises of modernity. The charisma of modern *khru*ba has become more figural, tangible, and purchasable. In this study, magic-sacred objects are considered as active agents having the capacity to connect people from different ways of life to become involved in the network. This involvement includes relationships with *khru*ba. Furthermore, since the people are from different backgrounds and come to a *khru*ba with different purposes, relationships among the followers are also taken into account, in addition to the ways in which they are connected and how they have contributed to the networks.

However, human agents are also important in the *khru*ba's network. This study shall investigate the translating process of key translators in the network and see how they pass and share information about *khru*ba along with amulets, rituals of prosperity and miraculous stories. The processes may vary from one to another, depending on the context, but in the end they have all contributed to the growth of the network as well as the popularity of *khru*ba. In the deterritorialized world, the translating process is performed not only via face to face interaction (offline) but also via online communication, e.g., websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Line, as well as mass media, including TV, radio, and printed materials.

1.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study situates modern *khru*ba in the context of modern, globalized society which is featured by transnationalization, flows of people and information, electronic media, a decline in state control of religion (but not a decline in nationalism), and heterogenization of religious beliefs and practices. Modern *khru*ba are analyzed as actors in the Lan Na region in the articulation between local knowledge (the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism) and global culture (e.g., popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, Buddhist public culture and global Buddhist ecumenism). The rise of modern *khru*ba in the North of Thailand is part of a global phenomenon, as the dialectics to modernity and disenchantment of the world. The concept of *khru*ba is a context generated. Thus, it is not a given but ephemeral.

In the past three decades, modern *khru*ba have undergone a period of flourishing which involves heterogeneous beliefs and practices. The Lan Na Buddhist tradition and *dhamma* practice have been transformed, re-defined, and re-evaluated in the process of articulating with popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, capitalist economy, the rise of the middle-class, and other forces of the globalized world. The charismatic leader, Khruba Siwichai represents the ethno-cultural identity of Lan Na. He is being used as a source for claiming charismatic power and authenticity. In this sense, the process illustrates transforming of the charisma of Khruba Siwichai to the traditional charisma of his successors, directly or indirectly. At the same time, modern *khru*ba have employed many other techniques to construct *khru*ba's charisma for modern times. The external elements of Khruba Siwichai's monastic style, *dhamma* practices, prosperity rites, production of amulets, religious construction, and the other things of and relating to modern *khru*ba are not purely the continuation from the past but are the articulated value between the past and the present which signifies the transformation of Thai Buddhist society.

The modern *khru*ba network signifies the multifaceted charisma of modern *khru*ba according to the varied expectations and imagination of diverse groups of followers. Nonetheless, in the *khru*ba's network, the role of sacred-magic objects of and relating to modern *khru*ba is emphasized as an active agent contributing to the growth of the network and the wide reputation of modern *khru*ba. In the prosperity religions in the Thai Buddhist world, sacred-magic objects are increasingly important. They have become the main attraction, bringing people from nearly every corner of the world to visit and support *khru*ba. Additionally, in the *khru*ba's networks, the circulation of sacred-magic objects as well as the expansion of the network is assisted considerably by human agents who serve as translators, conveying the information about *khru*ba to others by using both offline and online communication.

The proposed conceptual framework of this study can be schematized as follows:

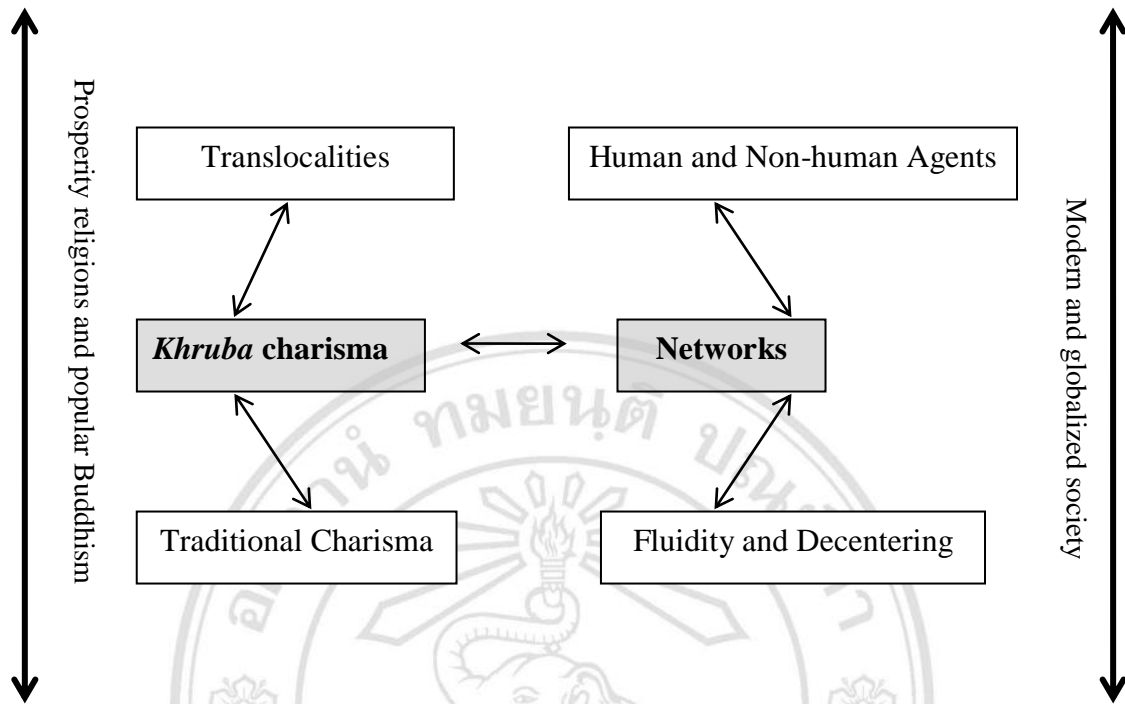


Diagram 1.1: Conceptual Framework

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the construction of charisma and religious networks of modern *khru* under the concepts of charisma, modernity, and network society. Three modern *khru* are chosen as the main case studies; they are Khruba Noi of Wat Si Don Mun, Khruba Don of Wat Phraphutthabat Pha Nam (henceforth, Wat Pha Nam) and Khruba Ariyachat of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan. These three *khru* were chosen because they generally represent the heterogeneity of modern *khru* at the present time. Specifically, I tried to choose three different, but overlapping, types of modern *khru* for the reasons outlined below.

1. Khruba Noi Techapanyo or, Phrakhru Sirisilasangworn, his official title (*phrakhru* rank⁹) in the *sangha* system, is now the abbot of Wat Si Don Mun in Saraphi district,

⁹ *Phrakhru* is the first monastic title of the *Sanyabat* rank in the Thai *sangha* system. Monks who are promoted to this title must have administrative positions (Thai: *phrasangkha thikan*), ranging from ecclesiastical regional governor (Thai: *chaokhana phak*) to abbot assistant of the monastery. Recently,

Chiang Mai province. The 64-year-old monk has gained a reputation for expertise in magical subjects. The former abbot, the late master, Khruba Phad, handed down this knowledge to him. Khruba Phad was known as a renowned magic monk and also one of Khruba Siwichai's disciples. Khruba Noi also claims to be a successor of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition which was delineated by Khruba Siwichai. The monastery has gained long-time patronage from the royal family. His amulets and potent objects are produced and sold in order to support his activities for the religion and for social services, such as the construction of a new small-sized hospital in his community. Among amulet seekers, collectors, and laypeople, he is very famous, and his amulets are some of the best sellers in the market. Every day, hundreds of people come to pay him homage and receive a blessing in order to enhance their fortune, personal charm, invulnerability, health, and wealth.

Khruba Noi also provides various kinds of ritual services, such as one for life prolongation (Thai: *phithi suepchata*) for his followers, Thais and foreigners. His following includes members of the royal family, military officers, civilian bureaucrats, politicians, businesspeople, celebrities, pop icons, amulet entrepreneurs, Shan migrant workers and foreigners, especially Chinese. Khruba Noi is an exemplary case who represents both the local Lan Na Buddhist tradition and a highly commercialized form of Buddhism serving both local and global devotees. Although he is in his mid-sixties, his religious view is very flexible and his practices are a mixture of Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements. These make his charisma multifaceted, as he is venerated both as a successor of Khruba Siwichai and as one of the most popular magic monks in the North nowadays.

2. Khruba Don or Phrakhru Sunthon-atthakan (official title in *phrakhru* rank), serves as the abbot of Wat Pha Nam in Li district, Lamphun province. He is 46 years old and is known as the successor of Khruba Wong and Khao Pi. In fact, he was born in Doi Tao district of Chiang Mai and is not a direct disciple of Khruba Khao Pi. He was a little child when Khruba Khao Pi passed away in 1977. He is relatively young and little

there are four classes of *phrakhru*, ranked from high to low: the special class (Thai: *chan phiset*), the first class (Thai: *chan ek*), the second class (Thai: *chan tho*) and the third class (Thai: *chan tri*). Each class of *phrakhru* can be recognized by the fan of rank (Thai: *phat yot*) given by the king (wikipedia.org 2016b).

known among followers of Khruba Siwichai's lineage because, after the demise of Khruba Khao Pi, they turned to Khruba Wong of Wat Huai Tom, who was known as a direct successor of Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi. In spite of having less popularity, Khruba Don is an important figure following the *Khruba* lineage. He is not reputed to have magical power and has never produced amulets or potent objects in his own name, except for the reproduction of Khruba Khao Pi's amulets. But, surprisingly, during 2014 and 2015, the numbers of his age (44 and 45) exactly matched the lottery numbers twice. This phenomenon led to a rumor among his followers that he was becoming charismatic as a result of his untiring merit-making activities for Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong. Significantly, in the early 2010s, he was promoted to first-class *phrakhru* by the *sangha*.

Khruba Don represents *khruba* in a more traditional way, living a simple life in a rural area of Li district and claiming to be a successor in the direct line of Khruba Siwichai. Thus, he could maintain a large number of followers, Karen and Yuan (Northern Thai), who have followed Khruba Siwichai throughout the North. Even though he is not revered as a charismatic leader like his masters, he has been called *khruba* for several years because of his religious activities, and he has the potential to be viewed as charismatic in the near future. During the year July 2015- July 2016, I served as a research assistant in a research project, "*Tam roi Khruba Khao Pi*" [Tracing the path of Khruba Khao Pi (1889-1977): relationships, religious practice and collective memory] led by Kwanchewan Buadaeng. I spent a year doing fieldwork with Khruba Don and his followers, and I was also allowed to use data from that research in my dissertation.

3. Khruba Ariyachat Ariyachitto or Phra Phawana Rattanayan (official title in *rachakhana chan saman* rank) of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan in Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, at the age of 34, has gained a wide reputation through his *ton bun* attributes, religious activities and building construction. His chief work is his base, Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan. The monastery is very large and is attractively decorated. Inside, he built three large monuments of the greatest *khruba* in Lan Na: Siwichai, Khao Pi, and Wong, whose monastic lineage he claims to be part of. He himself claims that his meditation school, of Khruba Chum Phothiko (of Wat Wung Mui in Lamphun

province), was one of the closest of Khruba Siwichai. He has attracted a large number of followers who believe in Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Khao Pi, and Khruba Wong. He is very young and good looking, and he is seen by his following as a meritorious person and the reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai. He also produces amulets and potent objects. His monastery is often used as a site for consecration ceremonies (Thai: *phithi phuttha phisek*) for various kinds of amulets. His following includes people from many different backgrounds, such as members of the royal family, politicians, high-ranking military officers, civilian bureaucrats, wealthy businessmen, local people, migrant workers, hill tribe people, and foreigners.

The case of Khruba Ariyachat is very interesting. Even though he is only in his mid-thirties, he is highly venerated as a charismatic figure by many Thais and foreigners worldwide. He has recently become a phenomenon of the country since, within just a decade, a very large and magnificent monastery for him was built through donations totaling hundreds of millions of baht. He is a blend of being meritorious, young, good looking, and endowed with magical powers. Moreover, in late 2016, he was promoted to *rachakhana* rank in the *sangha* system, which is higher than other senior *khruba* in this region.

As for data collection, the study relies upon participant observation, casual conversations, in-depth interviews, and related research. Furthermore, the study uses data available on media channels, such as TV and radio programs, printed materials, Internet websites, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Line.

The ethnographic data was collected during the period from 2015 to 2016 in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Tak, Mae Hong Son, and Sukhothai provinces of Thailand, as well as in Tachileik (Thai: *Tha Khilek*), Keng Tung (Thai: *Chiang Tung*) and Mong Yawng (Thai: *Mueang Yong*) in Shan State of Myanmar.

The units of analysis for this study are modern *khruba* and key informants from various groups of followers who serve as translators in the networks, especially the urban

middle classes. The sacred-magic objects here are amulets, medallions, images, *yantra*¹⁰, and other potent objects produced by or related to modern *khru*ba.

The three modern *khru*ba are considered through life stories, activities, *dhamma* practices, rituals, and networks which demonstrate the process of transforming the charisma of Khru

ba Siwichai into the traditional charisma of successors, on the one hand, and the process of redefining, re-evaluating and re-interpreting the concept of *khru*ba in order to fit the current context and serve the heterogeneous expectations of people, on the other. Key informants are investigated through life stories, religiosity, expectations, and imaginations of *khru*ba, including spiritual and emotional experiences received from a *khru*ba and his sacred-magic objects. They are further examined through activities, roles, and relationships with other followers within the networks.



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¹⁰ The magic diagram inscribed in Brahman tradition.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZING *KHRUBA* IN THE LAN NA AND THAI BUDDHIST WORLDS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the specific contexts of *khru*ba both in a historical setting and in contemporary Thai society. The first part focuses on the development of Buddhism in Lan Na. The concept of *khru*ba has its roots in beliefs and practices of Lan Na Buddhism and has gained an important role among Tai Buddhist communities for almost a century. The second part focuses on *khru*ba in contemporary Thai society in which *khru*ba have transformed the meaning and form in order to respond to socio-economic changes. *Khru*ba have become very diverse and some have gained a wide reputation among followers worldwide. During the past three decades, *khru*ba have been on the rise in terms of reputation and wealth. However, the rise of modern *khru*ba has also caused tension in society concerning religious practices and interpretation of the *khru*ba concept among laypeople and monks of the two major points of view.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM IN LAN NA

The term *Lan Na* means the land of a million rice fields. Lan Na historically referred to an area comprising a group of principalities whose southern boundary extended as far as Tak (Ban Tak district) and the northern part of the Sukhothai kingdom. To the west, Lan Na reached the Salween River; to the east, it extended to the Mekong River; and to the north, Chiang Rung (in Xishuangbanna today) (Sarassawadee 2005, 13). Today, Lan Na is understood to cover the area comprising eight provinces in northern Thailand: Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan, and Mae Hong Son. Chiang Mai city has always been the center of Lan Na.

Chiang Mai was founded in 1296 by Phaya¹ Mangrai who was also the founder of the Mangrai Dynasty which ruled Lan Na until 1558. The majority of the Lan Na people are called Tai Yuan or *khon mueang*. Since Phaya Mangrai founded Lan Na, the Yuan people have comprised the majority of the townsmen, especially those in Chiang Mai. Yuan culture is said to be dominant (Kwanchewan 1988, 26). Besides Yuan, many ethnic groups were present in Lan Na. Meng or Mon ethnicity is dominant in the Hariphunchai kingdom, which had Lamphun as its center. The Lua, in many legends, are said to be the preexisting people in the Ping river basin before the coming of Queen Chamathewi of Hariphunchai and of Mangrai of Lan Na. However, the Lua now live in the hilly areas of Hod and Mae La Noi districts of Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son provinces, respectively. Many researchers found that the Lua folk tell enthusiastically of their origins near Chiang Mai; their last royalty, Khun Luang Wilangkha; and the *Inthakin*, their sacred pole which is now the city pillar of Chiang Mai (ibid., 26-27; Sarassawadee ibid.).

The Mangrai Dynasty ruled Lan Na for 266 years, from 1292 to 1558. Lan Na was conquered by the Burmese army in 1558 and was dominated by the Burmese for more than two hundred years (1558-1774). Lan Na was destroyed by the war before Phaya Kawila liberated it from Burma in 1774. Phaya Kawila's dynasty, called *Chao Chet Ton* (Seven Royalities), ruled autonomously over Lan Na (in 1774). To adequately populate Chiang Mai, Phaya Kawila conquered Chiang Kham, Keng Tung, Chiang Rung, and other small states in Xishuangbanna in the North and the Shan towns on the east of Salween and forced the Shan, Lue, Khuen, and Yong people to settle in Chiang Mai. Each group still used the names of their original villages for the new settlements (Sanguan 1972 cited in Kwanchewan 1988, 27). Kawila also brought the Karen to Chiang Mai (Kwanchewan 1988, 24-27).

The Lan Na royalties played a crucial role as the promoters of Buddhism of the kingdom. Phaya Kuena (1355-1385), the sixth king of Lan Na introduced the Lankavamsa (Sri Lankan) order to the kingdom from Sukhothai. The Lankavamsa order was considered a purer form of Buddhism than the earlier versions of the religion from

¹ *Phaya* and *thao* are traditional titles for a chief.

Hariphunchai, Pegu, and Ava that were combined with indigenous beliefs. Kuena invited a leading Sukhothai monk, Sumana Thera, to Lan Na, in 1369, and the monk came with holy relics. The king also invited 8,400 monks from an earlier sect that dated from the time of Queen Chamathewi to be re-ordained in the Lankavamsa order.

In 1371, Kuena constructed the Buppharam, or Suan Dok Temple, in the Phayom Flower Garden for Sumana Thera. In around 1373, Kuena built Wiang Suan Dok as a Wiang Phrathat, or town of holy relics. Relics brought by Sumana Thera were deposited at Phrathat Doi Suthep and Buppharam temples. Buppharam Temple became the center of Lankavamsa Buddhism, also known as the Ramanya (Mon) school (Thai: *Raman*), in the region. The name Ramanya School was a reference to Sumana Thera's being ordained and studying at Maha Sawami Uthumphon School in Martaban in the Mon kingdom. Kuena supported monks from other *mueang* (cities) such as Chiang Saen and Keng Tung to study at Buppharam Temple. There was an effort to make Chiang Mai instead of Hariphunchai the center of religion in the region (Sarassawadee 2005, 75). In 1442, 25 Chiang Mai senior monks went to Lanka to refresh their Buddhist knowledge. Upon their return, they settled in Wat Pa Daeng and set up the Sinhalese school.

Buddhism flourished during the reign of King Tilokarat, the ninth king of Lan Na (1441-1487). He supported monks of the new Lankavamsa or Sinhalese (Thai: *Sihon*) School. He himself was temporarily ordained at Pa Daeng Temple. There was a large increase in the number of ordinations into the Sinhalese school, which emphasized the study of Pali and proper conduct according to Buddhist doctrines. The Ramanya monks also began to increase their study of scripture. Tilokarat had high praise for monks who were well versed in the Tipitaka. Several, including Thammathin Thera, Yanakitti, and Sirimangkhlan, were famous for their knowledge. The Eighth World Tipitaka Council met in Wat Maha Photharam, now known as Wat Chet Yot, for one year in 1477. This assembly of highly learned monks from the region worked to eliminate discrepancies between different versions of the Tipitaka and the version revised by this council was used by the monks of several schools in Lan Na thereafter (Sommai 1996, 1-106; Sarassawadee 2005, 80).

Tilokarat constructed many temples, including Chet Yot, Ratchamonthian, Pa Tan, and Pa Daeng temples. He brought the Emerald Buddha, a revered image, and the palladium of the kingdom, from Phrathat Lampang Luang Temple to an enlarged Chedi Luang (the grand pagoda) in Chiang Mai. During this time, beliefs concerning the power of *phrathat*, or sites containing holy relics believed to have great power, became important. Sarassawadee (ibid.) has pointed out that Buddhism became important cultural glue linking the people of the region. The writing of chronicles helped encourage mutual awareness between Chiang Mai and other *mueang* in the kingdom, the *Chinakanmalipakon* mentions the religious activities of the eleventh king of Lan Na, Phaya Kaeo (1495-1525), in detail. Steles record that he constructed and restored temples and donated land and slaves to temples throughout the kingdom. Chet Yot and Pa Daeng temples received the most patronage. Phaya Kaeo appointed a monk in Sinhalese school as the supreme patriarch and sponsored royal candidates for ordination in the Sinhalese school. Monks received support for the study of Pali and the Tipitaka.

A number of monks produced impressive collections of Buddhist literature in Pali, and their fame spread as far as Lan Xang and Burma. The monk Phothirangsi, for example, wrote *Camadevivamsa* (Thai: *tamnan Chamathewiwong*), or Queen Chamathewi's biography, and the *Sihingabuddharupanidana* (Thai: *nithan Phra Phutthasihing*), or a history of the Sihing Buddha image. Rattanapanya Thera wrote the important *Chinakanmalipakon* in 1528. The text's major contents are of two parts: Buddhist history and the history of how its teachings spread in Lan Na (Kwanchewan 1988, 29; Sommai 1966). Sirimangkhlachan wrote *Vessantara-dipani* (Thai: *Vetsantara thipani*), explaining the Vessantara Jataka; *Cakkavala-dipani* (Thai: *chakkawan thipani*), a book on the universe and various aspects of it; *Sankhyapakasaka-tika* (Thai: *sangkhaaya pakasaka dika*), a handbook explaining the *Sankhyapaka*; and *Mangala-dipani* (Thai: *mangkhlatha thipani*), a book explaining the content of the *Mangala-sutta* (Thai: *mangkhal sut*). Phutthayan and Phutthaphukam wrote the *Mulasatsana* Chronicle, which emphasized the history of the Ramanya school of Suan Dok Temple. Yanwilat Thera wrote *Sankhayapakasaka*, a book explaining the counting and calculating of time, the system of weights and distances, the seasons, minted currency in the Buddha's time, etc. The *Panyasa-jataka* (Thai: *panyasa chadok*), a collection of fifty *jataka* tales written by unknown authors, was also probably written in Kaeo's reign. The *Panyasa-*

jataka is the origin of many works of Thai literature, including the *Samuddaghosa jataka* (Thai: *samutkhot khamchan*) and *Sudhana-jataka* (Thai: *Manora*). The *Panyasa-jataka* became very well known; it spread to Burma and was translated into Burmese during the reign of King Phothaphraya (Burmese: *Badawpaya* or *Padon Min*, r. 1782-1819). The Burmese called it *Zimme Panyasa-jataka*, (Chiang Mai's *Panyasa-jataka*) (Sarassawadee 2005, 82).

Kwanchewan (1988, 30-39) classified Buddhist principles in the various *dhamma* texts which influenced the beliefs and perceptions of the Lan Na people into six categories: (1) leaders are legitimated by the merit they accumulated in their past lives and their meritorious practices in this life, (2) to be a Buddha, one has to patiently accumulate his merit and perfections in many lives for a long duration, (3) the Buddha exists beyond time and place, (4) Ariya Metteyya, the fifth Buddha, will come after the 5000 year-span of the present Buddha, (5) Buddhist relics, Buddha images, Bodhi trees, and other objects relevant to the Buddha are sacred and possess mysterious powers, and (6) the conservation of traditional beliefs and practices is crucial to the persistence of society.

Traditional Lan Na Sangha and Its Practices

The traditional Lan Na *sangha* was not hierarchical. Moreover, Buddhist thought and practices were heterogeneous. Up to the reign of King Rama V, the *sangha* in Chiang Mai belonged to eighteen *nikai song* (sects): Chiang Mai, Chiang Saen, Nan, Thai, Mon, Lue, Nguarai, Nai, Khoen, Khoen, Khrong, Phrae, Lua, Yong, Mae Pla, Man (Burmese), Ngoi (Shan), Luang, and Luay (Sommai 1975, preface; Kwanchewan 1988, 40-41; Sopha 1991, 47-48). These sects' names were derived either from the name of the local area or the ethnic group. For example, Chiang Mai, Phrae, and Nan are names of local areas while Lua, Mon, and Khoen are names of ethnic groups.

It should be noted that the different sects have existed because they were allowed to practice their distinct Buddhist traditions. However, many sects can join in *sangha* activities in the same *ubosot*, a monastery building or area designated as the place for the conduct of monk activities, that is, ordination, reviewing the *vinaya*, and punishing the guilty monks. For example, the sects of Chiang Mai, Chiang Saen, Nan, Thai, Man, and Lua were in the same *ubosot* of Wat Pan Ta Koen (Sommai *ibid.*, preface;

Kwanchewan *ibid.*, 43). Sometimes an individual monk is said to have a combination of these sects, such as Khruba Siwichai whose religious practices belonged to Chiang Mai and Yong sects (Sopha 1991, 47).

Thus, it can be concluded that there were no significant differences among these various sects in terms of Buddhist *Vinaya* and practices. The term *nikai song* used in Lan Na during those times referred to a community of monks adhering to common beliefs and disciplinary practices (Sommai 1975). However, the Buddhist customs in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, and Nan all differed from each other. Each of these traditions was influenced in different ways by numerous and diverse forms of indigenous spirit worship and by Mahayana and Tantric traditions that flourished prior to the fourteenth century (Kamala 1997, 5; also see Sommai 1975, 1996; Isara 2011; Suraswat 2015).

The Lan Na *sangha* was organized into *muat ubosot*, a group of wat (monasteries) which had one common *ubosot* (ordination hall). The name *muat ubosot* was derived from *hua muat*, a wat that had an *ubosot*. Traditionally, the abbot of this wat, who was senior and intellectual, acted as the preceptor (a monk who presides over the ordination ceremony). Each *muat ubosot* had autonomy and its *hua muat* was tied minimally to the other *hua muat*. According to a manuscript which might have been written during the time of King Rama V, there were 25 *muat ubosot* in Chiang Mai. Each had several wat ranging from 4 to 41 wat (Kwanchewan 1988, 40-42).

In terms of religious practices, the Lan Na people have their own distinctive ways which are inspired by both Theravada and non-Theravada Buddhist conceptions. The latter are those of Mahayana and Tantric traditions, Brahmanism, and animism. Mahayana and Tantric traditions are said to have been dominant in Lan Na before the coming of Theravada Buddhism as suggested by Kwanchewan (1988) and Kamala (1997). The belief in the rise of *bodhisatta* as Buddha-to-be who is born not only to accumulate his merit but also to save mankind as well as ideas of vegetarianism are said to be inspired by Mahayana and Tantric traditions.

The knowledge of astronomy, and the belief in and practice of *khatha akhom*, *khatha* are incantations believed to give men power over nature to prevent some bad effects, *akhom* is the belief that the possession of *khatha* and the *yantra* would prevent dangers, belonged to Brahmanism. One explicit example of the synthesis of Buddhism and Brahmanism in Lan Na is the discovery of *yantra* at Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai. Moreover, *yantra* for making one more attractive inscribed on traditional textbooks are widespread in Lan Na. Animistic ideas can be seen in the Lan Na people's belief in spirits of their ancestors and the dead, and spirits which possess or inhabit varied places and objects, such as trees, streams, mountains, and fields. The belief is again shown in their rites related to these spirits (Kwanchewan *ibid.*, 43-44).

Furthermore, Burmese practices are also incorporated in Lan Na practices owing to the 200-year Burmese rule in Lan Na in recent history, such as preference of novice ordination (more important than monk ordination) in Buddhism, worship of Upagupta (Thai: *Phra Upakhut*), erecting a pair of lion statues (Thai: *sing*) in front of the temple gate, covering the stupa with *Jango* gold plates, dancing to pay respect to the ancestral spirits (Thai: *fon phi mot phi meng*), loosely considering on restrictions over women in Buddhism, and belief in luck and fate (Sommai 1996, 74-77).

2.3 KHRUBA IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The concept of *khruaba* relates to the belief in *ton bun* which is one form of holy men prevalent in the Lan Na region. *Ton bun* is a combination of the notions of *bodhisatta* and the coming of Ariya Metteyya manifested through meditative practice, a sacred campaign for religious construction and renovation, and possession of supernatural powers. This is the unique practice of Lan Na Buddhism (Cohen (2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, and 2017). *Khruba* Siwichai is most commonly referred to as *ton bun haeng Lan Na*, or the Buddhist saint of Lan Na (Bowie, 2014a, 687). *Ton bun* or *nak bun* are often used interchangeably to explain the monks who are generally known for their supernatural powers. Furthermore, *Khruba* Siwichai and *Khruba* Khao Pi were usually called *no phra phutthachao*, a scion of the Buddha, or *phachao*, the Buddha. The two *khruaba* were also called *phayatham*, *bodhisatta* who were born to disseminate *dhamma* to laypeople and give them opportunities to make merit in order to build up the moral

community to prepare for the coming of the future and the fifth Buddha (Kwanchewan 2002, 262- 293).

In the Lan Na *sangha* centuries ago, *khruva* was believed to be an official title (Kwanchewan 2002; Wilak 2010; Tanabe 2012) bestowed by the king. At the present time, in Keng Tung (Tai Khuen) and Mong Yawng (Tai Lue) in eastern Shan State and Xishuangbanna (Tai Lue), *khruva* is still an official title bestowed by local *sangha*. The conferring of this title to the monks may vary from one region to another in terms of age, knowledge in Buddhism, charismatic leadership and other featuring characteristics². For instance, the Tai Khuen Buddhist *sangha* in Keng Tung and the Tai Lue in Mong Yawng require specific criteria as well as a conferring ceremony (Thai: *phiti thera phisek*); for example, a monk should be at least 40 years old and have stayed in monkhood for at least 20 years. The conferring ceremony is recently held under the collaboration of the *sangha* and the communities under the committees for religion and culture. Moreover, lay supporters (hosts of the ceremony) have become an important factor for the conferring ceremony in recent times (Phra Swami Maha Chatchawan, Khruva Sam Nuan, and Phrakhru Adunsilakit in Nakhon 2010, 31-72; Wilak 2010, 15). In the Tai Lue Xishuangbanna *sangha*, *khruva* is the second-highest rank following that of *sangkharacha* (supreme patriarch).

In Thailand, the Lan Na *sangha* system was dissolved as a result of the centralization of the *sangha* by the Siamese authority at the turn of the twentieth century (the *Sangha Act* 1902). However, until the current day, the term *khruva* has been used continuously by Northerners unofficially in addressing their venerable monks. It should be noted that although a number of academic studies have a coherent conclusion that *khruva* was once an official title in the Lan Na *sangha* system, it is still unclear whether this is true because there are no primary sources to support this claim. Additionally, Phrakhru Adunsilakit has suggested that, according to a *pap sa* (mulberry paper book) of Wat That Kham³, the *khruva* title was not found in the ancient *sangha* system (see Nakhon 2010, 54-55). He has further explained that the *khruva* title, in the past, was used to

² Among Shans, *khruva* is known as *khruva*. Tai Khuen in Keng Tung and the other ethnic groups in Shan State pronounce similar sound (as it is heard).

³ In Tambon Haiya, Chiang Mai Municipality.

refer to the venerated monks while the terms *khru ba chao* or *khru ba luang* (great *khru ba* or senior *khru ba*) were used to call *khru ba* who had administrative positions, such as monastery abbot or chief of the *hua muat ubosot* system. Also, he is quite certain that *khru ba* was not an official title in the *sangha* (interview, March 9, 2016).

The most likely possibility is that those *khru ba* in administrative positions who had an opportunity to be promoted by princely rulers to official titles, for instance, seven *sangkharacha* or the chief administrators of the Chiang Mai *sangha* who were promoted by Phrachao Inthawichayanon (the seventh princely ruler of Chiang Mai) in 1895 were *khru ba luang* from Wat Fai Hin, Wat San Khayom, Wat Nong Khong, Wat Phuak Taem, Wat Chetuphon, Wat Pa Klui Chai Mongkhon, and Wat Nantharam (Nakhon 2010, 57-58, see also Sommai 2000, 25; Nuaon 2010, 218).

The belief in *ton bun*, or a holy man, is prevalent in Tai-speaking communities across the Upper Mekong region. The term could refer to a monk or a novice who has attained a higher level of enlightenment, great *barami*, or the charisma equivalent to *bodhisatta*. Charisma, as well as magical and supernatural powers, could be acquired and accumulated by practicing strict *samatha* and *vipassana* meditation, including during multiple past lives (Sopha 1991; Sommai 1994, 2000; Isara 2011; Tanabe 2012).

The most renowned *khru ba* in Thai Buddhist history is Siwichai (1878-1938) and his religious movement at the turn of the twentieth century in the North of Thailand. Statues and monuments of Khru ba Siwichai, large and small, were built for worship throughout the North, especially in Chiang Mai and Lamphun provinces. The most popular statue is located at the foot of Mt. Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai.

As I mentioned earlier, *ton bun* is associated with the possession of magical and supernatural-sacred powers which include having a divine ear, a divine eye, and the abilities to read minds, assume various forms, and recollect past lives (Tambiah 1987, 115-16 cited in Bowie 2014a, 687). For example, four out of eight charges which led to Khru ba Siwichai's confinement in Bangkok in 1920 related to popular beliefs about his supernatural power: 1) he did not get wet when walking in the rain, 2) he possessed the *Si Kan Chai* sword which was given by the god Indra, 3) his feet were 2 *sok*, or about one meter, above the ground when he walked (1 *sok*=50 centimeters), and 4) he could

walk on the surface of water (Singkha 1979; Wat Si Soda 2000 cited in Kwanchewan 2010, 2). Khruba Khao Pi, his closest disciple, was also rumored to have magical eyes and supernatural power resulting from his great merit (Phongsak 1997). Importantly, a concept of *ton bun* is related to the belief that the great merit of *ton bun* could be transferred or given to others. Hence, for lay Buddhists, an opportunity to accumulate considerable merit is to engage in activities led by *ton bun*, such as alms offering or participation in construction and renovation works for religious and public benefit.

It should be noted that *ton bun* is different from the Buddhist saint characterized by the concept *arahant*. Keyes (1981, 15), who has classified Buddhist saints, contrasts *arahant* with *nak bun* or *ton bun* because *ton bun*, which is idealized by Khruba Siwichai, has been actively involved in the world and has gained a reputation for his organization of major efforts to construct or repair Buddhist monuments. By contrast, Achan Man (1871-1942), a Buddhist saint from the Northeast, appears as almost the total inversion of Khruba Siwichai in that he spent most of his life in retreat from the world, practicing meditation in the forest. Achan Man's uncompromising renunciation of the world and his attainments as a Buddhist mystic led his followers to proclaim him an *arahant*⁴.

In the Lan Na tradition, *ton bun* is usually called *phayatham* or *thammaracha* (*Chakravartin*- universal emperor), as Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi had engaged in this-worldly activities during the intrusion of the more powerful Siamese state. The story of the reincarnation of *phayatham* or the fifth Buddha in Lan Na is fused with Ariya Metteyya as much as found in sacred biographies of Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi. In the case of Khruba Siwichai and his devotees, his construction works also implied the desire to create the *Buddhadesa*, or a "Buddha Land" according to Buddhist cosmology (Cohen 2001, 2002; Tanabe 2004).

After Khruba Siwichai's death, his teachings and practices were followed by his disciples; Khruba Khao Pi (1889-1977) and Khruba Wong (1913-2000). The last and living *khruba* who is acknowledged as a successor of Khruba Siwichai's lineage is

⁴ The one, who has fully realized the truth of Buddha's teachings and who, at death, will be released from the shackles of rebirth (Keyes *ibid.*, 150).

Khruba Phan of Wat Huai Tom in Li district, Lamphun province. However, there are many other monks who claim to be followers of Khruba Siwichai, through direct or indirect ways, such as Khruba Thueang of Wat Ban Den (see Ashley 2011, 2017), Khruba Noi of Wat Si Don Mun in Chiang Mai (see Wat Si Don Mun 2012), and Khruba Ariyachat of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan in Chiang Rai (see Isara 2011, 93-94; So Sutthiphan 2011, 2015).



Figure 2.1: Khruba Siwichai

Source: <https://www.phuttha.com>

2.4 KHRUBA IN CONTEMPORARY THAI SOCIETY

Kwanchewan (2002) categorized present-day *khruba* into two groups: 1) meritorious senior monks who have stayed in monkhood for a long time, who have been seen as meritorious and sacred and whose knowledge and practices are in the traditional northern Thai style and 2) those who have a connection with Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Khao Pi, and other *khruba*. Unlike those in the first group, the latter are perceived as *ton bun* and carry out monastery construction and renovation projects. They have emerged recently, could be very young and are known widely across many communities. Kwanchewan has also suggested that nowadays there are a few monks who are popularly called *khruba*. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, a number of *khruba* who have emerged during the past three decades. Most of them are very young, and their charisma and reputations have relied on various sources. Some of them are praised as *ton bun*,

while some are credited for other areas of expertise, such as magic, amulets, and prosperity cults. They have been able to attract a large number of followers as well as raise large sums of money. Additionally, the length of time that they have been a monk, whether short or long, is irrelevant.

These factors indicate that there are now many types of *khru*ba who do not fit into either of the two categories described above. It also implies that *khru*ba have undergone periods of re-evaluation and re-interpretation over the course of time. The current rise of *khru*ba portrays heterogeneity or disjuncture, to use a term of Appadurai (1996) in religious practices, even though they continue to represent themselves as followers of Khru

ba Siwichai and of Lan Na Buddhism. Generally, two major characteristics of *khru*ba today are 1) the reproduction of external elements and religious practices, what is thought to be authentic, of Khru

ba Siwichai's monastic style and 2) self-interpretations of the concept of *khru*ba which are diverse yet sometimes overlap one another. This thus makes the situation more complicated.

The emergence and rise of modern *khru*ba are situated principally in the context of (1) the decline of state control of religion (but not a decline of nationalism) as a result of globalization and the transnationalization of the world, and (2) popular Buddhism and prosperity religions in a capitalist-consumerist society. Regarding the first aspect, Apinya gave an insightful comment in an academic talk entitled "crisis of Thammakai, crisis of the society?" (Thai: *wikrit Thammakai wikrit sangkhom?*," organized by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiang Mai University, on March 10, 2017 (summarized by Prachatai.org 2016) that the weakness of the *sangha* these days is a result of the domestication of the *sangha* along with the project to modernize Buddhism and the building of the modern nation-state since King Chulalongkorn's reign (Rama V). The reformation of the *sangha* (the *Sangha* Act 1902) created the *sangha* bureaucracy, a modern ecclesiastical system with a hierarchy, royal titles, and a monk ranking system, which have, as a result, weakened the balance between *lokiya* and *lokuttara*, or the profane and sacred realms of the monks (see also Apinya 1993, 1998). In her view, this is a problem in social positioning and power relations between the state, the *sangha*, and the laity.

While in the modern reforms, premodern beliefs and practices, such as spirit medium cults, superstition, and magic, were excluded from state-sanctioned Buddhism, they have never been controlled or totally eliminated (Pattana 2012, 129-144). The project to modernize Buddhism has not led to the total disappearance of premodern beliefs and practices or other local Buddhist traditions. On the contrary, different varieties of Buddhist traditions are still salient, and simultaneously, popular beliefs and practices have emerged or have been revived, such as spirit medium cults (see Morris 1994; Pattana 1999), King Chulalongkorn cults (see Stengs 2009) or new Buddhist schools like Thammakai and Santi Asoke (see Apinya 1993, 1998), which have been practiced and expressed in the form of new social movements.

According to Phra Paisan Visalo (Paisan 2000), a prominent scholarly monk, the weakness of the *sangha* in recent times can be evidenced through numerous cases including scandals of senior monks, a series of deviances (from the *Vinaya*) of monks throughout the country. The weakness here means an ineffectiveness of the *sangha* institution (the *Sangha* Supreme Council of Thailand (Thai: *maha thera samakhom*) to manage and control monks and their affairs. The core problem, in his view, is the structure of the *sangha* institution, which is centralized like a bureaucratic organization, including strong dependence on the patron-client relationship. This has caused a distance and alienation between monks and the communities in which they live because the monks have focused solely on serving policy of the national *sangha* in order to please the ruling monks and gain benefits from them, such as financial support or royal titles, while the mission to serve their communities has been neglected.

This fact explains why the monks throughout the country have tried to build personal and reciprocal relationships with the center and the ruling monks in the *sangha* system. Some monks have been fraudulent in selling and buying royal titles because the titles have become essential for gaining protection from the *sangha* law, for wealth and prosperity, and for the expansion of their patron-client network in their communities. This is an open gate for these monks to deviate from the *Vinaya* as we have seen today in the flourishing of many cults even though they are under the *sangha* law.

Similarly, Apinya (1998, 55) also affirms that dependence the laity for the four necessities for living (food and drink, clothing, bedding, and medicine) as well as for

the construction of buildings in their monasteries in the context of urban society reflects the power structure and patron-client relationship in Thai society which has led to a decline in the sanctity of the *sangha*.

In respect of the second aspect; popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, Jirachat (2010) has reviewed that during 1987- 2007, numerous new *khru*ba have emerged. They have tried to draw various degrees of connection to Khruba Siwichai.

These modern *khru*ba have started their monastic vocation by using the discourse of Khruba Siwichai's successors to proclaim their authenticity and charismatic leadership. In the same vein, Wilak (n.d.; interview, June 1, 2016) and Phrakhru Adunsilakit⁵ (interview, March 9, 2016) have criticized the practices of modern *khru*ba which are deviant from the *Vinaya* and the former *khru*ba in the Lan Na Buddhist tradition. Their practices have been transformed considerably in order to serve intensified capitalist desires, while the *khru*ba concept as well as the concept of *bun* (merit) is oriented toward wealth and luck rather than salvation. The critiques of modern *khru*ba are expressed as another way to criticize the weakness of the *sangha* as well.

Nonetheless, this phenomenon is far from unique to Thailand, as Pattana (2008) and Rozenberg (2010) have shown the proliferation of wealth-oriented practices of monks and the laity in Buddhist societies throughout Asia. In Thailand, this phenomenon reflects the fluid and irregular shapes of the nation's religious landscape where various forms of beliefs and practices, such as spirit-medium cults, cults of national heroes and heroines, cults of amulets, including devotion to the Mahayana Buddhist *bodhisatta* Guanyin (Thai: *Guanim*), and movements surrounding Theravada Buddhist monks, both living and dead, who are reputed to possess supernatural power, coexist (see such as Morris 1994; Pattana 1999, 2012; Jackson 1999a, 1999b; Stengs 2009; McDaniel 2011).

In this study, modern *khru*ba are placed in the context of popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, as they have demonstrated the convergence of religion and the multidimensional forces of modernization, capitalism-consumerism and globalization. In Pattana (2012), "popular Buddhism" refers to the various forms of everyday beliefs

⁵ The abbot of Wat That Kham in Chiang Mai city, also ecclesiastical chief of the tambon (Thai: *chaokhana tambon*), Haiya.

and practices carried out by specialists and ordinary people who identify themselves as members of the Thai Buddhist community. Popular Buddhism in Thailand incorporates the supernatural powers of spirits, deities, and magic that has emerged out of the interplay of animism, supernaturalism, folk Brahmanism, worship of Chinese deities, and state-sponsored Theravada Buddhism. Significantly, “it constitutes the largest, liveliest, and most dynamic religious space in contemporary Thai Buddhist society” (ibid., 1-2).

In this regard, popular Buddhism is flourishing in an individualistic culture. Tanabe and Keyes (2002) have suggested that radical social and economic changes have produced crises of modernity that have made people insecure in the present and anxious about the future. The term “crisis of modernity” is in the sense that modernity gives rise to fragmentation (Simmel 1978 cited in Tanabe and Keyes 2002, 6-7). Modernity also breaks down the village-based sense of community, including more collective religious forms and rituals in Buddhism (Jackson 1989 cited in Pattana 2012, 55). The negative and positive consequences become embedded in the minds and bodies of the people in modernity as we have evidenced in a variety of individuals, including Buddhist monks (e.g., *khru**ba*) who have established themselves new forms of religious practices. Simultaneously, laypersons from various backgrounds have created their own pieties to meet their everyday spiritual and mental needs, as I shall elaborate in the following chapters.

2.4.1 Two Types of *Khru**ba*

*Khru**ba* in Thailand can be categorized into two types. *Khru**ba* in the first group are those who have been promoted officially by the local Buddhist *sangha* outside Thailand, such as Keng Tung and Mong Yawng in the eastern Shan State of Myanmar, while the second group are awarded unofficially by lay devotees, meritorious senior monks and young monks with *ton bun* attributes. Most *khru**ba* in Thailand belong to the second group.

As I mentioned previously, the ceremonies conferring the monastic titles (Thai: *phithi* *thera phisek*), including the *khru**ba* title, are recently found in Tai Buddhist

communities in Keng Tung, Mong Yawng and Xishuangbanna. Furthermore, this tradition is believed to be an old practice of the former Lan Na *sangha* since it shared the same Buddhist ideology with other Tai communities in this region. The Tai Buddhist *sangha* outside Thailand hold the conferring ceremony from time to time, and significantly, the monks from Thailand were found being promoted to different titles (e.g., *sitthi*, *swathi*, *khrua*). In the conferring ceremony of Keng Tung *sangha* in 1998⁶, there were eight monks from Thailand (mostly from the North) conferred, six of the monks as *khrua* and the other two monks as *sitthi* (Wat Tha Kradat 2005). Among the six *khrua*, some were well-known among Thais such as Khrua Bunchum (based in Mueang Phong, Tachilek) and Khrua Montri of Wat Suthon Mongkhonkhiri in Phrae province (ibid.).

Another Thai monk conferred in this ceremony was Khrua Sam Nuan (Anon Athittathammo) of Wat Tha Kradat in Mueang district, Chiang Mai province. He is 47 years old and in charge of the abbot position. He is half-Shan (Tai Yai), half-Tai Khuen, and was born in a village at the border area of Chiang Rai province. He was conferred as *swathi* by the Keng Tung *sangha* in 1998 and later as *khrua* in 2008 (interview, February 18, 2016). At the same time, he is serving as *phrakhru palat*, one of the personal staff of Phra Rat Wachiraphon⁷ of Wat Mahaprutaram in Bangkok. This indicates the close relationship with senior monks in the central region.

Khrua Sam Nuan described the conferring of the *khrua* title in the Keng Tung *sangha* as follows:

Khrua has been a monastic title in the *sangha* system for generations, dating back to the ancient Chiang Tung⁸ dynasty. In that period, the Khuen *sangha* was

⁶ The ceremony was the greatest event in 30 years to celebrate the conferment of the 14th *Somdet Atyatham* (supreme *dhamma*) of the Keng Tung *sangha*, including the conferment of seven monks in *khrua*, one monk in *sami* (*swami*) and eleven monks in *sitthi* (*swathi*). In the Keng Tung *sangha* system, degree of the titles can be ranked from high to low as follows: 1) *somdet atyatham* (supreme *dhamma*), 2) *sangkhanayok*, 3) *khrua*, 4) *sami* or *swami*, 5) *sitthi* or *swathi*, 6) *maha*, 7) *phikkhu*, 8) *sammanen* (novice) (Wat Tha Kradat 2005, 113).

⁷ A monk with the royal title “*rat*” or *phra rachakhana* has the authority to designate a group of monks to serve as his personal staff in the titles of *phrakhru palat*, *phrakhru samu*, and *phrakhru baidika* (Wikipedia 2016a).

⁸ Thais refer to Keng Tung as Chiang Tung.

under the patronage of the ruling king known as *chaofa*. Therefore, the sole authority to promote any monastic titles belonged to the king. In recent times, after the ancient dynasty was overthrown, we have a council of religion and culture known as *khopaka*. *Khopaka* is thus in charge of all religious and cultural affairs in Chiang Tung, including the conferment of monastic titles, working hand-in-hand with the *sangha*. Regarding the procedure of conferment, every title has specific requirements, for example for the *khruaba* title, a monk should be at least 40 years old and have stayed in monkhood for at least 20 years. During his time in monkhood, he should practice *dhamma* strictly in accordance with the *Vinaya*. In addition, he should constantly support activities for disseminating Buddhism in the region. In my case, I have carried out various activities for Tai communities in this region for decades. My activities cover the dissemination of Buddhism, *dhamma* study, cultural promotion, and construction works in many places across Chiang Tung and Sipsong Panna. I also raise funds for the education of local monks and novices. In summer, I usually go there to teach Lan Na *dhamma* scripts. When the courses are finished, I arrange a series of examinations while some sorts of awards are given to those who passed the exam as a token of their efforts. As another aspect of cultural promotion, I support Tai traditional performances. Music bands and cultural performance groups are formed in order to perform on various occasions, for example, in a procession to celebrate the monks who passed *nak tham* exams [a series of ecclesiastical examinations]. Therefore, there are many factors which were combined and led to the conferment in the *swathi* and later in the *khruaba* titles of mine. In short, once people acknowledge that we are respectful, by good practices, they will hold us up as moral strength.

However, I found that in the conferring ceremony in 1998, one monk from Bangkok was also promoted to *khruaba* (Khruba Wisutthisarayan from Wat Amon Khiri, Wat Tha Kradat 2005, 24-25). This is evident that in the Keng Tung *sangha* nowadays, inclusion and exclusion criteria for being conferred in the system are more flexible. As Khruba Sam Nuan explained, Buddhist monks in either Thailand or other countries were welcome as they were all *dhamma* heirs of the Buddha. Therefore, regardless of

nationality and ethnicity, any monk who has good practice and who has contributed to Keng Tung is eligible to be conferred by the *sangha*. Nonetheless, it should be noted here that all of the monastic titles conferred on Thai monks are honorary awards; there is nothing to do with the Keng Tung *sangha*'s administration (interview, February 18, 2016).

The conferring ceremonies were also found in Tai Lue communities in Xishuangbanna of Yunnan Region (PRC) and Mong Yawng in the Shan State of Myanmar. In 2016, Xishuangbanna's *sangha* held a ceremony to promote *Somdet Phrasangkharat*, or supreme patriarch, and four *khruaba*⁹ (none from Thailand, see cm77.com 2016). However, in Mong Yawng's *sangha*¹⁰, where I witnessed the ceremony during February 21-24, 2016, the third *Somdet Atyatham* (supreme *dhamma*) was promoted together with 18 monks in the lower titles, e.g., *swathi*, *swami*, and *khruaba* (ranked from low to high degree). Among the eighteen monks, four were promoted to *khruaba* (none from Thailand)¹¹.

However, even though *khruaba* in the second group are unofficial when compared to the first group, they constitute the majority of *khruaba* in Thailand. Although *khruaba* who have achieved this rank in an official conferment seem to have more legitimacy, due to

⁹ On February 19, 2016 at Wat Pachie Maharatchathan.

¹⁰ On February 23, 2016 at Wat Ratchathan Luang Hua Khuang, it was the greatest event in 50 years since the last supreme *dhamma* of Mong Yawng *sangha* was promoted (Phra Philuang Pabong).

¹¹ However, I found two monks from Mae Chan and Mae Sai districts of Chiang Rai province, Thailand who were promoted to *swami*. The hierarchical order of title and criteria of conferment in Mong Yawng's *sangha* system are said to be similar to Keng Tung's system. However, I found that details in the ritual of Mong Yawng are more similar to those of Xishuangbanna. For example, the custom of wearing a crown-like headdress, made from either gold or silver, during the conferring ceremony is found in both Tai Lue *sangha* while it was not found in the Tai Khuen *sangha* of Keng Tung. The newly conferred *Somdet Atyatham* of Mong Yawng explained to me that it is because people in Mong Yawng and Xishuangbanna share the same origin (Tai Lue). According to the history of Mong Yawng, their ancestors were Tai Lue relocated from Xishuangbanna, the very northern region. Therefore, they have many things in common, including the conferring ceremony of the monks. Regarding the conferring ceremony, *Somdet Atyatham* added that he had also earned from the palm-leaf manuscripts handed down by Tai Lue ancestors originally from Mueang Luang in Xishuangbanna. For the two monks from Chiang Rai province who were promoted to *swami*, *Somdet Atyatham* explained that is because they had a good relationship with Mong Yawng as well as with the *sangha* in many ways. Furthermore, they also had Tai Lue origin. Nonetheless, he noted that, as with Keng Tung's *sangha*, Buddhist monks from other regions, especially from Thailand, were always welcome to be conferred by the *sangha* as long as they had the consent of the *khopaka* and financial support from the sponsors (interview, *Somdet Atyatham* of Mong Yawng, February 23, 2016).

the approval of the *sangha*, there is no significant effect on the latter group, especially in the eyes of lay followers. It is implied that the popularity of *khru*ba in the present times relies not only on the conferring ceremony but also on many other characteristics. Moreover, Khruba Sam Nuan (and also Somdet Atyatham of Mong Yawng, interview, February 23, 2016) suggested that the conferment of monastic titles in Keng Tung and Mong Yawng has recently depended on various parties, not only the *sangha* council and the *khopaka* but also the lay sponsors, because their financial support is a crucial factor in making the ceremony happen.

Therefore, even though there is a virtual open gate for *khru*ba in Thailand to be promoted officially, there are still not many *khru*ba from Thailand who have been promoted by these *sangha*. It can be surmised that this might be due to the inferior status of these local *sangha* in relation to the Thai national *sangha*, as well as monastic titles given by them. Hence, modern *khru*ba prefer getting promoted by the national *sangha* because of its superiority and the power given by the *sangha* system, e.g., monastery abbot, *phrakhru*, or higher¹². Importantly, in the northern Thai context, the charismatic status of modern *khru*ba can rely on symbolic transfer through the discourse of succession in Khruba Siwichai's lineage (as it shall be discussed in chapter three). Thus, in recent times, modern *khru*ba are able to draw upon various sources of legitimacy. One may start his vocation as *khru*ba whose title is unofficially awarded by devotees. Thereafter, he could get promoted in the Thai *sangha* system while searching for a connection to get officially promoted to the appointment of *khru*ba in other Tai Buddhist *sangha*, such as Khruba Sam Nuan, Khruba Thueang and Khruba Montri.

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¹² Such as Khruba Ariyachat of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan in Chiang Rai province who was promoted to the rank of *phra rachakhana chan saman (vipassana thura)* as (the royal title) Phra Phawana Rattanayan in 2016. He is now *khru*ba of the highest rank in the Thai *sangha* system.



Figure 2.2: The conferring ceremony of Buddhist monks (Thai: *phithi thera phisek*) in Mong Yawng, eastern Shan State of Myanmar, on February 23, 2016

Source: author



Figure 2.3: The conferring ceremony of Buddhist monks (Thai: *phithi thera phisek*) in Xishuangbanna of Yunnan Region (PRC) on February 19, 2016

Source: www.cm77.com

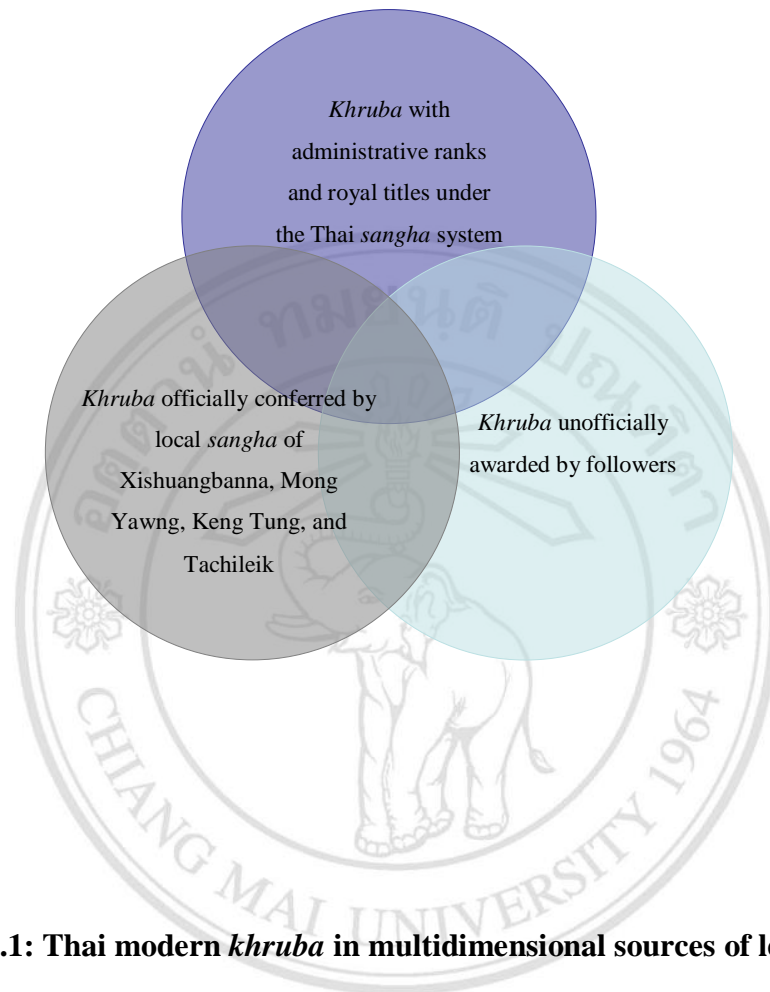


Diagram 2.1: Thai modern *khruba* in multidimensional sources of legitimation

According to diagram 2, Thai modern *khruba* are fluid and flexible in the way they incorporate multidimensional sources inside and outside the country in order to build transnational connections as well as to legitimize their *khruba* charismatic status.

2.4.2 *Khruba*: A Contested Meaning

The proliferation of *khruba* during the past three decades in the North is a social phenomenon of the modern Thai Buddhist world. Owing to their ability to integrate the value of the local Buddhist tradition in the North with the value of capitalism-consumerism, and consequently their ability to draw large numbers of followers and money donations, modern *khruba* are viewed by society in different ways, negatively

and positively. Here I view the *khru*ba concept as a contested meaning in which certain groups are contesting for creating a definitively valid meaning of being *khru*ba. In order to understand this, two major groups of positions shall be discussed, the essentialist view of *khru*ba and the modern view of *khru*ba. Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that this is not the self-classification of *khru*ba, but the outsiders' views.

1) The Essentialist View of *Khru*ba

In the course of my fieldwork, I found the essentialist view of *khru*ba among senior monks and scholar monks, including university scholars in the North. This point of view could be characterized by their ideas of essentialism and Buddhist reformism. According to this standpoint, the concept of *khru*ba has an essence itself which can be traced back to the origin. At the same time, Khruba Siwichai is established as the original version of charismatic *khru*ba (I use the term “a *khru*ba role model”) representing the essence of the *khru*ba concept in the Lan Na Buddhist world. Everything from his practices to his activities and monastic style is being used as an indicator by which to measure the modern *khru*ba. And apparently, if even one thing deviates from the paradigm, there can be no talk of an authentic *khru*ba.

Isara (2011) has suggested that Khruba Siwichai had a significant role in Northern Thai Buddhism and has become of enduring importance for Thai Buddhists in recent times. He is best known for his ability to mobilize thousands of people to fund and construct a 12-kilometre road to the most famous pilgrim monastery of the North, Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai, during 1934-1935. Up to the present time, countless number of people continue to come to pray at sites associated with him, for example, at his statue at the foot of Doi Suthep Mountain. “People wear amulets bearing his image, place his photograph on their home altars, and join his birthday memorial ceremony at Wat Ban Pang in Li district every year” (ibid., 107-126). Therefore, the contemporary cult of Khruba Siwichai, including shrines, museums, and amulets are all significant indicators of the recognition of Khruba Siwichai's spiritual attainment and his status as a Lan Na *ton bun*. Moreover, in the academic world, scholars, both Thai and non-Thai, are attracted by his life and works and produce a steady stream of literature about him,

not to mention abundant biographical publications of him as I have discussed in chapter 1.

This essentialist view of *khru*ba, as having Khru

ba Siwichai as a role model, is deeply skeptical about modern *khru*ba especially concerning their practices and activities which are believed to be contaminated by interaction with modernity and consumerism. Moreover, a large number of monks in contemporary Thai Buddhism have been criticized by certain groups of people for their prosperity-oriented practices and commercialization of religion, which have made them far removed from the *Vinaya* and the Buddhist doctrines. Commercialized Buddhist activities (Thai: *phuttha phanit*), as seen in magic monks and Wat Phra Thammakai (see Apinya 1993), are some of the most prominent features of today's Buddhist monks in modern Thai society, and have led to the decline of faith among Thai Buddhists, as Phra Paisan Visalo has suggested (Paisan 2003).

Likewise, modern *khru*ba in the North have been condemned in the same way, namely that they deviate from the former *khru*ba's practices, specifically from those of Khru

ba Siwichai. In other words, rather than focus on the local practices, they use *khru*ba as a trademark to make a profit, which destroys the value and image of the "cultural treasure" of Lan Na. This kind of criticism can be found widely in general discussions, books, and academic seminars. Phra Rat Pariyatmethi¹³ (2010) commented about the modern *khru*ba phenomenon at an academic seminar (organized by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya (Buddhist) University, Chiang Mai campus), saying that in Chiang Mai today people praise *khru*ba not because of their good practices but because of something superficial, such as their outward appearance and external elements of monastic style (in Nakhon 2010, 16).

The most concrete discourse by the essentialist view of *khru*ba to attack the modern *khru*ba today is *khru*ba *uk kaet*. *Uk kaet* literally means "being ripened by ripening gas" to evoke a public image of modern monks who have become *khru*ba by artificial acceleration (Wilak 2012, 16-17, n.d.). Monks who become *khru*ba by artificial

¹³ Now as Phra Thep Mangkhlachan, an abbot of Wat Thaton in Mae Ai district, Chiang Mai, and also Deputy Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Chiang Mai.

acceleration are not as good as the authentic *khru**ba*. This implies that they have not put enough effort in *dhamma* practice and are not yet knowledgeable or experienced in both *dhamma* and *Vinaya*. Hence, they are not real, compared to the former *khru**ba* or even to senior monks who became *khru**ba* in their old age. Recently, this negative expression has become widely used and is often found in academic writings.

Wilak Sripasang, a lay intellectual specializing in Lan Na literature and culture, introduced the *khru**ba uk kaet* expression around 1997 (interview, June 1, 2016). He is also the one who continuously criticizes modern *khru**ba* and their deviant practices through his semi-academic writings. For instance, in 2012 (16-17), he criticized the appearance of many young monks who claim to be *khru**ba* by reproducing the external elements of Khru*ba Siwichai's* monastic style. In his opinion, "becoming *khru**ba* cannot be identified solely by the external elements but also by the austerity in *dhamma* practices which can be proven only by time." Additionally, the external elements of monastic style can be easily imitated. Hence, the point is that we should pay more attention to other aspects because there is something more behind the scenes (ibid.).

Sentiments of people in this standpoint are very clear in their attempt to bring back the "good old days" to counter the dark age of the present times. Behind the affirmation that *khru**ba* has the essence continuing from the past which is worth protecting from the harmful influence of capitalism-consumerism and also from deviant *khru**ba* is the establishment of a *khru**ba* role model and firmly fixed codes of conduct for being an "authentic, good *khru**ba*." For Wilak (2012; interview, June 1, 2016), to be *khru**ba*, a monk should be over 50 years of age and should also have the following features:

- 1) Seniority in age and *vassa* (years as a monk),
- 2) good practice in *dhamma* and *Vinaya*,
- 3) contribution to the religion, such as in construction or renovation projects.

Ultimately, if a monk does not meet all of the above criteria, he is then ineligible to be *khru**ba* or can be just *khru**ba uk kaet*.

I have also found more firmly fixed codes of conduct suggested by Phrakhr*u Adunsilakit* (interview, March 9, 2016) as follows:

- 1) Wearing three-piece monastic robes,
- 2) getting up very early (at 4 A.M.),
- 3) eating one meal a day,
- 4) practicing walking meditation regularly,
- 5) wandering in the forest,
- 6) observing *chatupari sutthisin*, or precept of pure conduct,
- 7) concentrating on mind purification,
- 8) praying alone, and
- 9) spreading loving-kindness to all living creatures.¹⁴

From these codes of conduct, as well as critical comments from Phrakhru Adunsilakit, we can summarize the main contrasts between “authentic, good *khru*ba” and *khru*ba in recent times, which echo the mental attitude of essentialism and reformism as shown in table 1.

Table 2.1: Contrasts between the authentic, good *khru*ba and modern *khru*ba

Authentic, Good <i>Khru</i>ba	Modern <i>Khru</i>ba
1. Observed <i>thudong</i> , forest tradition-wandering monk)	1. Abandoned <i>thudong</i> tradition, do not focus on <i>dhamma</i> practices but external elements of monastic style and magic
2. 60 years old onward	2. Very young (some are just novices) 3. Keep money with them; possess a large number of valuable things
3. Possessed neither money nor valuable things	Manage monasteries on their own without lay committee (Thai: <i>kammakan wat</i>) to monitor the financial affairs

¹⁴ He claims that the nine codes are summarized from the practices of the former *khru*ba monks he had observed. He also showed me a booklet about the *khru*ba’s code of conduct that he is writing and plans to publish soon.

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Authentic, Good <i>Khruba</i>	Modern <i>Khruba</i>
4. Treated everyone equally, regardless of social and economic statuses	4. Commit a cardinal sin by flattering wealthy devotees for material wealth
5. Never produced or sold amulets	5. Produce a wide range of amulets and provide ritual services for prosperity to attract people and gain more material wealth
	6. Found in scandals for money laundering, shady financial dealings and intimate relationships (also sexual harassment) with male or female followers

One of the main criticisms frequently used to attack modern *khruba* concerns age and *vassa* because most modern *khruba* are quite young, while the traditional criterion requires a minimum age of 60. Why have age and *vassa* become a major concern for being *khruba*? Wilak (2002, 29) explained that young monks with low *vassa* are easily defeated by *Man* (Pali: *mara*) or the personification of defilements. Phrakhru Adunsilakit (interview, March 9, 2016) also affirmed that because young monks in the past liked plays and fireworks (Thai: *chop kanlalen lae bokfai*), they often joined firework competitions which were held throughout the region. Sometimes they went overboard and engaged in drinking alcohol and having sex (with women), and they were then deprived of ecclesiastical status. Therefore, time is the best measurement for their sincerity, austerity, and determination, and this is why *khruba*, the venerated one, should be elderly.

However, it is worth noting that the issue of age and *vassa* of *khruba* is still controversial in today's discussion because *Khruba Siwichai*, a *khruba* role model, died at age 60. Thus, he must have been called *khruba* since long before his death.

The question is, is the criterion above still valid? Sirisak (2016, 25) reveals that, according to primary sources, *Khruba Siwichai* was called *khruba* when he was around 42 years old with 21 years of *vassa*. According to this finding, the issue should be solved, but Phrakhru Adunsilakit, as well as others who hold this point of view, still

insists that the codes of conduct, including the criteria on the numbers of age and *vassa*, are valid. In the case of Khruba Siwichai, Phrakhru Adunsilakit has argued that Khruba Siwichai had never been called *khruba* during his life time; his *khruba* title was bestowed later after his death. Additionally, according to *khao so* or the Northern Thai literature written by Chao Suriyawong Sirorot (in 1929 see Udom 2007) and Thao Sunthonphotchanakit, while Khruba Siwichai was alive he was called *tuchao sintham* (a moral monk), or *phra Siwichai-tuchao Ban Pang* (a monk from Wat Ban Pang).

People who hold the essentialist view of *khruba* situate themselves as challengers to the proliferation of *khruba* and inspectors of the religion in the time of crises of Thai Buddhism (Thai: *wikrit phutthasatsana*). At the same time, this group invites society to pay more attention to the Buddhist teachings and practices that are now being ruined by modernity and consumerism. However, this essentialist perspective and the adherence to the *khruba* concept as an imagined ideal have concealed the fact that the concept of *khruba* has been reformed, redefined, and re-interpreted from time to time since the time of Khruba Siwichai. Kwanchewan (1988, 2002), Sopha (1991) and Isara (2011) concur that the *khruba* concept was redefined and re-interpreted by *khruba* themselves as well as their followers in order to fit the specific socio-political context. From Khruba Siwichai to Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong, the *khruba* concept has never been linear and static even though the three are thought to be in the same monastic lineage. Moreover, the codes of conduct or criteria of being an “authentic, good *khruba*” suggested by people holding this point of view are simply a self-interpretation lacking supportive sources. Additionally, even though they accuse modern *khruba* of deviation from “true” practices of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition delineated by Khruba Siwichai, his *dhamma* practices have not yet been adequately clarified, especially by primary sources. Moreover, they themselves overlook the fact that they in some degree share a form of commoditized religious expression, as they have blamed others, such as the production of amulets and servicing rituals for wealth and luck. Some scholars holding this point of view are also amulet collectors and traders and are deeply fascinated with magic arts.

Furthermore, there have been not only criticisms but also actions which represent the desire to bring back “the good old days,” along with the idea of Buddhist reformism (see Apinya 1998, 6-9, see also suggestions for Buddhist reformation in globalized world by Phra Paisan Visalo (Paisan 2003). I found evidence in the seminar on the conferring ceremony of ecclesiastical titles in the Lan Na tradition organized by the center for Buddhist studies in neighboring countries project, at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus (on July 15, 2010, see Nakhon 2010). The message from the seminar was clear in its attempt to bring back the official title of *khru*ba as well as the conferring ceremony, which was believed to be an effective way to control modern *khru*ba. According to the proliferation of *khru*ba during the past three decades, the organizers and participants thought that it was a mark of failure of the national *sangha* to monitor these deviant practices as well as a sign of disaster in Buddhism.

With firmly fixed criteria, they believed it was a way to control the proliferation of *khru*ba as well as to drive away corrupt, immoral ones. This is the key to increasing the faith and belief of Buddhists and eventually to conserving Buddhism. As Phra Rat Pariyatmethi (in Nakhon 2010, 15-18) suggested, in the old Lan Na period, *khru*ba was an official title. To be promoted to this title, a monk would have to have been screened by a set of requirements and then by the conferring ceremony. Therefore, becoming *khru*ba, in the past, was not as easy as it is today. Significantly, in the current situation, the *khru*ba title should be under the *sangha* system again. Inclusion and exclusion criteria should also be clearly determined. All *khru*ba would then be under the *sangha*'s control and would be closely monitored by the *sangha* council. The seminar also discussed the feasibility of bringing back the conferring ceremony as it is practiced in Keng Tung, Mong Yawng and Xishuangbanna these days. Although the suggestion was eventually aborted, it implied their reformist ideology through reorganization of the system in the region¹⁵.

¹⁵ In the recommendation section, Nakhon concludes that reviving the official *khru*ba title as well as the conferring ceremony of the former Lan Na is impossible today because the last conferring ceremony held in Chiang Mai was in 1845 (during King Phutthawong's reign, the 4th King of Chao Chet Ton Dynasty) or 165 years ago (up to 2010). As a result, we have only limited details while many elements no longer fit the current situation. Additionally, the structure of the Lan Na *sangha* system has long been replaced by the Thai national *sangha*. If the *khru*ba title of the former Lan Na system was really revived, it would probably overlap with the current system and cause many problems. For

2) The Modern view of *khru**ba*

The modern view of *khru**ba* is found among modern *khru**ba*, regardless of their age and *vassa*, and their believers and followers. Even though some of them are over 60 years, such as *Khru**ba* Noi of Wat Si Don Mun, they are included in this strand owing to their flexible religious view. This standpoint argues that even though *khru**ba* is the continuation of the past, the *khru**ba* concept should be revised so as to fit with the current situation. They believe that *khru**ba* and the Lan Na Buddhist tradition can survive in the modern period by adaptation and absorption. As I mentioned in chapter 1, modern *khru**ba* here are not the ones who stand in opposition to traditional order in the pre-modern era, or *khru**ba* who are characterized by less mystery and are more rational (by sciences and technologies), as suggested by modernization theorists (e.g., Giddens 1990). Modern *khru**ba*, rather, rely on what Appadurai (1996) has suggested on modernity, which is about the difference, disjuncture, and heterogenization that lead to the new emergence, re-evaluation, and re-intervention of cultural identities.

Undoubtedly, the elements of monastic style and practices which are thought to be authentic Lan Na refer directly to *Khru**ba* Siwichai. In this sense, *Khru**ba* Siwichai is also treated as a *khru**ba* role model by people holding this point of view. I have found that all modern *khru**ba* claim to be successors of *Khru**ba* Siwichai. Some claim to have direct links through his monastic lineage, while others claim implicitly to be the reincarnations of him. On the one hand, for the modern view of *khru**ba*, *Khru**ba* Siwichai is the *khru**ba* prototype to follow, while on the other, he is the point of departure for new interpretations. As *Khru**ba* Noi clarifies:

I follow my masters but also conform to the centralized *sangha*. The color of the robes is not the point to consider, and everything is dependent on the context. Even though I say I am a follower of the former *khru**ba*, their practices should be re-evaluated. What is suitable for the current situation, we keep following,

the proliferation of *khru**ba* these days, the recommendation is that the *sangha* and related parties should issue some regulations for screening good *khru**ba*. As of now, there are no written regulations on this issue, while obviously some *khru**ba* monks behave improperly, which could undermine the *sangha*'s image and lead to the loss of faith and belief in monks and the *sangha* as a whole (Nakhon 2010, 249-50).

but for something that does not fit anymore, we then quit. The Lan Na tradition is now under the centralized *sangha*. Thus, we are all the same; there is nothing special about *khruaba* except that we are under the oldest Mahanikai sect (March 4, 2016).

Additionally, this attitude is not new, as I mentioned earlier that the concept of *khruaba* has been re-evaluated and redefined from time to time since in Khruba Siwichai's period. Khruba Wong, the third generation in Khruba Siwichai's lineage, was a good example; his reputation as a sacred monk at the national level brought him in greater contact with middle and high-class business owners from central Thailand. Towards the end of his period, these wealthy devotees served as Khruba Wong's close aides and temple managers. At the same time, local and ethnic leaders were not close to Khruba Wong as much as they were at the beginning. Unlike Khruba Siwichai and Khao Pi, Khruba Wong was a monk under the centralized *sangha* system. He had been gradually promoted to a higher position in the system and had been patronized by the Royal Family (see also Gravers 2012). Khruba Wong once taught his followers that the world had changed so much that we cannot do the same as the former *khruaba*, "everything is *anitcha*" (Pali: *anicca*, impermanence) (interview, Dok Keaomi, August 22, 2015).

This statement represents the group's standpoint as to the perceived solution for enabling the concept of *khruaba* to survive: it must adapt to the current situation. Significantly, this title is not official; it is the award for venerated monks bestowed by laypeople, which implies that *khruaba* reach this position because people think they are deserving of the title. It comes to them by consensus, not by force or money, and there is no reason to refuse it. Moreover, as we have seen, nowadays *khruaba*'s reputation goes far beyond the boundaries. Owing to modern technology, followers of modern *khruaba* include the middle classes in many countries. Hence, the flexible *khruaba* idea is interpreted as the adaptability of being *khruaba* for global devotees, as well.

Similarly, as we have seen today, modern *khruaba* are characterized by a mixture of tradition and modernity. They claim to be followers of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition, which is thought to be the cultural heritage of the region, and at the same time, they are under the centralized *sangha* with many promoted to official titles. Khruba Wong's and

Khruba Noi's messages convey symbolic meaning through the confirmation of loyalty to the national *sangha* and state authority. Simultaneously, this standpoint endorses their national-international reputations as well. Followers of modern *khruba* recently include business owners in many countries, especially Chinese from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. Hence, the "going native" process should be integrated with the global trends in order to be *khruba*, charismatic monks, for Thais and global devotees. This is the main focus of this research that I shall discuss more in the following chapters.

Regarding the issues of age and *vassa*, as they are frequently attacked by the opposing group, I found that it is not taken seriously by modern *khruba*. In addition to the argument from primary sources confirming that Khruba Siwichai was called *khruba* before he reached the age of 60, these modern *khruba* have argued that as long as they follow good practices and are accepted by their followers, they can be *khruba* at any age.

As Khruba Sam Nuan comments:

The *khruba* title in the North [of Thailand] is bestowed honorarily by followers. On this basis, followers will consider the individual monk through his practices in accordance with the *Vinaya*. Thus, these days, we find many *khruba* who are young in age. Moreover, some are praised as *khruba* while they are still novices. It is possible and acceptable that either monks or novices can be *khruba* if they do good things and strictly follow Khruba Siwichai. Importantly, as long as they are accepted by followers, there is nothing wrong. Followers must consider these matters thoroughly before paying respect to any monks, I believe (February 18, 2016).

Thus, the two opposing views of *khruba* can in a sense be considered two sides of the same coin; moreover, they share at least two things in common despite their different standpoints. First, they both have engaged in the process of establishing Khruba Siwichai as the *khruba* role model. While the former argue that his practices are *authentic* Lan Na Buddhist traditions which should be preserved and protected, the latter also claim to be the followers of Khruba Siwichai in addition to believing that

some things should be revised to better suit people's needs in modern society. Therefore, for the former, *khru*ba can survive by preservation and protection from the modernity, whereas for the latter, *khru*ba can survive by adaptation and interaction with modernity. Second, they claim to be compliant monks under the *sangha* system. As I mentioned earlier, most of the monks in the essentialist view of *khru*ba have administrative positions just as do modern *khru*ba (*phrakhr*u or abbot of a monastery).

One thing that differentiates people holding the modern view of *khru*ba from those with the essentialist view is criticism of the weaknesses of the *sangha*. Modern *khru*ba and their followers seem careful not to give any critical comments on the *sangha*, whereas critical opinions are found amongst monks and scholars from the other side. Phrakhr

u Adunsilakit (interview, March 9, 2016), for example, explicitly commented that the proliferation of *khru*ba in the North today reflects the weakness of the national *sangha* because it lacks any measure of clamping down or monitoring them. Moreover, some monks in ecclesiastical offices have good and mutually beneficial relationships with modern *khru*ba¹⁶. The conflict between the two points of view regarding *khru*ba represents the social tension that has occurred for decades. Significantly, I point out here that *khru*ba is a contested meaning for which no group can claim the absolute right to create a definitively valid meaning for society. This term is open to new interpretations.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The *khru*ba tradition and belief in *ton bun* is a unique practice of Theravada Buddhism in the Upper Mekong region covering the areas of today's northern Thailand, eastern Shan State of Myanmar, northern Laos, and Xishuangbanna in Yunnan region of PRC, so-called Lan Na Buddhism. This belief is in addition to a combination of the concepts of the *bodhisatta*, one manifestation of the future Buddha, and Ariya Metteyya, or the legend of the fifth Buddha to come. Therefore, some former *khru*ba were seen by their followers as *ton bun* or *bodhisatta*. Later in contemporary Thai society, *khru*ba have

¹⁶ Similarly, Phra Paisan Visalo (Paisan 2000) has commented that the *sangha* system has recently become ruined because of its centralized system and the patron-client relationship. He calls it "anarchy in the *sangha*" (Thai: *anathippatai nai wongkan song*).

undergone a period of flourishing which involves heterogeneous beliefs and practices. The concept of *khru**ba*, as well as *ton bun*, has been redefined and re-evaluated under the context of (1) the decline of state control of religion (but not a decline of nationalism), and (2) popular Buddhism and prosperity religions in capitalist-consumerist society. Modern *khru**ba* are so diverse that they could not be put into categories of *khru**ba* previously described by scholars.

Furthermore, recently, there are two types of *khru**ba*: official and unofficial, while the majority belong to the latter. Even though modern *khru**ba* could be easily promoted to the *khru**ba* title officially by the local *sangha* of Tai-speaking groups in the Upper Mekong region, as a way to legitimize themselves as an official *khru**ba*, most *khru**ba* do not take it seriously. It can be surmised that this might be due to the inferior status of these local *sangha* in relation to the Thai national *sangha*, as well as monastic titles given by them. Hence, modern *khru**ba* are rather looking forward to getting promoted by the national *sangha* because of its superiority and the power given by the *sangha* system, e.g., abbot of a monastery, *phrakhru*, or higher.

Furthermore, *khru**ba* is considered a contested meaning since the proliferation of *khru**ba* during the past three decades has caused social tension between groups of people who are marked as essentialists and those who consider themselves Buddhist reformists. While modern *khru**ba* believe that *khru**ba* could survive by adaptation and interaction with modernity, people in the essentialist view argue that *khru**ba* is a cultural heritage which should be preserved and protected from the taint of modernity and consumerism. This is the contestation centering on the creation of a definitively valid meaning of *khru**ba* for society, yet no group can claim that they have the absolute right to it. However, the two opposing standpoints share two important things: (1) establishing Khruba Siwichai as the imagined ideal of *khru**ba* or a *khru**ba* role model, and (2) being good members of the national *sangha*.

CHAPTER 3

CHARISMATIC MONKS IN THE MAKING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The process how modern *khru*ba create their charismatic status is an important aspect of understanding how modern *khru*ba are considered to be endowed with supernatural power or an exceptional quality which could not be accessed by ordinary individuals. In other words, it is the process of differentiating themselves from other monks and the laity, or a distance-making process. This is a symbolic practice which then forms a pattern of relations among them. In this chapter, I shall investigate the process of making charismatic status of modern *khru*ba, focusing on three major cases and discussing through four major areas: (1) the discourse of succession of the great *khru*ba, Siwichai, (2) sacred biographies (*ton bun* narrative), (3) the construction of grandiose monasteries, and (4) religious practices and activities. I point out here that these are very crucial and have strong influence on people's perception of *khru*ba's charismatic status. Additionally, these activities signify the continuation of the former-day *khru*ba concept on the one hand, and new strategies to respond to the diverse expectations of people in modern society on the other.

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3.2 IN THE NAME OF SUCCESSORS



Figure 3.1: Khruba Ariyachat with a backdrop of the statues of the three greatest *khruba* of Lan Na: Siwichai, Khao Pi and Wong

Source: Facebook @saengkaewphothiyan, posted on May 11, 2016

This chapter investigates the process of creating the charismatic status of modern *khruba* through a discourse of the succession of Khruba Siwichai. This process and discourse are essential, as they reveal the attempt of modern *khruba* to connect with the most popular *khruba* in history. The discourse of succession has been expressed through various practices and activities which have made modern *khruba* charismatic. Therefore, this process, among many, is interpreted as a way of legitimating *khruba* in modern times.

Even though all modern *khruba* are under the national *sangha* and many of them received a formal Buddhist education, knowledge in the *khruba* tradition is another domain. Similar to local Buddhist traditions in other regions (e.g., the Lao (northeastern) tradition of Achan Man, see Kamala 1997), *dhamma* studies in Lan Na Buddhism focus on practices of meditation, and reading and writing the Yuan characters rather than on the Tipitaka. Additionally, the form of knowledge transmission typically relies on oral transmission from master to disciples¹. This tradition emphasizes

¹ Isara (2011, 61) suggests that this type of transmission explains the rarity of materials relating to meditation practices of Khruba Siwichai.

commentary texts, meditative exercises, and reading and writing in the Yuan characters, as well as architecture and construction techniques as found in the case of Khruba Khao Pi who had been trained chiefly by Khruba Siwichai (Kwanchewan 1988, 125-141, also Isara 2011).

The transmission of esoteric knowledge still practiced today, especially for mystical-practical subjects like mind training and meditative contemplation (Thai: *kammathan*), mantra chants (Thai: *mon*, *khatha*), ritual performance, *yantra*, and production of magical-potent objects, which certainly are not taught in formal Buddhist education. Additionally, in biographies of modern *khruba*, a journey to seek knowledge from specialists located in several places is highlighted. It is also found in the official biography of Khruba Siwichai to demonstrate his devotion and enthusiasm for *dhamma* practice. When a biography describes how hard an individual *khruba* has come in seeking and learning special subjects with the specialists, it not only implies his determination and devotion in a monastic life, but it is also used as a way to legitimize his knowledge in a special position. It is, in addition, considered as one technique to differentiate himself from other monks, and typically, from other *khruba* of his time. Here, I shall elaborate through three cases of modern *khruba* as follows.

3.2.1 Khruba Don of Wat Phraphutthabat Pha Nam in Li district, Lamphun province

Khruba Don was 45 years old at the time of the interview. According the interview (July 4, 2015), Don was born on January 4, 1971, in Ban Dong Ma Da, Doi Tao district, Chiang Mai province. He is the third of five children. As he recalled, his monastic life started in 1986 when his grandfather brought him to Wat Huai Tom in Li district, Lamphun province, and asked Khruba Wong to take care of him as a pupil (Thai: *luksit*, *dek wat* or a temple boy). Khruba Wong was the abbot of Wat Huai Tom and was well known as the third successor of Khruba Siwichai's lineage, after Khruba Khao Pi. Wat Huai Tom was founded by Khruba Wong around 1971. The Huai Tom community was also founded by Khruba Wong during this time and was primarily for Karen who relocated from mountainous areas and wanted to stay near Khruba Wong. Until Khruba Wong died in 2000, moral rules in Huai Tom were strictly followed by the majority:

no animals were kept, alcohol, drugs and weapons were banned, and followers were to adopt vegetarianism. The monastery is supported by the Thai Royal Family and the King secured the land for the Karen after visits in the 1970s. A royal project station was set up in the vicinity. Wat Huai Tom has a footprint of the Buddha (Thai: *phrabat*) and a holy spring (Gravers 2012, 357-358; also Gravers 2017; and Kwanchewan 2010).

Don became a temple boy after that. Because of a tight schedule, Khruba Wong later put him under the care of Khruba Phan, Khruba Wong's disciple and younger cousin (the current abbot). However, eventually Khruba Phan asked Phrakhu Upathamsangkakit, a senior fellow monk, to replace him as Don's master. In 1987, Don was ordained as a novice in that monastery. Khruba Wong gave him the ordination name *Aphiwanno*. As a novice, Don studied dhamma with the three masters in the monastery. He also completed the *dhamma* scholar advanced level (Thai: *naktham ek* or first class *nak tham*) in the *dhamma* studies examination. In 1992, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk. At first, Khruba Wong gave him the ordination name *Inthawangso*, but the preceptor in the ceremony changed it to *Atthakamo*.

Don stayed in Wat Huai Tom as a fellow monk until 1995-1996. After that, Khruba Wong asked him to leave for Wat Pha Nam. Wat Pha Nam is located in another village around 10 k.m. away. Khruba Khao Pi had restored Wat Pha Nam around 1963-1964 and used it as a permanent residence until his death in 1977. Khruba Khao Pi was known as a very close disciple of Khruba Siwichai. After Khruba Siwichai died, he was recognized as a successor of the Khruba's lineage as well as the second Buddhist saint of Lan Na (Thai: *ton bun ong thi song haeng Lan Na*, see Kwanchewan 1988, 1999, 2002, 2010; Phongsak 1997). Both Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong urged poor Karens from mountain villages to settle in their monasteries in order to stop animal sacrifice, become Buddhists and participate in development projects. Although they were Yuan, they were considered the heads of the Karens (Hinton 1979 cited in Gravers 2012, 358). Moreover, in the Pha Nam community, the majority of the population are both Karen and Yuan, mostly those who were affected by the construction of the Bhumibol Dam in 1964 (see Kwanchewan 1988, 2002).

After the death of Khruba Khao Pi, Khruba Wong was in charge of the monastery for many years. The mummified body of Khruba Khao Pi was kept inside the monastery instead of being cremated, following Khruba Wong's wish. However, this situation caused a serious conflict, chiefly between the former disciples of Khruba Khao Pi and the disciples of Khruba Wong. Khruba Khao Kham Pan (died in 2002)², who was known as one of the close disciples of Khruba Khao Pi, led a group of dissidents to attack Khruba Wong's high-handed decision. Khruba Khao Kham Pan insisted that the body should be cremated in accordance with the local tradition, no matter who he was, because mummifying a body was taboo, while Khruba Wong's disciples believed it was a good will and a good vision for Wat Pha Nam itself. The mummified body was kept inside the monastery to maintain a religious community of Khruba Khao Pi as well as to attract people. "It is the best way for the monastery to survive after the death of the master" (interview, Phra Songkran, August 23, 2015; Khruba Soda, August 22, 2015). A sharp fragmentation among villagers and disciples in the Pha Nam community lasted for many years, as a result, even after Don was in charge.

As a direct disciple of Khruba Wong, Don was being closely watched by the opposite faction in the Pha Nam community, including the former disciples of Khruba Khao Pi outside. I was told by a close disciple of Don that during his early years as abbot, he tried hard to resolve the conflict. At the same time, a new identity as a disciple of Khruba Wong and a successor of Khruba Khao Pi was being introduced. In order to solve the long-lasting conflict, Don began in a very simple way, such as avoiding talking about the conflicts in the past, either the conflict of Khruba Khao Pi with Khruba Phrommachak³ and Khruba Inthachak⁴ (see Phramaha Saranyu Panyatharo

² A white robe monk, the same as Khruba Khao Pi.

³ Khruba Phomma was a master of Khruba Wong, too.

⁴ During the 1950s, Khruba Khao Pi had a dispute with three senior *sangha* monks who were brothers. They were Inthachak, Phrommachak and Khamphira. In 1951, Khao Pi wrote a booklet, *ong satsana song hong*, or the two religious forms (see Apichai Khao Pi 1951). According to Khao Pi, one religious form was the Lamphun and Chiang Mai religion, which was the authentic one. The other form was *Burmese Christianity*, which he regarded as a counterfeit religion imported by the three senior *sangha* monks. The so-called *Burmese Christianity* was, in fact, the standardized set of Buddhist practices promoted by the centralized *sangha*. In the booklet, critical issues are the acceptance of the eight precepts and the method of chanting. Khao Pi's denunciation of the three monks as those who imported *Burmese Christianity* insulted Inthachak, among the three, who then notified the regional *sangha*. On August 7, 1951, a meeting was held to settle the dispute between Khao Pi and Inthachak, who was supported by other modern educated monks. After this meeting,

2003; Provincial *Sangha* Councils of Chiang Mai-Lamphun 1951; Kwanchewan 1988, 134-140) or the conflict of Khruba Wong with Khruba Khao Kham Pan. He also asked the villagers to stop talking about these conflicts. During one conversation, Don explained, “the past is the past; it is already finished. Now we need to move forward, not go backward, so it is useless to talk about it” (interview, August 28, 2015).

I witnessed on several occasions that if villagers, including me, went too far in discussing the conflicts, he would interrupt with a strong voice and repeat the statement which implied his intention to end the subject.

Don follows Khruba Wong’s will to preserve the sacred-mummified body of Khruba Khao Pi and holds the robe-changing ceremony on March 3 of each year (the date Khruba Khao Pi died). Recently, the ceremony has gained more popularity than in the time of Khruba Wong, attested by the large number of attendants as well as money donations⁵. Moreover, the ceremony is now promoted by the provincial offices to be one of the most important events of Lamphun province. The event thus has become the main destination of Khruba Khao Pi’s believers and followers, including general Buddhists from all over the country. The number of attendants in 2016 was estimated to be more than 20,000 (during 1-3 March), and the monastery gained more than one million baht in donations.

Regarding the group of dissidents opposed to the mummifying of the body as well as the robe-changing ceremony, I found that, as the event has gained more popularity, opposing voices have become softer. Two monks that I have met have been in strong disagreement over this issue. They also commented that the ceremony has recently become commercialized. Nonetheless, they are found at the robe-changing ceremony every year. During the ceremony in 2015 and 2016, one of the monks served as master

which was held in Wat Phra Singh, the Chiang Mai and Lamphun *Sangha* Councils jointly published an announcement defining Khao Pi’s followers as those who were illiterate the Thai alphabet, but who did not believe the reasons pointed out by the “intellectual” (Kwanchewan 1988, 134-140; Provincial *Sangha* Councils of Chiang Mai-Lamphun 1951).

⁵ Furthermore, in 2016 the deputy supreme commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces came to preside over the ceremony as chief of the laity (Thai: *prathan fai kharawat*).

of ceremonies in the main hall while the other prepared an alms house for guests⁶. Phra Prakop Bun, from the two above mentioned, has even declared himself to be a close disciple of Khruba Khao Kham Pan and served as a ritual specialist for Don during a private robe-changing ceremony (in February 2016) before the official event. The paradoxical standpoint of these monks is understandable since the robe-changing ceremony gives them space to claim the status of successors of Khruba Khao Pi.

In a more strategic approach, Don has performed various activities as follows.

1. Participatory approach to religious activities

The fragmentation in the community also meant that villagers were divided into two groups; each group conducted religious activities in accordance with their own masters, either Khruba Wong or Khruba Khao Pi, for example, in reckoning of Buddhist Sabbath days and the Buddhist lent day. As the abbot, Don showed his sincerity in including them all in the monastery's activities. Through this strategy, he hoped that a sense of belonging would be rebuilt among villagers in both groups. More than a decade after he took up the abbot position, his effort eventually came to fruition. I was told by a fellow monk of Wat Pha Nam that, over the past decade, villagers have decided to leave the conflict behind and conform to conventional practices (interview, Phra Songkran, August 23, 2015). Nonetheless, Don is wise enough to compromise by continuing to carry on some practices of Khruba Khao Pi along with the conventional way (of the national *sangha*), rather than having them totally disappear. For instance, Wat Pha Nam holds the Buddhist Lent Day ceremony twice a year, one to conform to Khruba Khao Pi's practice and the other in accordance with the standardized Buddhist calendar.

Currently, Wat Pha Nam has at least four major activities each year: the robe-changing ceremony, the beginning of Buddhist Lent Day (Thai: *wan khao phansa*), the end of Buddhist Lent Day (Thai: *wan ok phansa*), and *thot kathin* festival⁷. Each activity requires a large number of volunteers as well as a huge budget. Don invites villagers in

⁶ They explained that although they did not totally agree with the event, as disciples of Khruba Khao Pi, they also wanted to pay homage to their teacher's spirit (interview, Khruba Soda, August 22, 2015; Phra Prakop Bun, September 4, 2015).

⁷ *Thot kathin* is practiced annually during October and November. The practice consists in essence of giving new robes to the monks who are coming out of retreat at the end of the rainy season.

the community, both Karen and Yuan, to take part in every process in order to show that the monastery affords importance to the community. In Don's point of view, the participation of villagers is the key to success, "as we have seen today, Pha Nam is an exemplary case for a community-based activity, and it also represents the collaboration of a multi-ethnic community" (Khruba Don, March 1, 2016). Wat Pha Nam gains great support from the community members who have, one way or another, contributed to the flourishing of the monastery today.

Wat Pha Nam also gains support from its outside network, including the Huai Tom community of Khruba Phan and groups of Khruba Khao Pi's believers and followers in Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Mae Hong Son, and Tak provinces. The annual March 3 robe-changing ceremony has confirmed the effectiveness of Pha Nam's network (see Kwanchewan and Pisith 2016).

2. Khruba Chao Apichai Khao Pi Foundation

The foundation has been in existence for two decades. Even though it is called a foundation, it has not yet been legally registered. Its function is similar to that of a fund (interview, Khruba Don, March 1, 2016). So far, the fund is aimed at emergency cases, such as a financial shortage⁸. Furthermore, the fund is granted for public benefits which can be grouped into two categories: 1) construction and renovation of religious buildings and promotion of education (for temple boys, novices, and monks), and 2) charitable activities such as funerals for poor families. The construction and renovation works include the former sites of Khruba Khao Pi, such as Wat Ban Rai in Doi Tao district, Chiang Mai province; Wat Mae Wang Lum in Li district, Lamphun province; and new sites such as Wat Huai Bong, Wat Sao Hin, and Wat Sala Chiang Tong in Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son province; and Wat Thung Khok Chang in Doi Tao district, Chiang Mai province. Don and his activities, carried out in the name of the foundation, are also viewed as an effort to maintain and expand Pha Nam's network, as will be elaborated in the following chapter.

⁸ Currently, there are 15 committee members in charge, consisting of school directors, village headmen, and sub-district chiefs.

3.2.2 Khruba Noi of Wat Si Don Mun in Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province

At the time of the interview, Khruba Noi was 65 years old, born on February 10, 1951, in Ban Si Don Mun, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province. In his biography (Wat Si Don Mun 2012; watsridonmoon9.com 2015; see also “เปิดบันทึกตำนาน ตอน ครูบาน้อย วัดศรีดอนมูล” [Opening the legend of Khruba Noi] on YouTube 2015). He is the second child of four siblings. He was ordained as a novice in 1964 and later as a monk in 1971 with the ordination name *Techapanyo*, literally “the one who has wisdom as power.” When he was seven years old, his mother asked Khruba Phad, the former abbot of Wat Si Don Mun, to take care of him as a pupil (a temple boy). Wat Si Don Mun is located in the community, and in addition, Khruba Phad was famous for magical art, especially invulnerability and traditional healing⁹ (see “เปิดบันทึกตำนาน ตอน ครูบาผัด วัดศรีดอนมูล” [Opening the legend of Khruba Phad] on YouTube 2015). Khruba Phad was also known by his followers as a disciple of Khruba Siwichai (watsangkaew.com 2010). Khruba Phad taught Noi several subjects, such as the Yuan alphabet, which was used to preserve knowledge of the incantations and magic spells of ancient Lan Na. Due to his great merit and unusual talent, he was a fast learner and surpassed other students in the class. The biography portrays Noi as the closest disciple whom Khruba Phad trusted the most and to whom he wanted to hand down the secret knowledge of magic arts.

Noi gained a reputation as a magic monk since he was under Khruba Phad. After Khruba Phad passed away (in 2007), Noi succeeded him as abbot. Even though we do not know exactly when Noi was recognized by the *khruba* title, Daeng, one of his close followers (interview, March 4, 2016), revealed that it was at the latest by 1994. Because it was the first year of his *nirothakam* (retreat), the success of this practice has led people to recognize him as a charismatic *khruba* (*nirothakam* will be discussed in detail in the following topic). Therefore, Noi was able to claim being a follower of the Lan Na

⁹ An important piece of evidence to prove his invulnerability was at the royal cremation in 2008, when most of the corpse remained incredibly fresh (see “ปาฏิหาริย์ครูบาผัด” [The supernatural phenomenon of Khruba Phad] on YouTube 2014). He was also patronized by the Royal Family which signified his recognition at the national level.

Buddhist tradition of Khruba Siwichai and a successor of the magic arts of Khruba Phad. He declares his devotion to Lan Na Buddhism by paying high respect to Khruba Siwichai and claims to follow Khruba Siwichai's teachings in every aspect, such as self awareness, construction works, *nirothakam*, and vegetarianism. Khruba Siwichai is treated as the greatest *khruba* of all (Wat Si Don Mun 2012, 13; interview, Khruba Noi, March 4, 2016).

Besides Khruba Siwichai, Noi had eight more masters who had taught him directly on various subjects, which were 1) insight meditation from Khruba Phrommachak of Wat Phrabat Tak Pha in Pasang district, Lamphun province (a master of Khruba Wong); 2) sacred formulas (Thai: *mon-khatha*) for sprinkling holy water for happiness, prosperity, and health from Khruba La (Ta Thip) of Wat Pa Tueng in San Kamphaeng district, Chiang Mai province; 3) the Yuan characters recording sacred formulas for compassion and charms (Thai: *metta mahaniyom*), as well as herbal and medicinal recipes from Khruba Kham Pan of Wat Mo Kham Tuang in Chiang Mai city; 4) meditative practices during *nirothakam* from Khruba Wong of Wat Huai Tom (the master of Khruba Don) in Li district, Lamphun province; 5) astrology, horoscopes and medicinal herbs in Tai (Shan) and Burmese traditional recipes, including the making of amulets such as candles for life prolongation and warding off bad luck (Thai: *thian suepchata*, *thian sado khro*), from Sala Kung Ma (layman: an astrologer in the court of ancient Keng Tung); 6) Khruba In Kaeo, the preceptor in a novice ordination ceremony, of Wat Ku Suea in Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province; 7) Khruba Un Ruean, the preceptor in a monk ordination ceremony; and 8) the first master, Khruba Phad (Wat Si Don Mun 2012, 12-21).

These nine masters are highly respected by Noi. His gratitude to these masters is expressed and highlighted through several activities, for example, the building of a pagoda hall at the back of the monastery which was named *Chedi Kao Khanachan* or the pagoda of nine masters. Inside the pagoda, life-size images of nine masters are enshrined. The pagoda was built large and magnificently decorated in the Northern Thai style with a budget of more than ten million baht. Recently, it has become a new tourist attraction of Saraphi district. Moreover, each year (in June), Noi holds a ceremony to pay homage to the masters' spirits (Thai: *wan katanyu kao khanachan*). On that day,

he also performs a ritual for life prolongation, warding off bad luck and enhancing good fortune, according to the Northern Thai tradition, for all guests.

Furthermore, at least once a month during the waxing moon period, Noi will conduct almsgiving in the early morning for 108 monks and novices in front of Khruba Siwichai's statue at the foot of Doi Suthep Mountain (Wat Si Don Mun, 2012, 29; interview, Daeng, March 4, 2016). The number 108 symbolizes the 108 auspicious things in Buddhist beliefs and is also believed to be the total number of rosary beads of Khruba Siwichai¹⁰. Photos of this activity were posted and shared on Wat Si Don Mun's facebook page (@Watsridonmoon, e.g., on July 10, 2016) even though this activity seems strange in the eyes of general Buddhists because a monk, who should seek alms, is doing almsgiving to Buddhist monks and novices. This activity is another example confirming that Khruba Siwichai is highly esteemed by Noi.

These activities convey a symbolic message to underline the status of successor to "traditional secretive wisdom." They are also used as a message to counter the opposite side that condemns Noi's deviant behavior. By discursive practices, the general public is notified that his knowledge and practices are genuine, not just a self-invention. Moreover, in these activities, the image of a grateful monk is emphasized. According to Thai custom, gratitude (Thai: *khwam katanyu rukhun*) is a mark of a good man, manifested in being grateful to parents, teachers and patrons. Generally in Thai society, National Teacher's Day and *wan wai khru* (the ritual of paying respect to teachers) are annual national events. In Noi's *wan katanyu kao khanachan*, too, he attracts hundreds of people every year. By this means, his deep gratitude to the masters, symbolized through these activities, is also highly appreciated by lay followers. He is praised by the designation "the grateful monk of Lan Na" (Thai: *phra yot katanyu haeng Lan Na*) (Wat Si Don Mun, 2012, 21).

¹⁰ The number 108 has been referred to in many other ways, such as on the Buddha footprints, e.g., of the reclining Buddha at Wat Phra Chettuphon, or Wat Pho, in Bangkok which depicts pictures of the 108 auspicious things, and *I ti pi so rattanamala* (a Pali poem) which contains 108 chapters to appreciate the Buddha's virtues (56 chapters for virtues of the Buddha, 38 chapters for virtues of the *dhamma* and 14 chapters for virtues of the *sangha*).

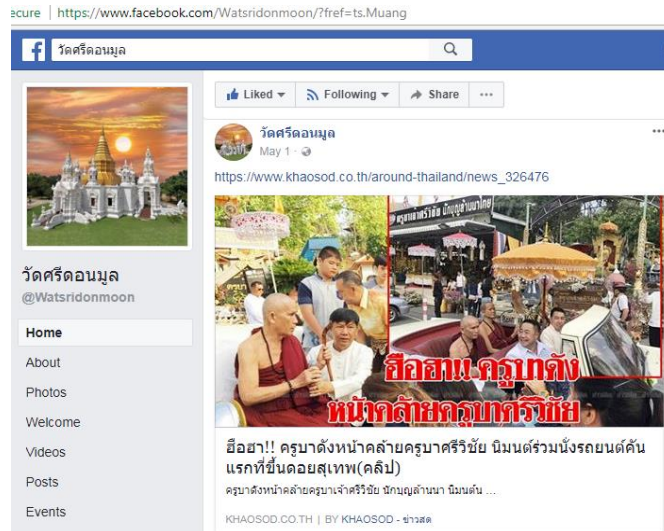


Figure 3.2: News by Khaosod reposted on Facebook by Wat Si Don Mun showing Khruba Noi with the headline “causing a sensation, a popular Khruba [Noi], who looks like Khruba Siwichai, was invited to be seated on the first car to Doi Suthep” [Re-projecting the event of Khruba Siwichai who went up to Doi Suthep by a car for the first time as the celebration for the accomplishment of the road construction on April 30, 1935]

Source: Facebook @Watsridonmoon, posted on May 1, 2016

3.2.3 Khruba Ariyachat of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan in Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province

Khruba Ariyachat was born on January 9, 1981, to a poor farmer family in Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province. He is the youngest of three children. His biographies (So Sutthiphan 2011; watsangkaew.com 2010; YouTube Watsangkaew Phothiyan 2016) have portrayed Ariyachat as a talented child and a man of merit compared to others of his age in the village. He was also a fast learner and, consequently, his parents named him *Keng*, meaning smart or clever. As a child, he liked to go to the temple with his grandfather to listen to *dhamma* sermons. Thus, he has been able to recite the *dhamma* verses since he was 11 years old. Khruba Chan Thip, the former abbot of Wat Wang Mui in Lamphun province, close to his hometown, observed him and foretold that this child was characterized by great charisma which could contribute to the Buddhist religion in the future. Hence, Khruba Chan Thip decided to pass down his knowledge,

especially the Yuan alphabet and magic arts, to the little Ariyachat (watsangkaew.com 2010; So Sutthiphan 2011, 13-16).

Khruba Chan Thip himself was famous for magic arts and potent objects passed down by Khruba Chum Phothiko, the former abbot of Wat Wang Mui. Khruba Chum was a legendary monk reputed to have this kind of subject. His biography (LuangPor.com 1994) devotes most of the space to his famous amulets and miraculous stories of supernatural powers experienced by devotees nation-wide. He was praised, by the author of the biography, as *phra ariyachao haeng Hariphunchai* (the *arahant* of Hariphunchai, or Lamphun). Furthermore, Khruba Chum was known as one of the close disciples of Khruba Siwichai. His devotees claim that he was a direct successor to Khruba Siwichai's lineage, and not Khruba Khao Pi ¹¹ (interview, Phra Athikan Winuwat, the current abbot of Wat Wang Mui and elder followers, August 28, 2015). Ariyachat also claims that Khruba Phad of Wat Si Don Mun in Chiang Mai province (a master of Khruba Noi) had also studied magical subjects with Khruba Chum at Wat Wang Mui, because it was found that they share some *yantra* formulas (watsangkaew.com 2010).

Under the care of Khruba Chan Thip, Ariyachat was a fast learner. He was able to read and write within only 1-2 days. Khruba Chan Thip then taught various mantras to Ariyachat, and of course, he was able to learn in a very short time. Ariyachat was very adept at reading the *yantra* characters and figures representing Khruba Chan Thip. When Khruba Chan Thip was very old, Ariyachat produced *takrut* (a tiny rolled metal amulet inscribed with magic words) and other amulets by himself. It was said that the amulets contained magical and protective powers, just as those of Khruba Chan Thip

¹¹ As it is acknowledged by the public, two pieces of evidence were used to confirm the assertion. (1) Chum was the only one who received permission from Khruba Siwichai to cast an image of himself while he was alive. This event affirmed Chum's status as a very close disciple of Khruba Siwichai, even though casting an image of a living person is a serious taboo in the Northern Thai custom. After the image was completed, Khruba Siwichai saw it and was delighted. He then took a rosary from his neck to put on the image. He also gave two peacock fans to be placed side-by-side with the image. Recently, Wat Wang Mui claimed that the image is the only one which had been cast while Khruba Siwichai was alive. (2) Chum was given a peacock fan and walking stick from Khruba Siwichai during the construction of road to Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai city. This event was interpreted as the designation of Chum as the direct successor to Khruba Siwichai's lineage (LuangPor.com 1994, 56-60). All of these items have recently been placed in a pavilion located next to the sermon hall of Wat Wang Mui in Lamphun city.

(watsangkaew.com 2010). When he was 17 years old (1988), not long after Khruba Chan Thip died, he had a fervent desire to ordain just as he had the opportunity to pay respect to Khruba Thueang of Wat Ban Den in Mae Taeng district, Chiang Mai province.

Khruba Thueang is a highly respected master with deep understanding of meditation. He is also rumored to be a reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai (see Ashley 2011, 180-185)¹². Khruba Thueang suggested to him that he should ordain because Khruba Thueang observed that he looked like a person with charisma who has a destiny in Buddhism. However, Ariyachat's parents wanted him to continue his studies so that he could work and support the family after graduation. In the end, his parents consented as they were unable to oppose him; consequently, Ariyachat was ordained as a novice under the care of Khruba Thueang (ibid.).

Ariyachat studied *dhamma*, including the Yuan alphabet, and magic arts at Wat Wang Mui for a long time and then went to search for knowledge in other areas, such as a series of incantations until it was regarded that he was inferior to no one in the area of incantations. Nevertheless, he still wanted to search for more knowledge in the area of incantations. Apart from Khruba Chum, Khruba Chan Thip, and Khruba Thueang, the masters held in great respect by Ariyachat were Phra Achan Mani of Wat Ban Tuet in Chiang Klang district, Nan province, Khruba Bunsom of Wat Wang Mui in Mueang district, Khruba In Ta of Wat Huai Sai in Ban Thi district, Khruba In Ta of Wat Wang Thong, and Khruba Wong of Wat Huai Tom (a master of Khruba Don) in Li district, Lamphun province. All were experts in magical subjects as well as insight meditation (watsangkaew.com 2010; So Sutthiphan 2011, 48-52). He was then ordained as a monk at Wat Wang Mui when he was 20 years old (2001). His ordination name is *Ariyachitto*. As described above, Ariyachat claims to be a follower of the Lan Na Buddhist tradition delineated by Khruba Siwichai. The evidence is the practice of *nirothakam* (the same as Khruba Noi), which is believed to be an old practice of Khruba Siwichai.

¹² It is often told by his followers that he was born on the same day (February 20) of the year that Khruba Siwichai died. They also pointed out the physical resemblance between photos of the young Khruba Thueang and young Khruba Siwichai. There is a photo juxtaposing the face of each monk as a young man, seen in the hall where Khruba Thueang receives his guests. The two faces are also found on either side of amulets that are frequently distributed at monastery celebrations (Ashley 2011, 182).

Ariyachat states that he learned this practice from a *pap sa* (mulberry paper manuscript)¹³ of Khruba Chum. He also claims that the manuscript contains the exact information of the original version written by Khruba Siwichai¹⁴. While Khruba Chum was alive, he practiced *nirothakam* regularly, mostly in a cemetery near the village (watsangkaew.com 2010; So Sutthiphan 2011, 48-52).

The casting of a Khruba Siwichai statue is another piece of evidence to confirm an effort to link himself with Khruba Siwichai. The statue has recently been claimed to be the largest bronze statue of Khruba Siwichai in the world. It is a symbolic message to underline the status of a successor in Khruba's lineage as well. The Khruba Siwichai statue was soon accompanied by statues of Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong. They were both recognized as the direct successors of Khruba Siwichai. The three *khruba* are generally known as the greatest *khruba* of Lan Na or *ton bun haeng Lan Na*, and are highly revered by the Northerners in recent times. This indicates that the dominant discourse of Khruba Siwichai's lineage consisting of the three *khruba* has influenced Ariyachat's perception. Even though Wat Wang Mui has staunchly claimed, through several pieces of evidence, that Khruba Chum was the direct successor of Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Chum was not included in the construction of the greatest *khruba* statues by Ariyachat¹⁵.

The discourse of succession, in Khruba Siwichai's lineage is underpinned by stories of reincarnations. Siripha, a key devotee of Ariyachat (based in Bangkok and London), told me that when Ariyachat was a novice, he claimed to be a reincarnation of Khruba Khao Pi (interview, November 7, 2015). She later sent me a photo of young Ariyachat through Facebook messenger in order to confirm the physical resemblance of the two

¹³ *Pap sa* is a thick paper made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree, which is accordion folded to form a light brown booklet. The Lan Na mulberry paper booklets contained secular stories as well as talismanic, astrological and ritual matter, unlike the palm-leaf scrolls which dealt almost exclusively with Buddhist scriptures.

¹⁴ As suggested by Isara (2011, 94), Khruba Chum might have learned meditation techniques from Khruba Siwichai, and the meditation techniques of Khruba Siwichai might have been transferred to Ariyachat.

¹⁵ Khruba Chum's image was also cast, but in a much smaller size, and was enshrined together with other images of Thailand's famous monks in a long pavilion located beside the large statues of the three *khruba*.

*khru*ba. However, as he gains more popularity after the establishment of Wat Saengkaew, he is rumored to be a reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai instead.

Even though he himself has never proclaimed it, by all appearances, he has a habit of walking slowly with a slightly hunched posture of an elderly person. Additionally, the rumor was intentionally emphasized many times by his followers. For instance, the author of his biography, So Sutthiphan (alias) in 2011, with Ariyachat's permission, points out that Ariyachat's face resembles the face of Khruba Siwichai on the statue. Another case was in 2016, Woody, a famous TV host, asked Ariyachat again if he was the reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai. And even though he always says "no," it is assumed that the general public tends to believe that the contrary is true because of all the evidence that seemingly supports it.

Nonetheless, another claim is found in the discourse of succession among other modern *khru*ba who cannot connect themselves directly with Khruba Siwichai's lineage. They instead claim to be successors in the Lan Na Buddhist tradition, or the so-called *khru*ba tradition of Khruba Siwichai. The concept of succession in *khru*ba tradition is widely used by a number of young *khru*ba and is expressed through various practices, such as the reproduction of external elements of Khruba Siwichai's monastic style and participation in ceremonies or activities for the former *khru*ba, including drawing a connection with living *khru*ba who are especially known as disciples of the Khruba's lineage. As Wilak (2010, 27) explains, in recent times, Khruba Siwichai's tradition is followed by two groups of monks. The first group can be identified by a direct relation in the monastic lineage to Khruba Siwichai, while the second group is branded by succession of the *khru*ba tradition. However, the former remain small in number whereas the latter constitute the majority of *khru*ba today.

Moreover, I found that some *khru*ba in the latter group are also rumored to be reincarnations of Khruba Siwichai. This is considered another way to affirm the status of successors. Even though a number of disciples have insisted that Khruba Siwichai had reached the *nibbana* state (Thai: *nipphan*, the final goal of Buddhism, a state of enlightenment, meaning a person is free from desires and suffering), which means that he will no longer be reborn, stories of reincarnations are found in many places across the region. The stories share a common principle that after the death of Khruba Siwichai,

his *khwan* (life essence or soul) split into 32 pieces and fell in diverse directions. Thirty-two is the total number of human parts in Buddhist philosophy. *Khwan* is a common belief in the northern region as well as in other Southeast Asian countries. *Khwan* is the vital life force for a living entity and is transformed into spirit (Thai: *winyan*) after death. In Thai folk belief, *khwan* always accompanies a person and indicates his/her physical and mental states of well being (Anuman Rajadhon 1986 cited in Pattana 2008, 133). *Khwan* is embedded along the thirty two parts of body, e.g., head, eyes, hands, arms, and legs.

The concept of *khwan* is related directly to life after death and reincarnation. Having grown up in a rural area of Chiang Rai province, I am familiar with the folk practice of spirit mediumship (Northern Thai: *tham mo tham muea*). Not long after the birth of a new family member, senior members would go to see a spirit medium to find out whose soul is reborn to their family. In the same way, some modern *khruaba* are believed to be reincarnations of one of the 32 *khwan* of Khruba Siwichai, as found in the biographies of Khruba Bunchum (see Cohen 2001, 238), Khruba Thueang, and Khruba Chao Nokaeofa (larndhamkruba.net 2010)¹⁶. Although they interpret the rumors of reincarnations in different ways, it is indicated that the discourse of the succession as well as the establishment of Khruba Siwichai as a *khruaba* role model is crucial for the making of charismatic monks.

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
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¹⁶ In Chomthong district, Chiang Mai province, I also found Khruba Traithep, who is rumored to be the reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai, and a young Khruba Yawichai, who is rumored to be the reincarnation of Khruba Khao Pi.

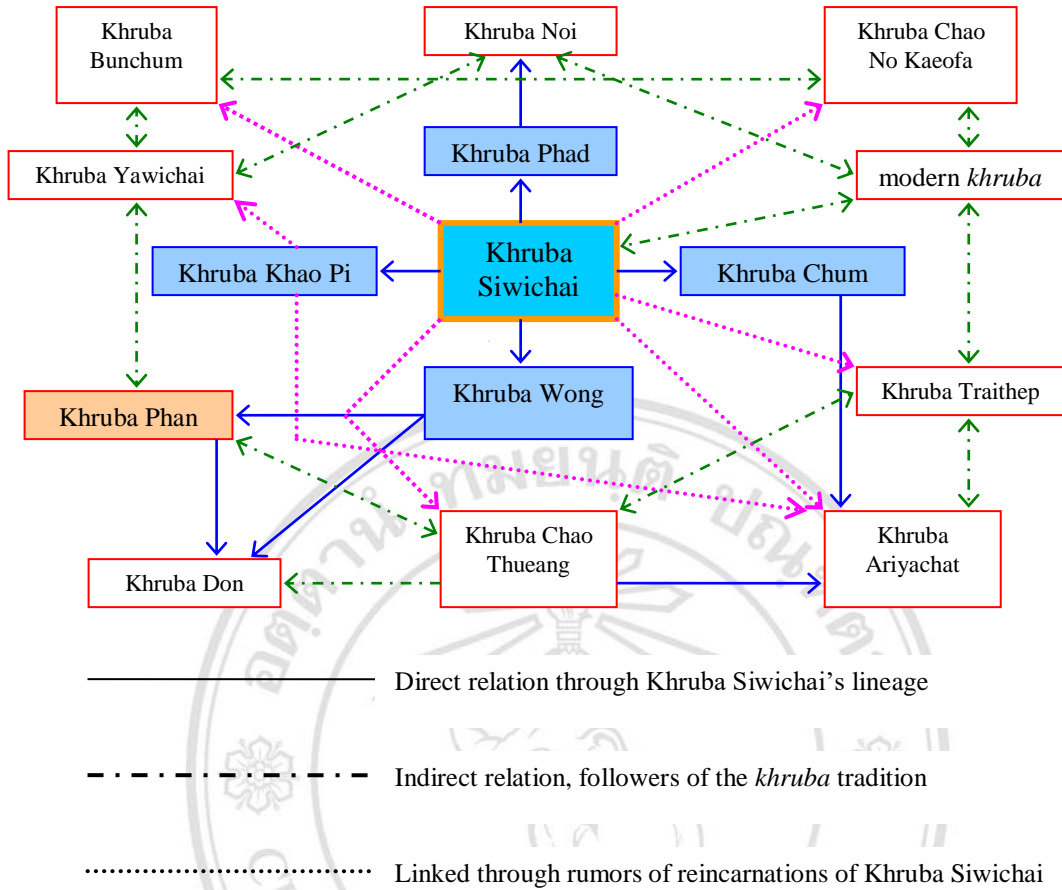


Diagram 3.1 Connections of modern *khruba* with Khruba Siwichai



Figure 3.3: Khruba Don (in the center)

Source: author



Figure 3.4: Khruba Noi (with author)

Source: author



Figure 3.5: Khruba Ariyachat (with Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan)

Source: author

3.3 SACRED BIOGRAPHY

In this topic, I shall discuss holiness in accordance with the concept of *ton bun* or *phu mi bun* (a meritorious person or a man of merit) found in oral and written biographies of modern *khruba*. I point out that this process correlates significantly with varying degrees of charismatic status of modern *khruba*. The topic is demonstrated through a comparison between Khruba Don, who is characterized by a very low degree of holiness, and the other two *khruba*, Noi and Ariyachat, who are characterized by a high

degree of holiness. Through the sacred biographies, a point to consider is the use of the traditional narrative style as it was found in the sacred biographies of the former *khru*ba (e.g., Siwichai and Khao Pi), which demonstrate the important role of the old tradition as a fundamental source underlining the charismatic status and the distance-making process.

3.3.1 Sacred Biographies of the Former *Khru*ba

It was reported that on the day Khru

ba Siwichai was born (in 1878), there was a heavy thunderstorm. He was then given the name of *Fuen*, “quake” or “thunder.” The unusual event signified for many people that he was a *phu mi bun* or a person who endowed with supernatural power or full of merit (Singha 1979, 7; Sommai 2000, 6; Sirisak 2016, 62-74). The circumstances of his birth resonated with the local belief that the god *Indra* (Thai: *Phra In*) heralds the birth of *ton bun* with natural signs such as earthquakes or thunderstorms. Additionally, in his childhood, Siwichai’s compassion was manifested through his refusal to kill animals (Sommai 2002, 7; Faa 1976–1977, 170 cited in Bowie 2014a, 687-688). This is one of the four supernatural events found in his official sacred biography and is recognized as a fundamental source for his success in meditation mastery and religious activities, as I mentioned earlier. The traditional narrative style in the official biography is also found in the case of Khru

ba Khao Pi (see Pradit 1982; Kwanchewan 1988; Phongsak 1997).

3.3.2 Traditional Narratives in Sacred Biographies of Modern *Khru*ba

For modern *khru*ba, I shall focus on the three major cases mentioned above. First, regarding Khru

ba Noi, his official biography began with an unusual event in that as he was born the umbilical cord was wrapped around his body. This event was unusual but in accordance with local beliefs, as it is an auspicious sign for a child who was endowed with merit, one who was born to preserve the Buddhist religion. As he grew up, Noi is portrayed a good boy who obeyed his parents and teachers. He liked to make merit and listen to *dhamma* sermons. He always accompanied his mother to the nearby monastery on Buddhist holy days. When he listened to *dhamma* sermons, he would sit still in

a very polite posture and try to chant along with the monks (amulet.in.th 2008). This remarkable characteristic was described as his affinity for Buddhism.

During his childhood, since the age of seven, Noi was under the care of Khruba Phad. He was a fast learner in *dhamma* studies and the Yuan alphabet and could surpass other students. He was later a very close disciple of Khruba Phad and was purposely selected to inherit knowledge on the magical subjects of Khruba Phad's school. From that time on, he was Khruba Phad's right-hand man and abbot to be, until Khruba Phad's last moment (Wat Si Don Mun 2012; interview, Khruba Noi, March 4, 2016).

Similarly, Khruba Ariyachat, according to his official biography (watsangkaew.com 2010; So Sutthiphan 2011; YouTube Watsangkaew Phothiyan 2016) was associated with auspicious signs very early in his life. While his mother was pregnant with him, she had exceptionally good dreams twice. Once, a large piece of white cloth came to her by chance. She was delighted as she looked through it carefully because the cloth was so bright and clean. Soon after, another good dream came to her; a bright yellow light shone out as she opened the bedroom door. Senior members of the family interpreted it as an auspicious sign, signifying that a very good thing would come to her and her family. The very good thing, as it was interpreted, eventually came when her new born baby was found to have a remarkable physical appearance. According to the local belief, his glowing complexion, large eyes, long ears, and slender fingers and toes were considered the physical marks of *phu mi bun*. As he grew up, little Ariyachat was a recluse who did not hurt animals. In addition, he enjoyed molding Buddha images from clay in different sizes. In school, he was an outstanding child who could surpass other students in the class.

Regarding his affinity for Buddhism, he liked to go to the temple with his grandfather to listen to *dhamma* sermons. He was able to recite *dhamma* verses since he was 11 years old. After that, under the care of Khruba Chan Thip, Ariyachat was a fast learner.

He was able to read and write within only 1-2 days. Khruba Chan Thip foresaw that he would be a charismatic monk, one who was born to preserve the Buddhist religion. Because of his talent and great merit, Khruba Chan Thip decided to teach him several mantras, and he was able to learn them in a very short time. Ariyachat was very adept at

reading the *yantra* characters and figures, eventually representing Khruba Chan Thip, as I mentioned earlier. The turning point was when Ariyachat was 17 years old and studying in secondary school, and he had a fervent desire to ordain. Eventually, Ariyachat was ordained as a novice under the care of Khruba Thueang.

As I have shown above, the traditional narrative style of sacred biography is characterized by all kinds of supernatural stories, such as strange dreams, visions (Thai: *nimit*), unusual innate events, and the superhuman quality as found in the official biographies of Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi, signifying the fundamental source of having a charismatic status. This tradition is still found in the modern days by modern *khruba*. Moreover, owing to modern technology, sacred biographies of modern *khruba* are disseminated even more widely and in a large variety of forms, such as books, leaflets, CDs, video clips on YouTube, and Internet websites.

This practice is considered a major mechanism in the making of charismatic monks in modern times. Furthermore, sacred biographies also serve as a fundamental part of the distance-making process, as I found in the cases of Khruba Noi, Khruba Ariyachat, or Khruba Thueang, and Khruba Bunchum. On a daily basis, Noi and Ariyachat have a fixed schedule for general guests and pilgrims at the monasteries. For example, Noi is available during 10.00-11.30 and 14.00-17.00¹⁷ for guests and pilgrims. With regard to invitations from others, they are quite selective; I found that big events, mostly hosted by prominent, high-ranking monks, are their first priority. At the same time, upon invitations from lay devotees, inside and outside the country, they have prioritized groups of close devotees, who are mostly well-to-do, middle class in big cities (interview, Daeng, March 4, 2016).

Another example is in the monasteries' rituals and ceremonies which are well organized by hired, professional organizers in order to make them splendid and impressive. In the processions, *khruba* are seated on elaborate palanquins or chariots while hundreds of people are gathering around them. Ariyachat usually throws hundreds of bank notes into

¹⁷ I was told by a staff member in charge of a donation house in front of Wat Si Don Mun that if I wanted to take a picture of Khruba Noi, I should ask for permission first, otherwise he would not appear in the picture because of his magical-supernatural powers (May 25, 2015).

the air and lets the congregants fight over them. This practice is commonly found in the processions of modern *khru*ba, as I witnessed in Bunchum's and Thueang's events.

A twenty-baht bank note from a *khru*ba is not worth much in an economic transaction, but the merit and powers embedded in it by *khru*ba are immeasurable. It is worth fighting for. It is usually placed on a household altar or kept in a personal wallet as an auspicious object like other genres of amulets. This practice is also reminiscent of the *bodhisatta* with the mission of saving all living creatures. Chariots and palanquins are the traditional vehicles used to show high reverence to former *khru*ba, including other venerated persons, like Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi (see also Cohen 2001, 241-243). For Khruba Wong, we have seen that even if he got out of the palanquin, his devotees would lie down on their backs for him to walk on. Khruba's rituals and ceremonies thus are crucial in the process of constructing and visualizing the symbolic message of charismatic status.

By contrast, Khruba Don was portrayed, in the biography, as having a very low degree of holiness which, as I suggested earlier, significantly relates to his currently low charisma in the eyes of devotees. His biography is as mundane as that of an ordinary monk, containing no auspicious signs nor unusual stories. As a matter of fact, his official biography has not yet been publicized to the general public and is not available on an online channel. As I mentioned above, his life is very simple and is not characterized by supernatural powers or exceptional quality. In short, he is not tied with *phu mi bun* or *ton bun* concept at the beginning of the story. It thus means he lacks a fundamental source to underline the charismatic status if compared to the other two *khru*ba.

Don lives a very simple life and easy to reach. In Wat Pha Nam, without special events or invitations, he prefers wearing old, faded robes in a casual style. He also prefers walking barefoot inside the monastery. Moreover, he has no rosary, walking stick, or fan (neither peacock nor palm leave) as external components, unlike the other modern *khru*ba. He is also an adventurous monk. He likes to visit remote mountainous areas, especially in Tak and Mae Hong Son provinces. He likes chewing betel nut and smoking hand-made cigars (tobacco wrapped in dried banana leaf). Moreover, he is

a serious cell phone talker. During a trip accompanying him to a *salakkaphat* festival (the act of offering to monks) at Wat Don Mun in Mae Ramat district, Tak province (October 2015), I observed that, at almost every stop, he would walk a distance to look for a place to sit and talk on the phone. Sometimes, he was smoking while talking. These behaviors may not enhance his charismatic status nor his distance-making process. In rituals and ceremonies at Wat Pha Nam, such as the robe-changing ceremony, he prefers working behind the scenes as the head organizer, holding a walky-talky to make sure everything goes well. At the same time, Khruba Phan, of Wat Huai Tom, was invited to preside over the ceremony as the head monk.

Moreover, Don has never had his own distinctive amulet. So far, Wat Pha Nam just keeps reproducing Khruba Khao Pi's amulets for the market. Therefore, stories of charisma and supernatural potency embedded in this kind of object, as we have found in other modern *khruba*, are also missing (I will discuss this point later). The less charismatic status of Don, by all factors, also relates to the less diverse groups of believers and devotees compared to the two abovementioned *khruba*. As I observed, the major groups of devotees of Don are quite specific, chiefly the Karen and the Yuan. There are some devotees from the central region as well, but none from abroad.

Additionally, his rituals and ceremonies are arranged in a more folk style by villagers, rather than hired professional organizers. In the processions, Don walks ahead while Khruba Phan and other senior monks are seated in palanquins surrounded by hundreds of congregants. This indicates that even though he is the abbot of Wat Pha Nam, he is not the one who takes center stage. Phra Songkran, a Pha Nam fellow monk, comments that this is because Don is quite young and has not yet been seen as charismatic compared to the former *khruba* in the lineage. Therefore, villagers prefer calling him by a more casual way as *tu phi* (brother monk), *Tu Don* (monk Don), or *Than Don* rather than *Khruba Don*. And it is noticeable that the *khruba* title was just given to him during the last few years by certain groups of devotees, including many young *khruba* from outside, not by people living in his community (interview, July 31, 2015). Therefore, Don's *khruba* status is rather moderate. However, it is important to add that in the last couple of years, his age numbers won the lottery twice on his birthday in 2014 and 2015. Don took his devotees by surprise and a rumor was spreading out quickly among

his devotees proclaiming his supernatural powers, at least at the early stage, which is a result of the untiring works for Khruba Khao Pi and his followers during the last two decades.

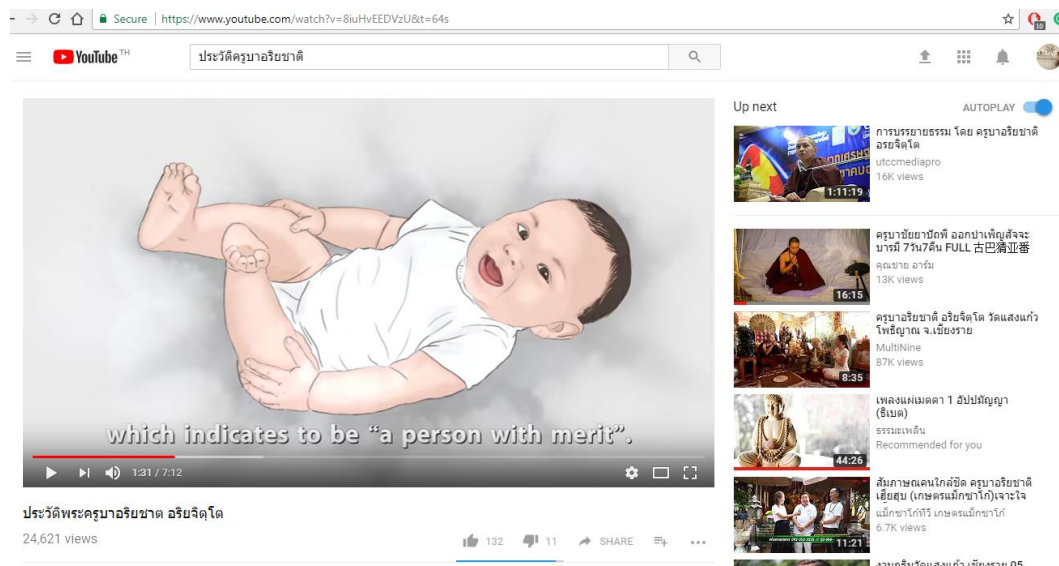


Figure 3.6: A video clip on YouTube presenting the biography of Khruba Ariyachat using the traditional narrative, as found in a printed version

Source: YouTube Watsangkaew Phothiyan, posted on July 8, 2016

3.4 GRANDIOSE MONASTERIES AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Apinya (1993) in her work on Wat Phra Thammakai and its movement in Thailand emphasizes the monastery's landscape architecture as one of the strategies for inducing faith. Clean, clear, tranquil and well-designed landscape architecture has induced faith among followers and visitors, in contrast to many other Buddhist monasteries which are characterized by disarray and deterioration. In this topic, I shall examine space management in monasteries of modern *khruba* in order to suggest that this process is significant for inducing faith as well as for creating charismatic status. Additionally, I argue that monasteries of modern *khruba* are designed to better serve diverse expectations of pilgrims, tourists, and followers. Magnificent buildings and well-designed landscape architecture not only serve people in the quest of peace, like Wat Phra Thammakai, but also provide many activities shared by both popular Buddhism and prosperity religions. Furthermore, monasteries of modern *khruba* have recently merged with the concept of religious tourism. As religious tourist sites, pilgrims and

tourists from diverse religious backgrounds are able to enjoy beautiful sights, magnificent works of art, and various kinds of merit-making activities.

The construction works of modern *khru*ba are considered a significant process to testify to their charismatic status through the grand and magnificent buildings in the monasteries which undoubtedly require large amounts of money to be built. In fact, construction work is one of the traditions of the old-day *khru*ba as we have found in cases of the three greatest *khru*ba in Siwichai's lineage (also a case of *Khru*ba Kham La together with *Khru*ba Intha in Chaing Rai province during the years 1953-1979, see Irwin 2017). The success of construction works for religion and social services (e.g., roads, bridges, schools, health centers, and government offices) in many places across the region were considered one of the major sources of *khru*ba's charisma (see Kwanchewan 1988, 1999; Sopha 1991; Charnnarong 1997; Cohen 2001; Tanabe 2004, 2012; Gravers 2012; Sirisak 2016). In the view of Buddhist revivalism, religious construction is at the center of Lan Na Buddhism whose monks initiate construction projects to cultivate charisma or *barami* by giving their followers opportunities to make merit (Cohen 2000b, 2002; Irwin 2017).

Moreover, this kind of work created the perception of “*khru*ba, the development monk” (Thai: *khru*ba *phra* *nak* *phatthana*) for them which definitely correlated with the state's strategy to develop education and infrastructure of the region during the BE 2500s (1957-1967). *Khru*ba Khao Pi, during the final period, received several commemorative plaques from various government sectors for his construction works to support education and government services. And *Khru*ba Wong was promoted to a higher position in the *sangha* system as *Phrakhru* *Phatthana* *Kitchanurak*; the term *phatthana*, literally “development”, was used to commemorate his contribution to social development just as his common name *Khru*ba *Chaiyawongsa* *Phatthana* (as in the case of *Khru*ba *Chum* of *Wat* *Wang* *Mui*, see *LuangPor.com* 1994, 97).

Therefore, in order to subscribe to *Khru*ba Siwichai's lineage, all modern *khru*ba must also follow this tradition. However, the concept of construction has been transformed in several aspects which signify a new ideology of modern *khru*ba as a result of

articulation with the current situation. Here, two major aspects in the concept of construction work are discussed below, as follows.

1) Scope of activity: construction works of modern *khru*ba are limited in terms of area compared to the former *khru*ba. In the former days, *khru*ba movements for construction and renovation of religious buildings as well as projects for public benefits covered a larger area, e.g., in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae, Tak, Mae Hong Son, and Sukhothai provinces (around 171 works of *Khru*ba Siwichai and 138 works of *Khru*ba Khao Pi). In the case of *Khru*ba Khao Pi, the construction works were also found along the borders of Myanmar and Tak province (see Pradit 1982). We found that Siwichai and Khao Pi relied on their visions (Thai: *nimit*) as well as invitations from villagers (mostly the chief monks in the locales) to initiate these construction works. In this sense, the construction activities highlighted the collaboration between *khru*ba and villagers in the locales.

Tanabe (2012) and Cohen (2001) have suggested that the construction works during *Khru*ba Siwichai's period, which continued in the period of *Khru*ba Khao Pi, were carried out under the context of BE 2500 as the half-way point in the Buddhism of the Buddha Gotama according to Buddhist prophecies. As a consequence, Buddhism would gradually decline and would be extinct in BE 5000, while society would be undermined by a state of immorality. Noticeable signs of the deterioration of Buddhism in the North were depicted by a number of ruined and abandoned pagodas and buildings across the region. At the same time, the decline of Buddhism and moral decay were attributed to the absence of the local monarchy. The ancient Lan Na monarchy once had a significant role serving as the major patron of Buddhism. After centralization during the reign of King Chulalongkorn of Siam (King Rama V), the Lan Na monarchy and its power were steadily brought to an end. Therefore, religious movements of the two *khru*ba were regarded by the locals as sacred campaigns to save Buddhism from extinction, or so-called Buddhist revivalist movements. *Khru*ba were *ton bun bodhisattas* as well as kings who came to save society and religion.

At the present time, construction works of modern *khru*ba are no longer characterized by numbers and areas; instead they focus on specific sites, especially their own

monasteries. Their monasteries are large and magnificent while the concept of *ton bun* in Buddhist revivalism has been replaced by that of the charismatic monk (Thai: *phra phu mi bun barami*) who is able to build large and magnificent buildings as well as draw large donations to carry out these construction works. Among the three modern *khruha* mainly discussed in this study, Khruba Don has more construction works than the other two in terms of numbers. As of 2016, Don had carried out construction projects in five monasteries in Lamphun, Chiang Mai, and Mae Hong Son provinces. Two of them are the former sites of Khruba Khao Pi, and all of them are religious buildings (interview, Khruba Don, March 1, 2016).

Khruba Noi's construction works were carried out in a smaller area. During the years 1997-2010, he had three projects for the Si Don Mun community: a bridge, a crematorium and a small hospital¹⁸ (Wat Si Don Mun 2012: 7-9). An ongoing project of Noi (2016) is a Pariyattitham School building in Wat Phranon Pa Ket Thi in the same district (where he donated around one million baht, interview, Daeng, March 4, 2016). While Khruba Ariyachat, as of early 2017, has conducted the casting of a large statue of Phra Mahapa Kesonpanyo in Wat Lai Hin, Lampang province, the construction of a bell tower in Wat Nong Si Chaeng in Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province and the installation of a gold pinnacle (7 Kg. of gold) of Chom Yong Pagoda (Thai: *phrathat luang Chom Yong*) in Mong Yawng, Shan State of Myanmar.

2) Form of fundraising: The form of fundraising for the construction works of former-day *khruha* was described as the concept of *nuea na bun* (field of merit). Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi were believed to be *ton bun* the same as *bodhisatta* or Ariya Metteyya who were endowed with the great merit. The concept of *nuea na bun* rested upon the belief that the great merit of *ton bun* could be transferred to all living creatures. As we have seen, the two *khruha* went around the region to be the chiefs of the construction works; in each place, they just sat in a meditative posture waiting to bless people who came to see them, so-called *nang nak* (sitting in a long period of time). Each day, hundreds of people came to pay homage to the *khruha*, donate money and construction materials, or help out in various ways, which contributed to the success of

¹⁸ Saraphi Borvon Pattana Hospital, where he donated 45 million baht for the land and the buildings.

the project. People believed that these kinds of contributions were a means to accumulate great merit.

This form of transaction, between *khruaba* and devotees and followers, was a key point in completing the construction work in a very short time at each place. As the reputation for the construction works spread, in the *khruaba*'s final periods, their schedules were filled with invitations for *nang nak*. They had to move around in a range of fifteen days to four months from one place to another because people needed to rely on their charisma to have the construction works completed within a short time. As for Khruba Khao Pi, he died during the peregrination to *nang nak* for a construction of a *dhamma* hall in Wat Tha Ton Thong Chai in Sukhothai province (Pradit 1982).

In the modern *khruaba* period, money for construction works is collected through a variety of activities while the *nang nak* practice is no longer relevant¹⁹. They have no peregrination activity, while their construction works outside are in a form of patronage which, in many cases, lacks the collaboration of villagers in the locales. Moreover, the contribution of free labor, as it was found in the former days in a form of faith (Thai: *sattha*), has totally disappeared since labor has become the most valuable capital in the cash economy. Money, thus, has become the most important thing contributing to the success of the construction works of modern *khruaba*. The more money they collect, the more beautiful monasteries they have, and the more charismatic they are recognized as being. I found that fund raising schemes are highly emphasized in all religious events of modern *khruaba*, including ritual performances and ritual products. For example, in the *thot kathin* ceremony in 2015, Khruba Noi was able to collect around four million baht from the main sponsors. Khruba Ariyachat collected around fifteen million baht in 2015 and sixteen million baht in 2016. While Khruba Don collected only about eight hundred thousand baht in 2015, he collected more than one million baht in the robe-changing ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi in 2015 and 2016.

Here, I shall show more data about the monasteries of the three modern *khruaba* that

¹⁹ However, it is noticed that this practice could also be observed by modern *khruaba* at any point in time in the future.

I have observed during 2015- early 2017. I shall focus on the aspects of space management and landscape architecture, heterogeneity of merit-making activities, and religious tourism.

3.4.1 Wat Phraphutthabat Pha Nam in Li district, Lamphun province

The monastery covers around 6.4 acres from the foot to the top of Pha Nam Mountain, and is surrounded by a religious community of Karen and Yuan who relocated from many places and have stayed with Khruba Khao Pi for nearly four decades (see Kwanchewan, 1988, 2010). The monastery was named after the mountain where Buddha footprints were found, according to the legend, “Travels of the Buddha” (Thai: *tamnan phrachao liap lok* see Li Cultural Council, 2016). It is reported that Wat Pha Nam was an ancient monastery which is said to have been established around 300 years ago. After being abandoned for decades, it was restored by Khruba Khao Pi and his followers during the years 1963-1964. After that, Wat Pha Nam served as the base for Khruba Khao Pi as well as the habitat for hundreds of followers until he died (in 1977, see Li Cultural Council 2016, Facebook @วัดพระพุทธรบาทผาหนาม [Wat Phraphutthabat Pha Nam] 2012).

At the top of Pha Nam Mountain, Khruba Khao Pi built a small pagoda next to the Buddha footprints (known as the white pagoda). Following the death of Khruba Khao Pi, Wat Pha Nam has undergone a period of rapid development (under the supervision of Khruba Wong and Khruba Don). For example, a mandapa (Thai: *mondop*) was built to house the mummified body of Khruba Khao Pi. A 16-meter high statue of Khruba Khao Pi in a standing post was erected at the front area. A grand *dhamma* hall (Thai: *wihan*) and a large pagoda covered with gold plates were built behind the grand pavilion (Northern Thai: *hong luang*). Additionally, at the top of Pha Nam Mountain, a pagoda was erected on the other peak point to commemorate Khruba Wong (known as the golden pagoda).

After taking up the abbot position (around 1995-1996), Don carried out numerous projects particularly on the top of the mountain, for example, two stairways heading up

to the summit and a third stairway built for the elderly. At the summit, the two pagodas were enlarged and re-covered, one with white plates and the other with gold plates. The highlight is the panoramic view point built enclosing the golden pagoda. Beneath the golden pagoda is a coffee shop run by the monastery to service pilgrims and tourists, where they are also able to enjoy a panoramic view of the Li countryside. Next to the white pagoda, two more pavilions were newly built (during 2014-2016) to enshrine the Buddha images. An ongoing project (2016-2017) at the lower point of the summit is a reclining Buddha statue which will be 28 meters long and 10 meters high (interview, Khruba Don August 3, 2016).

It seems that the construction works in order to make Wat Pha Nam more attractive are among the top priorities of Don. I found that he keeps thinking about them constantly, even though the financial situation is sometimes unfavorable. The total budget for the construction works, such as the construction of the panoramic view point, a bridge to connect the two pagodas, and the renovation of the pagodas, was collected through two major channels: (1) donations from main sponsors, mostly the upper-middle classes from the central region, (2) donations collected during the annual events, e.g., *thot kathin* festival and the robe-changing ceremony. Phra Songkran revealed that sometimes the projects cannot wait for the money, but Khruba Don is wise enough to have a backup plan. He uses the credit for construction materials from big construction stores in the area. Relying on trust and good relationships, he can take all construction materials and get them paid for later when he has enough money. This approach has been practiced, but very subtly, for a decade (interview, Phra Songkran, November 3, 2015).

The great effort of Don can be seen in this mission, and in his ability to maintain networks and attract pilgrims and tourists to the monastery after the death of Khruba Khao Pi. It also reflects the great pressure he has come under because of the uncertainty of many factors, such as funding. I was told by a key devotee (November 25, 2015) during the *thot kathin* festival in 2015 that sometimes the income was lower than expected. For example, in the *thot katin* festival (2015), Don had expected to gain, at minimum, three to five million baht, but the actual income was around merely eight hundred thousand baht. Nonetheless, large donations would come to them again during

the robe-changing ceremony, which is held in early March of each year (1-4 March). Thus, he still has a chance to collect more money.

Through all the hard work, Wat Pha Nam has recently become famous for a sacred place where people come to pay homage to the mummified body of *ton bun* Khruba Khao Pi, as well as the Buddha footprints and the pagodas. The sacred body is enshrined in a glass coffin placed on an elaborate platform at the center of the monastery. People can look through the glass to see the mummified body which is now wholly covered by gold leaf. The sacred body is taken out during the robe-changing ceremony while thousands of people, from all directions, are gathered around to witness (as it is discussed in the following section). Moreover, Wat Pha Nam has recently become famous as a main tourist attraction of Li district. After paying homage to Khruba Khao Pi, pilgrims and tourists are able to enjoy at the summit of the mountain for a beautiful panoramic view. People usually take pictures and post them on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. They can also refresh themselves with cups of coffee at the coffee shop beneath the golden pagoda.

I mentioned earlier that the view point is the new highlight of Wat Pha Nam because I found a number of photos taken there which were posted on well-known travel blogs and websites, such as pantip.com, paiduyakan.com and edtguide.com, especially during the winter time when tourists can experience a sea of fog and a gentle cool breeze. Pha Nam's Facebook pages (@PanhamTemple and also @SongkranWachiro) also attract Facebook followers by beautiful pictures taken at the view point from time to time. Don adds that during the winter time, a number of tourists come to ask him to stay overnight at the view point in order to feel the cool breeze and catch the sunrise in the morning. The monastery allows only male visitors to do so (interview, July 30, 2015). Furthermore, a number of activities were held at the view point, in association with the local administrative office, in order to promote tourism in the area, such as the candlelight procession (Thai: *wian thian*) on Buddhist holy days and the candlelight parade in the *loi krathong* festival in 2015²⁰.

²⁰ In association with Tam bon Pa Phai Municipality, the parade was led by the then deputy governor of Lamphun province.

3.4.2 Wat Si Don Mun in Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province

Wat Si Don Mun was presumably founded in the reign of King Tilokarat of the Lan Na kingdom. It was later abandoned during the occupation of the ancient Burmese dynasty. The monastery was restored during the reign of King Kawila of the Chet Ton dynasty. Wat Si Don Mun was located in the southern part of the village with a dune landscape; therefore, it was named “Wat Si Don Mun,” literally the monastery at the glorious dune (Wat Si Don Mun, 2012, 1-2). Khruba Noi is the sixth abbot after Khruba Pad (died in 2007) since 2008. Since Khruba Phad was hospitalized, Noi had been in charge of the monastery. In 1989, he was the key figure in the construction of a monk residence (Thai: *kuti*). The residence was built entirely of teak wood with 72 large teak poles. Its grandeur always attracts pilgrims and tourists. Some parts of the building are open for visitors where amulets, images of Thai Buddhist saints, antique earthenware and palm-leaf manuscripts are displayed (ibid., 1-10).

In 1995, Noi bought a new piece of land behind the monastery and made a garden for practicing *dhamma*. He built a scripture hall in 1998, and renovated the reliquary in 2001. A pagoda to commemorate the nine masters was built in 2008 (*Chedi Kao Khanacan*), including a multipurpose pavilion and thirty rest rooms. In 2009, he renovated the ordination hall and the arched entrance. In 2011, he bought another piece of land around *Chedi Kao Khanacan* and built a long pavilion. An ongoing project (2015-2017) was the construction of the grand *dhamma* hall (*Mahawihan Ruamchai Samakkhitham*) to celebrate the year BE 2600 of the Buddhist religion, which will occur in the year 2057. The building was built with a huge structure of 23 meters high, 25 meters wide, and 84 meters long. Noi (interview, March 4, 2016) revealed that the budget for this project was approximately around 100 million baht. Up to the present time, Wat Si Don Mun has been enlarged to cover around 15 acres of land and is more famous than it was during the time of Khruba Phad. Tourists and pilgrims are attracted to the beautiful buildings, Noi’s magical rites and a big amulet shop.

Opposite Wat Si Don Mun is a one-story building used for merit-making activities, mainly for life ransoming of cows and buffaloes in slaughterhouses, and coffin

donations for bodies of homeless. A large vinyl board hung over the building roughly reads:

Please donate for the lives of cows in slaughterhouses in order to make great merit. Saving lives is the great giving. Ransoming the lives of cows and buffaloes from slaughterhouses with Khruba Noi will gain merit, charisma, fortune and well-being. The ceremony will be held in February of each year at Wat Si Don Mun. Tel. 053-421040.

As we step into the monastery, on the left hand side is a coffee shop run by a young niece of Noi. Next to the cozy coffee shop is a large amulet shop. All of the products have undergone chanting (Thai: *plukse*) by Noi and are believed to bring prosperity, success in love and work, happiness, health, wealth, and good fortune for its owners. Vinyl boards hung above provide clear information about the size and price of the each product. Salespersons are on duty at all sales booths. Along the way around the shop are vinyl boards describing the production processes of amulets. The office of Wat Si Don Mun, located behind the amulet shop, provides a year-round schedule to ensure that we are not going to miss any important events with Khruba Noi. The three major events are highlighted (1) *nirothakam* (the retreat) in February, (2) *wan katanyu kao khanachan* (the ceremony to pay homage to the spirits of nine teachers) in March, and (3) *thot kathin* in October. These events are the major channels for fundraising besides the donations in ritual services and proceeds from the sale of amulets.

On a daily basis, in order to see Khruba Noi, we have to buy (Thai: *bucha*) *sangkhathan* (a basket of necessities for a Buddhist monk) at the *sangkhathan* station located under the same roof of the amulet shop. A female staff member, in her early sixties, will suggest what we have to do before proceeding to Khruba in the hall. In case of those who do not want to buy a *sangkhathan* basket, they also have to declare what they want to do with Khruba, such as to get something blessed (Thai: *choem*), such as signboards of shops and companies or license plates for automobiles. Moreover, *phithi suepchata* (the ritual for life prolongation) and *long na na thong* and *salika lin thong* (the ritual to enhance personal charm and evoke love) are often requested by guests (as I will discuss in the following section). Vinyl boards hung next to the hall show photos of Thai

celebrities who came to undergo *na na thong* and *salika lin thong* with Khruba, such as well-known politicians, popular TV stars, and successful businesspersons. Routinely, Khruba Noi will sit on a wooden seat decorated in Burmese traditional style. He is normally accompanied by two assistants, a monk and a senior layman. At the desk in front of Noi is displayed a notice for visitors and pilgrims about gifts to exchange. There are different types of amulets depending on the amount of donations.

The notice board reads:

Make merit with Khruba Noi, the fundraising for medical devices [of his hospital] by:

1. Donate 100 baht, get one small amulet
2. Donate 300 baht, get one *phra phong* [earthen based with holy dried plants] *Khun Phaen* embedded with *takrut*
3. Donate 500 baht, get one locket of a Khruba Noi image surrounded by artificial diamonds
4. Donate 1,000 baht, get one brass holy water bowl embedded with *takrut* to protect from harm and bad spirits
5. Donate 3,000 baht, get one 3-inch *Phra Bua Khem* image
6. Donate 6,000 baht, get one 5-inch *Nang Kwak*²¹ image
7. Donate 10,000 baht, get one 12-inch Khruba Noi image.

As I observed, his sacred formula (Thai: *mon, khatha*) for blessing is a combination of several languages, e.g., Northern Thai, Shan, Chinese, Burmese, and Pali. It induces a feeling of exoticism, mysticism, and sacredness at the same time. Apart from making merit with Khruba Noi, the monastery has provided various activities for pilgrims and tourists, for example, worshipping Buddha images, Khruba Siwichai's image, Hindu deities (Ganesha and Lord Brahma), the Chinese god of fortune (Thai: *Chai Sing Ea*), and the Burmese spirit guardian (*Nat Bo Bo Gyi*, the speedy god). The sacred pond behind the hall is believed to have magical healing powers for various illnesses. *Chedi Kao Khanacan* at the back is the new highlight of Wat Si Don Mun. It was built beautifully in the traditional Lan Na style at a cost of more than ten million baht.

²¹ *Nang Kwak* is a spirit or household divinity of Thai folklore. She is deemed to bring good fortune, prosperity and attract customers to a business and is found among merchants.

Life-sized images of the nine masters are enshrined for worship inside. While the ordination hall was supported by the Royal Family and was given the royal assent for the Royal Cypher of King Bhumibol at the gable (Wat Si Don Mun 2012, 5).

3.4.3 Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan in Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province

As described in Khruba Ariyachat's biography (So Sutthiphan 2013, 88-91), he wishes to make Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan a sacred place for pilgrims and visitors as well as a religious tourist site. That is why he tries to mix various styles of handcraft works as much as possible, such as traditional Lan Na, Shan, and Burmese (ibid., 90). One visitor said that she liked Wat Saengkaew because it had multiple functions. Apart from Khruba Ariyachat, there were many activities to do, such as worshipping and making votive offerings to the Thai folk spirit guardians, Hindu, Burmese, and Chinese deities. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the buildings and the architecture landscape are very large and beautiful (interview, November 7, 2015).

A decade ago (up to 2017), after having been in a conflict with Khruba Thueang, a former master, Ariyachat decided to move out of Wat Phrathat Dong Sima²² (henceforth, Wat Dong Si Ma) to Ban Pa Tueng which is located around eight km away. Before that, during his stay in Dong Si Ma, he had gained a reputation as a charismatic, young *khruba* who worked hand-in-hand with Khruba Thueang to restore the monastery. This led Ya Sita, the then-village headman of Ban Pa Tueng and his villagers to invite Ariyachat to stay and help them build a new monastery at Ban Pa Tueng. He later (in 2006) built a monastery on a hill behind the village and named it *Saengkaew Phothiyan*. During the first few years, the monastery covered around 7.6 acres of land, but now it has expanded to cover around 12 acres. Saengkaew Phothiyan, according to Ariyachat's vision (Thai: *nimit*), literally means the shining light of a crystal ball in the lotus flower. The lotus flower, in Buddhism, is a symbol of *phothiyan* (Pali: *bodhinyana*, wisdom of

²² Wat Phrathat Dong Sima was once an abandoned monastery which has been restored by Khruba Thueang for more than a decade. Khruba Thueang and his followers at the locale invited Ariyachat, from Wat Wang Mui, to stay and take care of this monastery for Khruba Thueang. Ariyachat had stayed there for three years and four months before moving to his current base (interview, senior devotee of Khruba Thueang, November 9, 2015; So Sutthiphan 2011, 64-66).

enlightenment), or the Buddha's enlightenment (watsangkaew.com 2010; So Sutthiphan 2011, 2013). Ariyachat is the first and the current abbot. At k.m. 125 heading to Chiang Rai city, the monastery is located around 3 k.m. away from the highway. Due to the hilly landscape, the monastery was designed, by Ariyachat, to have three main compounds in accordance with the Buddhist belief as follows (So Sutthiphan 2011, 85-88).

(1) The lowest compound is to represent the mundane world covering the area of the ground at the front gate. From this area, pilgrims and tourists are able to see the magnificent buildings and art objects which stand out on the upper compound. This area is decorated with large sculptures of Buddha, Kaccana²³ (Thai: *Phra Sangkachai*), Upagutta (Thai: *Phra Uppakhut*) and pair of lions, one on either side of the stairway connected to the upper compound. During the ceremonies and festivals, this area is usually used for enjoyable activities, such as night concert shows, as it is a kind of mundane happiness. Ariyachat states that "as guests step into the monastery, they will see Phra Uppakhut who brings luck for success in everything. Seeing Phra Si Ariya Mettrai in the form of Phra Mahakachai who enhances fertility and good fortune. Overall, it is as if once people enter the monastery, they will immediately receive wealth, luck, and happiness" (So Sutthiphan 2011, 84).

(2) The upper compound (the middle area) represents heaven or the celestial world, starting from the stairway at the front area to the back of the grand *dhamma* hall. This area is used for religious ceremonies and *dhamma* practice of the monks and the laity. Therefore, the compound is filled with an ordination hall, a sermon hall, a bell tower, and a scripture hall. In addition, Ariyachat purposely designed the buildings in this area to represent sixteen levels of the celestial world, such as sixteen small mandapas, a sixteen-room pavilion in the northern part, a sixteen-room pavilion in the southern part, and the sermon hall with nine rooms at the basement and seven rooms at the upper storey (sixteen rooms in total).

²³ Kaccana is listed as one of the ten principal disciples of Gotama Buddha. He is foremost in explaining *dhamma*. He is known as *Phra Sangkachai* in Thai Buddhism and portrayed as extremely portly. Thai Buddhists worship him for wealth, richness and luck (Wikipedia.org 2017b).

(3) The highest compound represents *nibbana*, starting from the bridge at the back of the sermon hall to the residential area. The bridge represents the way to transcend *samsara*, or the cycle of death and rebirth, to *nibbana*. The Buddha's relic is enshrined in this area as well as the world's largest bronze statue of Khruba Siwichai at the highest point. "The Khruba Siwichai statue represents *bodhinyana*, while beyond *bodhinyana* is *bodhisatta*, hence Khruba Siwichai is the *bodhisatta* who will lead people to transcend the cycle of dead and rebirth," Ariyachat adds (So Sutthiphan 2011, 87-88).

Therefore, from the beginning, the monastery is well designed to serve as both a Buddhist monastery and a tourist destination. Thousands of people visit the monastery each year, and the number multiplies during the grand ceremonies, such as the *thot kathin* festival and Ariyachat's birthday celebration. Visitors include Chinese middle-class people from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore. These annual events are the major channels for fundraising, as I mentioned earlier. On his birthday celebration in 2016 (January)²⁴, Ariyachat held a grand festival and invited popular TV stars and a TV host to shoot a special TV program (see WoodyTalk on YouTube 2016a-2016d). Additionally, one of King Bhumibol's granddaughters was invited to preside over the ceremony. Interestingly, in this event, Ariyachat's teeth which had been pulled out were auctioned for more than three million baht, and sold to two wealthy devotees from Bangkok.

The success of Wat Saengkaew has turned a small rural district to a tourist destination of Chiang Rai province. I found that a local gravel road leading to the monastery was enlarged and overlaid by asphalt in 2015 by the department of rural roads. The popularity of Wat Saengkaew has also contributed to the economic growth of this area. Small-and medium-sized hotels, resorts and restaurants are open to serve the increasing number of tourists each year. Ariyachat, and his monastery are therefore regarded by the state sectors as an economic stimulus of Chiang Rai province. As he reveals:

²⁴ It was also the celebration of the 9th year 9th month and 9th day of its establishment.

In 2015, Mae Fah Luang University [in Chiang Rai province] presented me with an award for the great contribution to Chiang Rai province. I asked the university president why I was awarded by this title, and the president simply replied it is because the monastery has drawn ten thousands of pilgrims and tourists each year. It was obvious that when the monastery organized the grand festivals, air tickets to Chiang Rai were sold out, a number of cars and vans for rent were booked, as well as resorts and hotels. Additionally, restaurants and souvenir shops could gain good profits during those times, too. So far, the monastery had contributed, as one small cog, to the economic growth of Chiang Rai province” (Khruba Ariyachat in WoodyTalk [Thai: *Woody koet ma khui*] on YouTube, 2016a-2016d).

As of 2016, Khruba Ariyachat still has a number of construction projects to carry out, such as the construction of a large arched entrance, the large Buddha image (Thai: *Somdet Ong Pathom Borom Phothon*²⁵) which has a *natak* (the distance that spans from knee to knee) of 25 meters and is about 32 meters tall, and two-story residences for meditation practitioners.

As one visitor described it earlier, the monastery has provided a wide range of activities, here I shall give some examples. At the front area of Ariyachat’s residence, there is a pavilion where a number of spirit guardians and deities are enshrined. All of them are credited with magical powers to bring wealth and success, such as (1) the Burmese nat *Thanmae Krasip* (the whisper goddess) or *Ahma Mya Nan New* (in Burmese), (2) another Burmese nat *Thep Thanchai* (the speedy god) or *Nat Bo Bo Gyi* (in Burmese), and (3) Ganesh, a Hindu god. Next to the pavilion, standing alone beneath a tree is the image of *Nang Kwak mahalap* (Nang Kwak super lucky). Her distinctive features are chubby body with a pretty oval face. This distinctive character is the creation of Ariyachat which became popular since it was made available for sale. Additionally, *Nang Kwak* is believed to bring good fortune, prosperity and attract customers to all kinds of businesses. Recently, *Nang Kwak* was one of the best sellers of

²⁵ The groundbreaking ceremony was held on November 7, 2015, by Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan, the then deputy prime minister.

Wat Saengkaew's collection (So Sutthiphan 2013; interview, salesperson at the amulet shop, November 8, 2015).

In the highest compound, large statues of Buddhist, Hindu and Chinese deities, such as Phra Siwali, Ganesh, Lord Brahma and a 38-hand Guanyin are stunningly lined up. At the highest point, the world's largest bronze image of Khruba Siwichai is enshrined. The image was cast in 2011 to have a *natak* of nine meters, is twelve meters tall, and cost more than 50 million baht (So Sutthiphan 2015). The Khruba Siwichai image has long been accompanied by the two *khruba* who were thought to be the successors in Siwichai's lineage, Khao Pi and Wong. Additionally, beneath the three greatest *khruba* images is a large hall built to enshrine large images of the three greatest monks of all Thai Buddhists, 1) Somdet To (Somdet Phra Phutthachan) from Bangkok, 2) Achan Man Phurithatto from Sakon Nakorn province and 3) Luang Pu Thuat from Pattani province. Therefore, pilgrims and tourists from other regions and countries are able to worship their own Buddhist saints in addition to the Buddhist saints of Lan Na.

Before leaving the monastery, the amulet shop, located right beside Ariyachat's residence, is waiting for customers. It provides a wide range of amulets produced by the monastery along with photos, CDs, and books about Ariyachat. The price of each amulet depends on size, material and rarity, for example, a 9-inch chubby *Nang Kwak* painted in gold color costs 7,000 baht, while another, which is covered by gold leaf, costs 11,000 baht. Apart from chubby *Nang Kwak*, another best seller is *phra pit ta*, or eye-covered Buddha image in the batch name *maha lap phan lan*, or super lucky billion (baht). Additionally, in the right wing of the monastery is a sloped area where pilgrims and tourists can explore the scenic landscapes of Mae Suai district. Ariyachat built a coffee shop with an open-air terrace for customers to relax. Next to the coffee shop are nine residences built on a hill in a modern resort style. One devotee revealed that these residences were built by a group of famous comedians and were first used as monk dwellings for their sons when they were temporarily ordained here. After that, the residences are reserved for V.I.P. guests of Ariyachat, especially during the grand events (November 8, 2015).

Therefore, the construction works of modern *khru*ba, on the one hand, signify the continuation of the former *khru*ba's tradition while, on the other, signify the transformation of *ton bun* and field of merit concepts in order to respond to the modern world. Various kinds of activities in addition to well-managed space and magnificent buildings, testify that concepts of popular Buddhism, prosperity religions, and religious tourism have strongly influenced modern *khru*ba constructions. Monasteries are thus considered key instruments to visualize the charismatic status of modern *khru*ba and the venues and tactics to attract pilgrims and tourists and money donations.

In the concept of *phuttha phanit* (commercialization of Buddhism/prosperity religion), monasteries are the major venues and tactics for commercially-oriented activities which have contributed to the growth of religious markets through the flow of goods, people, and stories (Pattana 2008, 138-139). Lastly, the construction works of modern *khru*ba, especially for their monasteries, signify the proactive strategy of modern *khru*ba.

As being *khru*ba for global devotees, groups of devotees could be more diverse and even bigger, which means that they could gain a wider reputation. Moreover, modern *khru*ba monasteries have also demonstrated what McDaniel (2017) suggests about "Buddhist public leisure culture and Buddhist global ecumenism" since Buddhist monasteries and other religious sites throughout Asia have served as tourism and leisure sites. These sites are ecumenical, international, and accessible offering a space in between the secular and the religious. As I have shown above, the same as we have seen in other cases in Thailand, Buddhist monasteries are open to all people, regardless of their religious faith and practice, and while Thai Buddhists will participate in some religious activities, they will be tourists as well. Therefore, "local people visit these sites like foreign tourists, not just for religious or ritual reasons but also for leisure activities" (ibid., 11).



Figure 3.7: Wat Phraphutthabat Pha Nam

Source: author

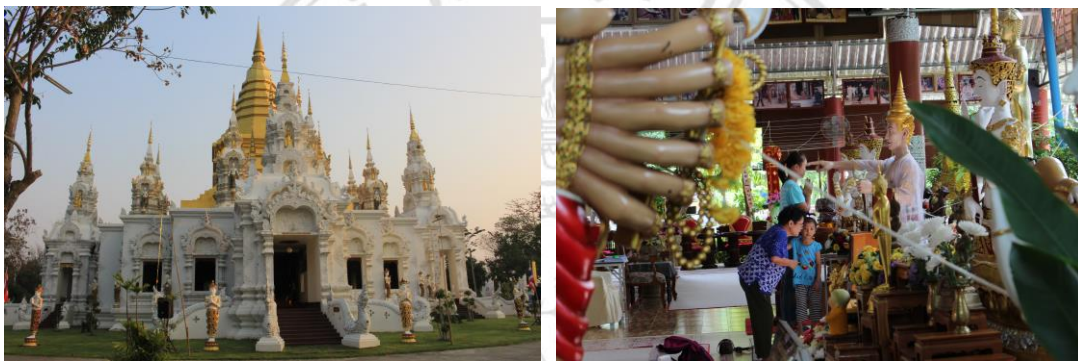


Figure 3.8: Wat Si Don Mun

Source: author



Figure 3.9: Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan

Source: Facebook @saengkaewphothiyan, posted on June 27, 2016



Figure 3.10: Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan

Source: author

3.5 HETEROGENOUS PRACTICES AND ACTIVITIES

Pattana (2012) has investigated spiritual specialists, e.g., monks and spirit mediums, and ordinary people from various backgrounds who have mutually shaped Thai popular Buddhism. He uses the term “popular Buddhism” to represent the heterogeneous forms of everyday belief and the practice of specialists and ordinary people who identify themselves as members of the Thai Buddhist community. However, Pattana has suggested that folk or local religious traditions differ from popular Buddhism since they are closely tied to a historical and ethno-cultural identity while Thai popular Buddhism, in his sense, is translocal, transreligio-cultural and transnational as its boundaries expand as far as its commercial influence spreads (ibid., 2). The *khru*ba tradition in Lan Na Buddhism may fall into the local religious tradition, which is distinguished by community affiliation, traditional and ethno-cultural identity of Tai-speaking groups in the Upper Mekong region, commonly known as the Lan Na cultural area, as explained earlier by Cohen (2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, 2017).

In this topic, I shall discuss religious practices and activities of modern *khru*ba in order to illustrate that the *khru*ba tradition has been re-defined and re-interpreted by modern *khru*ba as well as their followers to fit in with heterogeneous expectations in the context of popular Buddhism and prosperity religions. Below, religious practices and activities of modern *khru*ba are discussed: the retreat (Thai: *nirothakam*), the ritual for life prolongation (Thai: *phithi suepchata*), the robe-changing ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi

(Thai: *phithi plian pha Khruba Khao Pi*), and the molding of super instant Buddha images (Thai: *pan Phrachao Khot Thanchai*).

3.5.1 The Retreat (*Nirothakam*)

Nirothakam (Pali: *nirodhakamma*) is said to be a practice belonging to the Lan Na Buddhist tradition among three kinds of retreat²⁶ (Thai: *kan khaokam*). In general, it is a way to purify one's mind and a way of mental practice of strict practitioners (Weerasathophon 2010, 10). To specify, *nirothakam* is described as a combination of *nirothakam* and *thudong* (Pali: *dhutanga*) which was practiced formerly by Khruba Siwichai (ibid., 11-12). Commonly, this practice is carried out within ranges of three, five, seven or nine days depending on the individual practitioner. Each range of days has its own meaning related to Buddhist principles. Three days represent the Triple Gems (Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha); five represent the five Buddhas²⁷; seven represent the seven books of *phra aphitham* (Pali: *abhidhamma pitaka*); and nine represent *lokuttara* or the nine supramundane states²⁸ (ibid., 41-42). The practitioner, generally a Buddhist monk, is restrained from eating food, urinating and defecating. Sleeping or moving away from the seat is not allowed either. His mouth must be closed at all times. He is allowed to drink only one alms bowl of water. He must stay alone and away from villages in a small dwelling or hut only 20 square meters in size. Nevertheless, the author has not clarified primary sources of *nirothakam*, nor the instructions, including the claim that Khruba Siwichai practiced *nirothakam*. Nevertheless, *nirothakam* is a way to purify one's mind, and to reduce all defilements while the practitioner, if successful, will be then credited with austerity, determination and great merit, the same as Khruba Siwichai.

²⁶ Pali: *parivaskamma-nirodhakamma-dhutanga*.

²⁷ Thai: *Kakusanta, Konakama, Kassapa, Kotama, and Ariya Maitrai*

²⁸ Four noble paths (Thai: *mak*, Pali: *magga*), four corresponding fruits (Thai: *phon*, Pali: *phala*), and salvation (Thai: *nipphan*, Pali: *nibbana*).

Nirothakam of Modern Khruba

Khruba Noi and Khruba Ariyachat are famous for *nirothakam* in recent times. In their accounts, a mulberry paper manuscript (Northern Thai: *pap sa*) believed to have been written by Khruba Siwichai is referred to as the primary source for the practice.

This underlines what I mentioned in the previous chapter about the discourse of succession of Khruba Siwichai's lineage. However, it should be noted that the *pap sa* of Khruba Siwichai which is frequently mentioned by the two *khruba* still has not been found.

In Khruba Noi's account, *nirothakam* is a way to escape from the busyness of daily life. He said, "it is a way to find peace and it brings back happiness to body, mind, and soul. I like peacefulness [Thai: *charoen sa-ngop yen kai chai chit*]" (interview, March 4, 2016). His first *nirothakam* was held in 1994 during the severe illness of Khruba Phad, his master. This first *nirothakam* thus aimed to show his determination in Buddhism as well as to exchange his life for Khruba Phad's. Incredibly, a miracle appeared to occur within two days, as Khruba Phad's health significantly improved. Since then, Noi has held a firm belief in *nirothakam* and made a vow to practice it once a year (in February, Wat Si Don Mun 2012, 23-24). He recently declared his intention to continue the practice until he is 70 years old. Noi also noted that *nirothakam* should not be confused with *nirot samabat* (Pali: *nirodha samapatti*) because the latter is a higher practice for the extinction of feeling and perception in order to reach the fruition of arahantship (interview, March 4, 2016).

Details of *nirothakam*, according to Khruba Siwichai's manuscript, are clearly explained in his biography (amulet.in.th 2008). During the first day of the twenty-third *nirothakam* (February 18, 2016), I personally witnessed the practice as a researcher at Wat Si Don Mun. In the early morning (around 5 A.M.), the initial ceremony was held at *Chedi Kao Khanachan*. Approximately 100 people, a small group compared to the one on the last day of *nirothakam* and mostly elderly, attended. Soon after the ceremony, Noi left the building and led the procession to the site, a hut made from bamboo and hay located in front of the *chedi*. The hut was ten square meters in size and was surrounded by nine layers of bamboo reed (Thai: *ratchawat*). Inside the hut, eleven monks from

other monasteries were invited to witness the commencement of the practice. In the procession, the local youths performed traditional drumming (Thai: *klong sabat chai*). Noi was flanked by a group of elder devotees holding Thai flags and Buddhist flags (Thai: *thong thammachak*) in their hands.

During the three days of the retreat, Noi practiced insight meditation alternately with walking meditation and drank only water from an alms bowl. The water was prepared according to special instructions in order to underline the exotic, sacred, and auspicious aspects of the ritual. It was obtained from holy wells (Thai: *nambo thip*) with auspicious names in various places, e.g., *nambo thip* at Wat Doi Kha Mo in Lamphun province, and at Wat Dap Phai, Wat Chai Phrakiat, Wat Phra Sing, Wat Chai Mongkhon and Wat Loi Khro in Chiang Mai city. The water from those different sources was then mixed together, filtered through seven layers of white cloth, and poured into a large silver alms bowl. Each layer of cloth was inscribed with a *yantra* in order to sacralize the water with protective and magical power.

At one corner, there was a set of altar tables (Thai: *to mu bucha*) where a photo of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit was placed under the images of *Phra Sangkachai* and *Phra Uppakhut* in order to show loyalty to the monarchy. Before the practice began, only male devotees were allowed to go inside the hut while the master of ceremonies was describing details of the practice and what was going on inside to devotees waiting outside. The site was sealed with nine layers of the bamboo reeds which were tied by a holy thread (Thai: *sai sin*) at around 07. 20 A.M. Once the site was sealed, no one was allowed to go inside or even stay within a 100-meter radius until the last day (at 06.09 A.M. on February 21, 2016).

Khruba Ariyachat had learned the practice from the *pap sa* of Khruba Chum. He claims that it contains the exact information as Khruba Siwichai's original version, as I mentioned earlier (watsangkaew.com 2010; So Sutthiphan 2011, 48-52). The purpose of this practice is to stay peaceful in a state of mindfulness. Ariyachat also notes that it is the practice for his own sake and does not want to let anybody know about it. Nonetheless, his *nirothakam* was promoted by the monastery through various channels to attract the public (watsangkaew.com *ibid.*; So Sutthiphan 2011, 53-62). It was also

illustrated by miraculous stories in order to affirm Ariyachat's charismatic status and the sacredness of the practice (see So Sutthiphan *ibid.*, 57-62 and 165-169).

Despite the claim of the same origin, the detailed practices between the two *khru*ba were different from each other. Ariyachat has interpreted *nirothakam* as the same practice as *nirot samabat* focusing on the thirteen ascetic practices of *thudong*

(So Sutthiphan 2011, 62; Facebook “ศรัทธา พระครูบาอริยชาติ อริยจิตโต วัดแสงแก้วโพธิญาณ อ.แม่สรวย

จ.เชียงราย” [devotees of Khru

ba Ariyachat Ariyachitto Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province] 2014). The site where the practices took place was a small makeshift shelter made from bamboo and hay. Inside the shelter, there was a big hole one cubit deep and two cubits wide. Ariyachat sat in the hole in a meditation posture. He was not allowed to stand, consume food, urinate, or defecate. He was only allowed to drink the water in an alms bowl. Four pieces of white cloth symbolizing the four noble truths were used as cushions and the makeshift shelter was made from eight poles to symbolize the Noble Eightfold Path. A Buddhist flag was put on the summit of the shelter to symbolize wisdom; nine levels of bamboo reed enclosing the shelter symbolized *lokuttara*. In addition, the shelter was protected by guards to keep Ariyachat isolated within a 100-meter radius during the retreat. The range of days to practice depended on Ariyachat, ranging from seven to nine days and nights (watsangkaew.com, 2010; So Sutthiphan, 2011, 61). Ariyachat had made a vow to perform *nirothakam* only nine times in his life. He kept changing the site each time and did not perform it annually. The first *nirothakam* was held in 1999 in a cave in Nan province when he was a novice, while the fourth to the eighth *nirothakam* were held in different locations near Wat Saengkaew. The last *nirothakam* was held between 4 and 12 January 2013 at Wat Saengkaew.

Nonetheless, even though Noi and Ariyachat differ in the interpretation and details of *nirothakam*, they share a common ideology which aims to emphasize Khru

ba Siwichai as the symbol of authentic *khru*ba, and *niridhakam* as Lan Na's cultural value. The accounts of the two *khru*ba are used to claim their austerity in Buddhism and the path to purify their minds, as well as the desire to follow the traditional practice in the *khru*ba tradition. This practice also aimed to underline the charismatic status of *khru*ba as, proven by intensive practice, in the same way as Khru

carried out by ordinary monks. This practice is also reminiscent of the self-mortification of the Gotama Buddha.

Simultaneously, *nirothakam* of modern *khruha* these days has been redefined and re-interpreted to serve expectations in popular Buddhism and prosperity religions which focus on material wealth and mundane success. I also observed that *nirothakam* has become a big event which has been advertised vastly by modern *khruha* in order to draw attention from the public, especially on the last day of practice. As Phrakhrue Weerasathaporn (2010, 41) suggested, in general, those who have made merit with a monk who has just finished *nirothakam* will gain great merit immediately. They will find heaven and *nibbana*, experience relief from sorrow and suffering, and stay happy, healthy, wealthy and safe. Moreover, if someone wanted to make a wish for all good things, then it would come true within a short time. Therefore, hundreds of attendants gather on the last day of *nirothakam* in each year. For example, during the last day of *nirothakam* of Khruha Noi in 2016 (February 21), it was reported that up to 5,000 people attended and representatives from government offices and local administrative organizations were found amongst them (TLC News, 2016). Moreover, the attendants included a number of lottery enthusiasts who believed that it was a good opportunity to seek lottery winning numbers. Those numbers should be related to Noi and the *nirothakam* event, such as the date and time he came out from the site or his age and year of birth. They also bought a lot of lottery tickets on that day with the high hope of winning the big prizes (ibid.).

Not only did attendants make merit with *khruha* on the last day of *nirothakam*, they also sought after *khruha* who would perform rituals to enhance the luck and wealth for all guests. After the alms-giving session in the morning, Noi performed a ritual for life prolongation in accordance with the Lan Na tradition. Ariyachat, in his eighth *nirothakam* in 2011, performed a ritual to commence the casting of the world's largest bronze image of Khruha Siwichai. The project cost around 50 million baht and attracted 10,000 guests who wished to gain merit and luck (watsangkaew.com 2010).

Significantly, *nirothakam* is found to be highlighted as the rite of passage in becoming “authentic *khruha*” by young *khruha* these days. Apart from the abovementioned

*khru*ba, there are a number of others who have claimed to be the practitioners of this practice. They include Khruba Chaiya Patthaphi in Chiang Rai province, Khruba Chao Nokaeofa in Nakhon Ratchasima province, Khruba Withun in Nakhon Sawan province, Khruba Kaeo, and Khruba Sorayut in Lampang province. For these *khru*ba, with less apparent popularity, *nirothakam* has become a significant way to promote *khru*ba charisma as well as to attract more believers and devotees.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that not all modern *khru*ba are focusing on *nirothakam* and that the opposite group condemns the *nirothakam* of these modern *khru*ba as a way to get money, wealth and attention by fooling Buddhists who are blind to this deception (e.g., from Phrakhru Adunsilakit, interview, March 9, 2016). Khruba Don, among other modern *khru*ba, claims that *nirothakam* had never been practiced by Khruba Siwichai or Khruba Khao Pi. Moreover, he is still skeptical about the existence of the *pap sa* on *nirothakam* which other modern *khru*ba frequently referred to. He adds that he never heard about this practice from his masters or any disciples of Khruba Khao Pi. Nonetheless, he accepts it, if in fact, it had been practiced by other *khru*ba in former days, particularly Khruba Chum of Wat Wang Mui as it was found in his biography (interview, August 3, 2016). On this debate, Khruba Noi comments:

If we think in a good way and do good things, we don't have to be afraid of anything or anyone. This practice [*nirothakam*] is so difficult to carry out that other monks don't want to follow it. Sometimes, they tried to imitate me but they failed and eventually gave up. Some fell from grace because they cheated people. But I think that good things and good results should come to me, too.

I am real and the real is real" (interview, March 4, 2016).

This point indicates that these modern *khru*ba are not a unified group and that they usually come into conflict with others.



Figure 3.11: *Nirothakam* of Khruba Ariyachat

Source: <http://www.bokboontoday.com>, 2013



Figure 3.12: *Nirothakam* of Khruba Noi in 2016, filtering holy water

Source: author



Figure 3.13: *Nirothakam* Site of Khruba Noi in 2016

Source: author



Figure 3.14: A vinyl banner found on the roadside inviting people to attend *bamphen satcha barami* (a self-created name to refer to *nirothakam* in a different way) and *phithi suepchata* of Khruba Chaiya Pathaphi in Chiang Rai, 2017

Source: Surachat Phutthima

3.5.2 The Robe-Changing Ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi

The robe-changing ceremony or *phithi plian pha* of the mummified body of Khruba Khao Pi was initiated by Khruba Wong not long after Khruba Khao Pi died (1977).

The ceremony was held annually in order to commemorate the great master. However, the mummification of a dead body, whether layman or monk, is not a local tradition, including the robe-changing ceremony. This decision thus brought about a severe conflict resulting in sharp fragmentation among the disciples and devotees of Khruba Khao Pi (led by Khruba Khao Kham Pan) and Khruba Wong, as I mentioned above. Nonetheless, the ceremony is still held annually until today.

In brief, the ceremony is carried out by taking the glass coffin containing Khruba Khao Pi out of the hall and forming a procession around the hall three times²⁹. Then, the mummified body's robe is changed and the body is covered with gold leaf. This process is restricted to a set of designated committees, and is carried out at the ceremonial pavilion connected to the southern part of the hall. The ceremonial pavilion is an octagonal open-air building, where people outside are able to observe the ceremony.

²⁹ The same as the triple circumambulation (Thai: *wian tian*) on the Buddhist holy days. Additionally, I have heard that, in the past, they took the mummified body through the Pha Nam village.

The highlight is when the mummified body of Khruba Khao Po, clad in new robes is raised up and slowly turned around to allow people outside pay homage. This action is the final process before returning the body to the glass coffin, where it will rest until the robe changing the following year. This ceremony is a symbolic practice performed if Khruba Khao Pi were still alive. He is an immortal saint who is always there to protect all living creatures, rather than living in heaven.

During the time of Khruba Wong, the robe-changing ceremony was held in a very simple way. Photographs in the Wat Pha Nam museum show that, during that time, there were only a few hundred people attending during the ceremony (interview, Khruba Don March 1, 2016). Afterwards, during the time of Khruba Don, the ceremony gained more popularity. Don reveals that the ceremony has drawn more attention from the former followers and believers of Khruba Khao Pi. Moreover, during the last decade, the ceremony has received more visitors from other regions. Significantly, devotees from the central region have played a crucial role in the ceremony. They serve as sponsors for the ceremony and alms houses (Thai: *rong than*). The ceremony now takes place on a very large scale and is more impressive with a grand procession, traditional music and multi-ethnic performances, as well as various kinds of merit-making activities. The provincial office also marks the ceremony in the official calendar as one of the most important events of Lamphun province.³⁰

I observed the robe-changing ceremony in 2015 and 2016 and found that more than 20,000 visitors attended each year (during March 1-4). Usually the Lamphun governor was invited to preside over the ceremony as chief of the laity, as in 2015. But in 2016, the deputy supreme commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces was invited instead, showing that the ceremony has gained more importance at the national level.

Wat Pha Nam, accordingly, has both fame and financial donations.

The growing number of visitors at the robe-changing ceremony correlates with the factors listed below (see also Kwanchewan and Pisith 2016).

³⁰ As well as the robe-changing ceremony of the mummified body of Khruba Wong at Wat Huai Tom during May 16-17 of each year.

- (1) Advancement in transportation, road and infrastructure, including communication technology, making the journey to Wat Pha Nam much easier, while cell phone and social media applications allow people to circulate and share news and information more quickly and wider.
- (2) The enormous effort of Don to re-connect the former networks of Khruba Khao Pi throughout the region and, at the same time, to keep searching for new connections (as I will discuss in the next chapter).
- (3) The emergence of new groups of devotees who want to connect with Khruba Khao Pi (and Don), for different purposes, such as spirit mediums, amulet entrepreneurs and young *khruba* in the North.
- (4) The growth in the North and throughout the entire country of the middle class who want to rely on Khruba Khao Pi's charismatic and supernatural powers to serve their needs in the current capitalistic society. This phenomenon correlates with the spreading of Khao Pi's reputation as the second *ton bun* of Lan Na and the direct successor of Khruba Siwichai. Numerous stories about his holiness are also widely circulated through word of mouth, the Internet and social media tools nowadays.

Additionally, the robe-changing ceremony in recent times tends to serve the prosperity religions in various degrees. For example, in a private ceremony held one night a week before the official date of the robe-changing ceremony in 2016, Don and the sponsors of ceremony planned to change the white robes and gild the mummified body of Khruba Khao Pi³¹. This ceremony was closed to the public, allowing access only monks and novices of Wat Pha Nam, sponsors and skilled craftsmen, totaling roughly 30 persons. The sponsors were members of a wealthy business family based in Bangkok and Singapore (a husband, a wife, and two daughters).

After a ritual to pay homage to Khruba Khao Pi's spirit, the robe-changing and gilding work was begun. I observed that while the wife and two daughters were sitting and reciting *dhamma* verses in one corner of the hall, the husband was standing beside the

³¹ Don explained that the purposes of this event were to (1) check the mummified body carefully if there was something wrong, (2) change the robes, and (3) do a neat gilding work with the premium quality gold leaf (supported by the sponsors). He was afraid that in the official ceremony, there would be many people involved and produced an unneat work. In addition, there might have some ones who use fake gold leaf which could destroy the mummified body (February 27, 2016).

mummified body, together with Don, the fellow monks and craftsmen. He tried to collect all the tiny pieces of gold leaf which fell from the mummified body to the floor. These pieces of gold leaf were kept in a clear casket and would be placed on the family's household altar for worship. After the gilding was finished, the sponsors put tens of bank notes and the passports of their family members into the glass coffin of Khruba Khao Pi. To my knowledge, this practice signified the privileged status of the sponsors. One monk revealed later that these objects would be taken out the following morning. Upon Don's permission, the sponsors revealed that a banknote is symbolic of wealth while a passport is symbolic of success (in life and business) since they were global businesspersons. By doing this, the charismatic and supernatural powers of Khruba Khao Pi would be transmitted to these objects and bring them good results like those they had received throughout decades of devotion to Wat Pha Nam. The obvious results they had gained were health and more wealth (interview, the sponsors, February 27, 2016).

Similarly, in the official ceremony, I found the practice of putting bank notes and coins into the glass coffin of Khruba Khao Pi also carried out by the monastery committees. These objects would be taken out for sale (Thai: *bucha*) the following year. This practice is another way to sacralize objects by letting them absorb the charismatic and supernatural powers from the mummified body, like the consecration of amulets (Thai: *pluksek*). Then, they will be treated as sacred-magic objects to worship, credited with protective and magical powers to bring luck, health, and wealth to the owners. As I observed, these objects sold out very quickly even though the prices were higher than the actual value. They also included the white robes used to wrap the mummified body from the previous years, which were cut into tiny pieces for sale.

However, ritual performances which relied on a belief in supernatural and protective powers of *khruba* have been found since the time of the former *khruba*. For example, Khruba Siwichai was asked by lay people to use his supernatural power to cure pneumonia which was epidemic in Denchai district, Phrae province while he was on a trip back from Phrathat Cho Hae. He then dipped his rosary into the water and chanted. Then, he asked people to take the water for drinking and bathing at home. Miraculously, the epidemic ended (Singha 1979 cited in Sirisak 2016, 331). Similarly, Khruba Khao Pi

was often asked by lay people to exercise his supernatural power on many occasions, such as to bless stone walls to stop cattle thieves along the borders of Lampang and Lamphun provinces, and to bless and walk on small weirs for prosperity and security in agriculture (to prevent flooding during the rainy season and to have plenty of water in the growing season, interview, former devotees of Khruba Khao Pi in Li and Thung Hua Chang districts, Lamphun province during 2015-2016).

Nevertheless, these practices were aimed at solving basic problems in the rural-agricultural context where people were much concerned about security in agriculture, natural disasters, and harm from humans, wild animals and invisible things. Practices included the worship of objects related to the former *khruba* like hairs, nails, prints of hands and feet or even the remains of cigars (tobacco wrapped in dried banana leaf) and betel nut from *khruba*'s mouth.



Figure 3.15: The Robe-Changing Ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi in 2016
Source: author



Figure 3.16: The Robe-Changing Ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi in 2016
Source: author

3.5.3 The Ritual for Life Prolongation

The ritual for life prolongation or *phithi suepchata* has long been practiced since in the ancient Lan Na period. The ritual has no roots in Buddhism but it is rather the integration of Hinduism, Brahmanism and animism (Panuwat 2013; Panita 2016). Additionally, it was underlined by *atthakatha thammabot* (Pali: *dhammapada-atthakatha*, commentary to *dhammapada*) in the stories of *Ayuwatthanakuman* [อายุวัฒน์กุมาร] and *Phothiratkuman* [โพธิราชกุมาร]. In Lan Na region, the old *pap sa* recorded in Yuan characters, describing the ritual for life prolongation of the city (Thai: *suepchata mueang*) in the reign of King Sam Fang Kaen of the Mang Rai dynasty, was found to prove its long existence.

In the present time, the northerners favor undergoing this ritual on various occasions in order to stay healthy, happy, and prosperous. In fact, this ritual also is applicable for objects, buildings and places. Panita (2016) categorizes *phithi suepchata* into four types: (1) *phithi suepchata mueang* (life prolongation for a city), (2) *phithi suepchata ban, muban* (life prolongation for a house and a village), (3) *phithi suepchata khon* (life prolongation for a person), and (4) *phithi suepchata phuetphon* (life prolongation for crops). However, each type of *suepchata* requires different preparations in detail. Moreover, the same ritual may vary from one place to another as it is also practiced among other Tai-speaking communities in the Shan State of Myanmar (Tai Yai, Tai Khuen, Tai Lue) and the Lawa ethnic group in the North of Thailand (ibid.).

This ritual is psychologically significant in several ways. Nonetheless, basically it is closely tied with four aspects: (1) the belief in power of the Triple Gem (Thai: *phra rattanatrai*), (2) the belief in the law of karma (Thai: *kot haeng kam*), (3) the belief in auspiciousness (Thai: *rueang mongkhon*), and (4) the belief in merit transmission to all living creatures (Panuwat 2013, 103-104). Thus, *phithi suepchata* is considered an expression of cultural identity of Lan Na which has long been practiced until even now. As it is the integration of various beliefs, the ritual could be performed by either monks or lay experts. However, it is not easy to be a specialist in this ritual as it requires many specific abilities, such as proficiency in *dhamma* verses, knowledge of sacred formula (Thai: *khatha*), and knowledge of ritual preparation in accordance with the

Lan Na tradition. For lay experts, in addition, all of them had spent many years in the monkhood. Therefore, they must be elderly while having a reputation for performing specific rituals; thus people rely on the particular abilities of individual performers, such as possession of magical and charismatic powers or a secret recipe.

Regarding modern *khru*ba and other Buddhist monks, currently there are few who are able to perform this ritual. For the three major cases in this study, *Khru*ba Noi is the only one who can perform it (see procedures of *suep*chata in Panuwat 2013, 11-77). *Phithi suep*chata is now promoted as one of the most popular practices of Noi. He calls it *phithi suep*chata *luang baep Lan Na*, or the grand ritual for life prolongation in the Lan Na tradition). This ritual is performed during the major events of Wat Si Don Mun. Furthermore, as it has become very famous today, it is often requested, on a smaller scale, by his V.I.P. guests who are mostly wealthy businesspersons, high-ranking officials, army officers, well-known politicians and celebrities, such as the deputy supreme commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces and his company (on March 4, 2016), special advisor to the Royal Thai Army and chair of the executive board of Thailand Post Company (on July 24, 2016), and director-general of the Royal Forest Department (on August 21, 2016). The ritual is also popular among foreign devotees, especially the Chinese middle class in Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. Noi uses *phithi suep*chata as the main attraction for his overseas trips, such as in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on July 19, 2016. Photos of these activities were posted and shared on the Facebook page of Wat Si Don Mun by his staff (@Watsridonmoon) from time to time.

What makes the *phithi suep*chata of Noi so special? I found the reason is that it is embedded with the strong magical and supernatural powers of Noi who is renowned for magic arts, and who has accumulated merit and powers through *niro*thakam every year. Importantly, the ritual is combined with an additional practice, so-called *nam*mon *thoranisan luang*, or the sacralizing of water by the special sacred mantra. These, thus, make *phithi suep*chata of Noi more attractive and efficacious for his clients.

I suggest that the *phithi suepchata* of Noi has demonstrated a process of emphasizing values of the local tradition which is carried out hand-in-hand with the retooling of ritual and symbolic expression in order to serve desires in prosperity religions.

I witnessed the *phithi suepchata* of Noi on two occasions, in the *thot kathin* festival in 2015 (October 31) and in the first anniversary of the building of his hospital in 2016 (March 30). Participants were impressed by his professional and mystical way of practice while the stage and ritual props, such as flowers and the giant wooden tripod, were beautifully arranged in an elegant Lan Na style. In addition, non-northerners were also fulfilled in the search for authenticity and exoticism. Regarding the sacralizing of the *nammon thoranisan luang* in *phithi suepchata*, as a matter of fact, it is not a common practice for Thai Buddhists in general, but is well-known among magic and occult enthusiasts. It is portrayed as a secret-sacred formula passed down through his lineage. The formula may vary from one lineage to another. Luck Rakhanithes, known as Achan Luck or Mo Luck, a famous astrologer in Thailand, notes that the *nammon thoranisan* formula is a kind of secret subject which could be rarely shared to others, even those with whom one has a close relationship (Facebook @lucklive January 15, 2015). Regarding its efficacy, Noi and Mo Luck have explained, in the same way, that by drinking, bathing, or sprinkling it onto a body, a house or a shop for business, it dispels all bad luck (Thai: *sadokhro*), withdraws black magic (Thai: *thuk khun sai, don khong*), and rescues from danger (interview, Khruba Noi March 4, 2016).

The *nammon thoranisan luang* formula of Noi was handed down by Khruba La (Ta Thip) of Wat Pa Tueng in San Kamphaeng district, Chiang Mai province, one of the nine masters mentioned above. When done on a full scale, *phithi suepchata* and the sacralizing of *nammon thoranisan luang* takes around two to three hours. As I witnessed in the *thot kathin* festival on October 31, 2015, the rituals were performed in the main hall where more than 500 people attended, including the main sponsors who sat in the center under the giant wooden tripod. In Noi's *phithi suepchata luang lae phithi sador noppakhro tam kamlang wankoet* (the ritual for life prolongation and the ritual for dispelling bad luck in accordance with the nine celestial bodies), a particular chant (Thai: *khatha*) of each celestial body was recited respectively, starting from Sunday (Thai: *phra athit*), Monday (Thai: *phra chan*), Tuesday (Thai: *phra angkhan*), Wednesday (Thai: *phra phut*), Saturday (Thai: *phra sao*),

Thursday (Thai: *phra pharuehat*), Wednesday night (Thai: *phra rahu*), *phra ket* (for those who do not know their exact zodiac), and Friday (Thai: *phra suk*).

The other two prosperity rituals of Noi which are currently popular, and I would like to address here briefly, are described below.

1. *Na na thong* and *salika linthong*, or the ritual of placing gold leaf on the face and the tongue of a client. The ritual has recently been promoted to have potency in enhancing personal charm which enables one to persuade others. However, the persuasion is not limited to romantic conquests, for a trader needs charm to win his buyers with compliant words and deeds and a client needs it to win favors from his patron (Tambiah 1984, 226). Noi adds, *na na thong* is also a ritual to enhance a client's fortune, prosperity and charm (Thai: *soem duang chata barami soem siri mongkhon choklap metta mahasane khwam charoen rungrueang*). It is lucky for those who have undergone the ritual because "if one who has not been loved, s/he will be loved, one who has not been good in commerce, s/he will gain a huge profit. Good things will come to her/his life which was previously in downturn, and her/his fate will drastically change from bad to good" (Thainews 2015).

Regarding the process of the ritual, the gold leaf would be placed on the forehead and both palms of the sponsor (sometimes on both cheeks, as well). Then, Noi will use a walking stick, which was given by Luang Pu Tim³², to touch both palms and the forehead and give a blessing with special mantras, the so-called *khatha ngoen lan*, or the mantra for a million baht, and *metta maha niyom*, or the mantra for mercy and charm. Daeng, one of Wat Si Don Mun's committee members, revealed that normally Noi would perform the ritual only on very special occasions. But after well-known businessmen, including state officials, army officers and policemen in high ranks have undergone the ritual and gained success in their lives, the story is spreading by word of mouth and now a large number of people keep asking Noi to perform the ritual for them. Eventually, for people's well-being, Noi has agreed to do so (Thainews 2015, see also Facebook @Watsridonmoon January 10, 2015).

³² A famous magic monk of Wat Lahan Rai in Rayong province (died in 1975), one of his masters.

2. *Phithi plukse lae choem* or the ritual to bestow a blessing on amulets and other objects upon request, such as signboards of shops and companies or number plates of automobiles for auspiciousness (Thai: *khwam pen siri mongkhon*). It is a common practice in Thai Buddhist society and Noi is also famous for it. A good example was in 2011 when Noi was invited by the Chiang Mai Provincial Land Transportation Office to give a blessing on the 301 auspicious number plates of automobiles (Thai: *thabian lek mongkhon*) in front of the Three Kings Monument in Chiang Mai City. The ritual had the then-Chiang Mai governor preside as chief of the laity. Subsequently, these number plates would be sold at an auction (Thairath Online, July 13, 2011).

These rituals are promoted widely on the mainstream channels, such as in the country's top daily newspapers especially when Thai celebrities and important persons come to undergo the rituals. Photos of them, during the ritual performance, were also posted on the Facebook page of Wat Si Don Mun (@Watsridonmoon) to promote Noi's popularity. Below are some examples of the headlines:

“People flock to make merit and undergo *na na thong* at Wat Si Don Mun after “Somchai³³” underwent the ritual to ward off bad luck” (Maticchon Online, July 31, 2015)

“Enhancing fortune! ‘a wealthy man Wutti-sak³⁴’ underwent *na na thong* with ‘Khruba Noi’, a famous magic monk in Lan Na” (Thairath Online, January 4, 2015).

“ ‘Kraison’ and ‘Phet’³⁵ underwent *na na thong* with ‘Khruba Noi’, a famous magic monk in Lan Na” (Thairath Online March, 27, 2015).

³³ Somchai Wongsawat, the former Prime Minister of Thailand and Taksin Shinawatra's brother-in law.

³⁴ The then owner of a famous aesthetic clinic in Thailand, *Wutti-sak clinic*.

³⁵ The ex-husband of Pumpuang Duangchan, a late “queen of Thai country song” [Thai: *rachini lukthung*] and their son, “Phet”.



Figure 3.17: A set for *Na Na Thong*; an envelope for the ritual service fee and *trakut* as a gift

Source: author



Figure 3.18: *Phithi Suepchata* at *Thot Kathin* Ceremony 2015 of Khruba Noi (left), an advertisement of *Na Na Thong* in Wat Si Don Mun showing Thai celebrities while they were undergoing the ritual with Khruba Noi (right)

Source: author

3.5.4 The Molding of Super Instant Buddha Images

This activity was found in the *thot kathin* festival of Khruba Ariyachat in 2015. The instant Buddha or *phrachao thanchai* means the Buddha image that is able to be molded and finished within one day, or 24 hours. Buddhists believe that the image is endowed with strong Buddha power (Thai: *phuttha nuphap*) that can quickly bring luck and happiness or whatsoever is requested. As it is a common practice in Lan Na Buddhism, the images of *phrachao thanchai* are found in Buddhist monasteries across the region, both old and new. For example, the most famous *phrachao thanchai* in recent years is in

Wat Phrathat Doi Kham in Chiang Mai because of numerous stories about its magical potency to bring luck, especially to win the lottery.

The molding of *phrachao thanchai* image normally starts from midnight until the nightfall on the following day (around 6 P.M.). Then, it will undergo *phithi phuttha phisek* (the ritual to consecrate or empower the Buddha image) that night. If it takes longer than that, the image is considered just another Buddha image (see Swearer 2004). What makes the molding of *phrachao thanchai* so popular today is the ritual to install the heart of the Buddha (Thai: *phithi sai huachai phrachao*) inside the image. It is a heart-shaped container, usually made of gold and silver. This aspect of the ritual is a result of the influence of Tantric Buddhism on Tai Buddhist communities in the Upper Mekong region, including the ritual to open the eyes of the image (Thai: *phithi boeknet phrachao*), which is performed by expert monks after the installation of the heart of the Buddha all night until dawn. Overall, *phithi sai huachai phrachao*, *phithi phuttha phisek* and *phithi boeknet phrachao* are the processes to personify the Buddha image (see Suraswat 2015).

Since the molding of a *phrachao than chai* image consists of many detailed procedures, a Buddha image that is completed within one day is believed to be endowed with supernatural power with the support of divine beings (Thai: *thewada*) who smooth the progress of the event. Therefore, Buddhists consider *phrachao thanchai* to be divinely sacred with the transcendent capacity to bring forth instant success for whatever one wishes. Additionally, taking part in the molding activity, in any way, is also considered a great merit-making activity which brings instant multiple successes. In the past, the concept of *thanchai* was applied to Khruba Siwichai who was also called *khruba thanchai* by his followers, mainly in Phrao district, Chiang Mai province. Due to his ability to complete construction works, typically on a large scale within a short period of time in each place, the term *khruba thanchai* was used to eulogize and testify to Khruba Siwichai's saintly status (Sirisak 2016, 27).

I witnessed the molding of *phrachao thanchai* images in Ariyachat's *thot kathin* ceremony (November 6-8, 2015). But in this activity he played with a word by adding the term *khot*, or super or extreme, to make a distinction from *phrachao thanchai* in

other places. Thus, it is called *phrachao khot thanchai* or the super instant Buddha image. The term *khot* is used to highlight the extremely instant power of the Buddha images in response to requests. Ariyachat (November 7, 2015) explained to his devotees from Bangkok, “those Buddha images are *phrachao khot thanchai* which signifies extremely instant riches [Thai: *ruai khot thanchai*].”

The molding of *phrachao khot thanchai* by hand was staged on November 6 and was scheduled to be completed at 6 P.M. on November 7. Nonetheless, the number of *phrachao khot thanchai* images was limited to nine. The sponsors of *phrachao khot thanchai* had to donate one hundred thousand baht for each image³⁶. Thus, all of the sponsors were wealthy devotees from the central region. In this regard, on the one hand, it is considered a tactic to test the loyalty of Ariyachat’s devotees, especially from the upper-middle class while, on the other hand, it is a selling technique combining the Lan Na tradition with the desires of prosperity religions.

As I observed, the sponsors showed excitement and enthusiasm during the molding activities. However, Ariyachat provided a group of craftsmen to help them in order to make sure that the images would be beautifully completed in time. The sponsors appeared in white outfits. Some sponsors hung or pinned small lockets of Ariyachat, encased with gold and diamonds, on their necks and chests. During the daytime activity, they took turns, going back and forth between the molding site and the coffee shop to chat and relax. I went to observe the molding site again in the late evening and found that the five-foot tall Buddha images were nearly finished. The craftsmen were merely working on trimming and decorating while most of the sponsors already had left the site for dinner and were preparing for the coming rituals at night: *phithi sai huachai phrachao*, *phithi phuttha phisek* and *phithi boeknet phrachao*.

The main attraction for *phithi sai huachai phrachao*, for the sponsors of the nine Buddha images, was the heart-shaped containers made of silver hung together with other containers replicating human intestines, lungs, and kidneys. On the surface of each container, names of the sponsors were inscribed. Ariyachat explained to the

³⁶ Ariyachat also staged the casting of the brass image of *Phrachao Khot Thanchai* which has a *natak* of 49 inches, too. The particularity was the face of the image would be covered by 9 Kg. of gold.

sponsors, through a microphone and loudspeaker, that each heart of the Buddha image would contain oil and a holy thread (Thai: *saisin*) to represent blood vessels and blood (of the Buddha). He noted that if the image had not undergone these rituals, it would have been considered just a stone (November 7, 2015). Apart from oil and a holy thread, the sponsors, in addition, put various kinds of gemstones, coins, silver and gold rings and necklaces into the hearts of the Buddha images. As suggested by Ariyachat, these objects represented wealth and prosperity for the present existence and the next life. The sponsors seemed careful and awkward during the ritual due to their first-hand experience. They watchfully followed the instructions of Ariyachat step-by-step since they were afraid to make a mistake and thereby make the images less powerful. They asked Ariyachat periodically what should be or should not be put inside the heart-shaped containers and how to carry them properly.

I found that the molding of *phrachao khot thanchai* and the sequential rites provided physical and spiritual pleasure, a feeling of considerable sacredness and enjoyment to the sponsors. They seemed very proud of the images they had molded by themselves. During the *phithi sai huachai phrachao*, some sponsors held the Buddha hearts over their heads and prayed upon them quietly for a long time. After finishing the installation of the hearts, the holes behind each image were closed by the sponsors using various kinds of bank notes. They also put gold leaf onto the forehead and chest of each Buddha image while the remains were put back onto their foreheads. This practice is believed to be a way to transmit the power of the image into the bodies and a way to spiritually connect the image with its owners. Some also stood before and prayed to the images for a long time.

These symbolic practices reflect the extremely unquestionable desire for luck, wealth and other forms of material success of the middle and upper-middle classes while money has become a form of ritual investment and a means of exchange for religious consumption, as suggested by Pattana (2008). I overheard someone among the sponsors talking in response to Ariyachat's teaching about the extremely instant power of the *phrachao khot thanchai*, saying "Wow! it's so great that *phrachao khot thanchai* will help us to repay our debts in a short time *sathu! sathu! sathu!*" (November 7, 2015).



Figure 3.19: The Molding of *Phrachao Khot Thanchai* in *Thot Kathin* Festival 2015 of Khruba Ariyachat

Source: Author



Figure 3.20: *Phithi Sai Huachai Phrachao* for *Phrachao Khot Thanchai* in *Thot Kathin* Festival 2015 of Khruba Ariyachat

Source: Author

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the process of making charismatic monks in order to understand how modern *khruba* are considered to be endowed with supernatural power or exceptional qualities that are inaccessible to ordinary individuals. By examining three modern *khruba*, I found four crucial elements in the making of charismatic and authentic *khruba*: (1) the discourse of the succession in Khruba Siwichai's lineage, (2) the sacred biographies (*ton bun* narrative), (3) grandiose monasteries, and (4) heterogeneous practices and activities. The discourse of succession reveals the strong influence of Khruba Siwichai on the concept of *khruba*, which has led to his establishment as an imagined ideal of *khruba* or *khruba* role model. At the same time,

the traditional narrative of *ton bun* found in biographies of modern *khru**ba*, just like that of the former *khru**ba*, signifies an important role of the local tradition as a fundamental source underlining the charismatic status.

The construction works of modern *khru**ba* reveal the continuation of the *khru**ba* tradition of Buddhist revivalism and social development, which, in the meantime, testifies to *khru**ba*'s charismatic status. However, the construction works of modern *khru**ba* have changed in at least two aspects: the scope of activity and the form of fundraising. These changes also demonstrate the transformation of the concepts of *ton bun*, the field of merit and the community of the faithful, in Buddhist revivalism. Additionally, the task of making monasteries grandiose and ecumenical demonstrates the articulation of the local tradition and the global phenomenon of modern Buddhist society. It reveals the influence of popular Buddhism and religious tourism serving as key instruments to visualize *khru**ba*'s charisma as well as to generate faith and attract pilgrims and tourists from around the world. Heterogeneous practices and activities of modern *khru**ba* also demonstrate the process of highlighting the ethno-cultural value of Lan Na, which is working hand-in-hand with the process of redefining, re-evaluating, and re-interpreting ritual and symbolic expression in order to serve materialist and consumerist desires.

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CHAPTER 4

MODERN *KHRUBA* NETWORKS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having a large group of devotees organized into networks is one of the main elements of, and testimony to, the charismatic status of *khru**ba*. Flows of information and objects in different locations are made possible through human and non-human agents (sacred-magic objects), which consequently have contributed to the wide reputation and the expansion of networks of modern *khru**ba*. This chapter employs the network society concept of Castells (2010; Taylor 2003) to understand the main characteristics of *khru**ba* networks in contemporary Thai society, and to explore the relationships between people, between information and people, and between people and objects in the networks. This chapter shall emphasize the multiplicity of the convergence through connections made with other components and through social interactions surrounding the multifaceted charisma of *khru**ba*. Sacred-magic objects are highlighted as active agents by themselves having the capacity to connect people in different locations to get involved in the networks, just like human agents. Additionally, the networks are highly depicted by flexibility, fluidity, and decentering as they are connected through direct or indirect ways with multiple levels of linkages.

4.2 NETWORKS OF THE FORMER-DAY *KHRUBA*

This topic examines the main characteristics of the former *khru**ba*'s networks, mainly those of *Khru**ba* Siwichai. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of a human network for the success of *khru**ba*'s movements during those times. An example is that of Sirisak (2016, 329-342), which suggests that *Khru**ba* Siwichai's human network

contributed greatly to the success of the sacred campaign to construct and repair Buddhist monuments across the region. According to Sirisak (ibid.), the network comprised diverse groups of people in the Lan Na region: (1) local monks, (2) local royalty, (3) wealthy Yuan merchants, (4) civil officers and local politicians, (5) wealthy Chinese merchants, (6) wealthy Shan and Mon, (7) Karen (as the major workforce), (8) other ethnic groups, e.g., Khamu and Sikh and (9) groups of craftsmen (Chinese, Yuan, Shan, and Burmese).

Tambiah (1984), Sopha (1991) and Isara (2011) have suggested that before becoming a *ton bun* for Lan Na people, Khruba Siwichai's saintly status was first accepted among people in rural areas of Li district, especially Karen¹ whose belief was consistent with *ton bun* and Ariya Metteyya of Lan Na Buddhism. According to Sopha (1991, 44-46), Li district is located on the hills and mountains inhabited by many ethnic groups, mostly Karen. They were attracted by Khruba Siwichai's ascetic practice and rumors of supernatural potency. Karen later played an important role in Khruba Siwichai's movement, contributing as the majority of laborers in his construction works, including the movements of Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong.

The concept of *ton bun* rested upon a belief that the great merit of a *ton bun* could be transferred to all living creatures. His organization of efforts to construct and renovate Buddhist monuments was a means to cultivate charisma by providing opportunities for followers to make merit (see also Irwin 2017). As I have mentioned in chapter three, Khruba Siwichai, as well as Khruba Khao Pi, travelled around the region in order to be

¹ Sopha (1991, 44-46) has suggested that a belief in *ton bun* and Ariya Metteyya of Lan Na Buddhism is consistent with a traditional belief of Karen regarding the guardian lords, including *bodhisatta* and Ariya Metteyya, especially among the Telekorn group. Later, Gravers (2012) suggested that Karen imaginary and notions of royalty were preconditions for a new era governed by Buddhist ethics that will bring peace and prosperity. Royalty appeared in their myths, legends and prophecies since they believed they were like orphans without a king and leader. Buddhist Karen awaited the next Buddha, Ariya Metteyya- preceded by a righteous Karen leader. Thus, *khruaba*, and other charismatic monks, were perceived as lords such as Khruba Djau La (a Karen monk, during 1960-70) who was called by his disciples (in Karen) *Bhagava* (Noble Lord, an epithet of the Buddha), *Phu Ga Cha* (Lord Father), *Ga Cha Yuah* (God), *Djau Pha* (king) (ibid., 357-359). Similarly, Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong were also called by Karen devotees as *Ka Cha Bang*, *Ka Cha Wa* and *Ka Cha Pho*, the "Yellow-Robed Lord," the "White-Robed Lord," and the "Little Lord," respectively. Moreover, these lords were certainly more powerful than their traditional lords because they owned sacred places represented by *stupa* remains and monasteries scattered throughout the land (Kwanchevan 2002, 275-276). According to the Karen in Huai Tom, Khruba Wong gave them knowledge and development, thus "we are no longer orphans" (ibid., 358).

the heads of construction projects (Thai: *nang nak*). Khruba Siwichai became the center of public attention and devotion and was the focus of merit-seeking donations. Khruba Siwichai's sacred campaign to construct and renovate religious buildings, including buildings for public services, covered the areas of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae, Tak, Mae Hong Son, and Sukhothai provinces. Everywhere he went, parents brought their sons to be his disciples, novices and monks. Siwichai designated his disciples at each locale to take care of a monastery he had built or renovated after he left. Hence, the network of Siwichai's monastic lineage was formed throughout Lan Na region by this method.

Pensupa² (Facebook @pensupa.sukkatajaiinn, posted on September 7, 2016) adds that, according to Siwichai's biography, he issued around 2,000 monk certificates for monks ordained by him, such as, Khruba Khao Pi. Relationships between Siwichai and his disciples in the lineage can be found through activities they did together, especially in construction. For example, as discovered by Kwanchewan (1988, 2010), most of the first-generation Pwo Karen in Pha Nam community (of Khao Pi) had participated in Siwichai's construction of the road to Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep in 1933. Khao Pi also recorded that he himself brought 500 Karen to help in this project (Apichai Khao Pi n. d., 25).

Moreover, key disciples of Khruba Siwichai included Khruba Kaeo Kanthawangso, Khruba No Kham and Khruba Suriya. Khruba Kaeo, from Ban Hong district, Lamphun province, was specialized in constructing buildings. He was later designated by Siwichai to supervise major construction works, such as the renovation of Wat Phrathat Hariphunchai in Lamphun province. He accompanied Siwichai to many places as the principal craftsman (as listed at more than thirty sites in Phayao and Lampang provinces). Khruba No Kham and Khruba Suriya also served as key assistants in construction works. No Kham was assigned to supervise the construction sites in Phrao district of Chiang Mai and Wiang Pa Pao district of Chiang Rai, while Suriya was assigned to supervise construction sites in Chae Hom district of Lampang (Pensupa

² Khruba Siwichai is in a process to be nominated as one of the world's most important persons of UNESCO, Pensupa Sukkata is the principal researcher conducting research on Khruba Siwichai for the Khrubachao Srivichai Institute Foundation. She regularly posts preliminary analysis on her Facebook page while her book will be published soon.

ibid.). In each place, when the construction had been completed, a special festival was held. It was called *poi luang* or a great rite, indicating that the work was placed at the pinnacle of merit-making endeavors recognized in the Lan Na tradition. The *poi luang* was a communal undertaking par excellence, functioning to promote the social solidarity of those involved as well as serving to enhance their religious status (Keyes 1981, 155; see also Kwanchewan 2002 on “sacred space”). Furthermore, this festival was also a symbolic practice to signify the charismatic status of Siwichai.

Moreover, the network of Khruba Siwichai’s monastic lineage was expanded through a group of monks who later came to subscribe to his lineage, such as Khruba Chum of Wat Wang Mui in Lamphun city, Khruba Si Nuan of Wat Charoen Mueang in Phan district of Chiang Rai, Khruba Duang Di of Wat Tha Champi in San Pa Tong district of Chiang Mai, Khruba Wong of Wat Huai Tom in Li district of Lamphun and Khruba Thammachai of Wat Thung Luang in Mae Taeng district of Chiang Mai. Pensupa (Facebook, posted on September 9, 2016) noted that this group of disciples was larger and more famous than those in the former group, suggesting that they expanded the network of Siwichai through their network of disciples and followers.

The exemplary case to prove the network’s efficiency was the construction of the road to Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai. As detailed in a document sent to the government (original information from the Office of Principal Private Secretary [Thai: *samnakngan ratchalekhanukan nai phra-ong*] div.22/22, subject “Phra Siwichai presented an act of charity for His Majesty the King” [Thai: *Phra Siwichai thawai ratchakuson*] dated October 8-16, 1935, cited in Sirisak 2016, 308-309), the total number of people who came help the road construction between November 1934 and April 1935 (five months and 22 days, recorded by Siwichai) was 118,304³, (67,818 men and 50,486 women). They were from Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun and Lampang provinces. Among them, there might have a significant number of volunteers who had been brought and/or connected by the network of Siwichai’s monastic lineage, as I mentioned earlier. Disciples and followers had worked as human agents in Khruba

³ However, a process to get the exact number in that situation is skeptical.

Siwichai's networks while Buddhist monuments built or renovated by him also served as non-human nodes linking people in different locations.

In addition to the success in religious construction works, Khruba Siwichai's network also contributed to a political movement challenging Siamese authority. Kamala (1997, 43-46) has shown that during the political reaction of Khruba Siwichai, after the passage of the 1902 *Sangha* Act, Siwichai's disciples numbered over 2,000 monks and novices, from 90 monasteries in Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Chiang Rai provinces declared to be under Siwichai instead of the centralized *sangha*. With regard to the ideological level, the sacred story of Siwichai as a field of merit and a millenarian savior, *ton bun*-Ariya Metteyya, played a key message circulating among the people in the Lan Na region. The message was translated mainly in the form of rumors about Siwichai's supernatural potency. Bowie (2014a) has underlined the importance of rumors is regard to the mentality of the people in Lan Na, who believed that *ton bun* and saviors emerged during times of crisis. As Bowie writes, "Khruba Siwichai was attracting huge crowds wherever he went, and rumors of his magical protective powers mushroomed. People spread turmeric on his feet and saved the white cloth on which he had walked for worship and protection. There were so many people coming to pay him respect that every day was like a temple festival" (ibid., 689-690).

In this sense, Khruba Siwichai's network was formed not purely for religious purposes but was directed and redirected to serve different agendas of different groups of devotees. As Sirisak (2016, 333-341) points out, Siwichai's movement was the social space for members of the Lan Na royalty to regain their social status. At the same time, state officers and local politicians gained more recognition while Chinese merchants showed their devotion to Lan Na Buddhism which consequently benefited their businesses at the locales (see also Sopha 1991, 63-70). This illustrated diversity and heterogeneity of *khruba*'s network and reminds us not to consider a network a uniformed entity. Similarly, Kwanchewan (1988, 2010) has suggested that the network of Khruba Khao Pi was also characterized by heterogeneity.

The network of Khruba Siwichai was characterized by informality. The movement was mobilized by his charismatic authority. The ideology of the former *khruba*'s movements

can be clearly seen in at least two separable yet overlapping points: (1) to resist the centralization of the *sangha* and the centralization of the state by the Siamese authority, and (2) to revive Buddhism in the North through numerous construction works⁴. These were the driving forces and also the main attraction of *khru*ba's movements in the past. Hence, the network of Khruba Siwichai, including that of Khruba Khao Pi, was inevitably confined to specific groups of people in a specific area.

Nonetheless, due to the changing politico-economy in the North from the late Khruba Khao Pi's period until the period of Khruba Wong (after Khruba Khao Pi), *khru*ba's movements were no longer been characterized by ideological resistance. Moreover, the sacred campaign to revive Buddhism in Lan Na gradually became oriented to serve the state's development policy. As I mentioned in chapter three, Khao Pi and Wong initiated many projects for the development of education and infrastructure in the region during the BE 2500s (1957-1967). These kinds of works had formed the perception of "*khru*ba, the development monk" (Thai: *khru*ba *phra* *nak* *phatthana*) among people in Lan Na as well as the state. Khao Pi, during the final period, received a number of commemorative plaques from the government sectors for his construction works to support education and government services. As for Wong, he was later promoted to a higher position in the *sangha* system, as Phrakhru Phatthana Kitchanurak. The term *phatthana*, literally "development", was addressed to commemorate his contribution to social development in rural areas. He was also patronized by the Royal Family while a royal project station was set up in the vicinity of Huai Tom in 1978 (see Gravers 2012).

These factors gradually transformed the main characteristics of *khru*ba networks and also *khru*ba movements, accordingly. Khruba Wong's reputation as a charismatic monk at the national level brought him in contact more with the middle- and upper-class business owners from central Thailand. He attracted people in a larger area by his religious and development activities, such as the establishment of Wat Huai Tom and Huai Tom community for the Karen. He was also credited for magical and supernatural powers (Gravers 2012). He was invited, many times, to visit his devotees and followers

⁴ See also in a case of Khruba Khuen in Wasan (2013).

in Bangkok. Towards the end of his period, these wealthy devotees served as his close aides and monastery managers. At the same time, local and ethnic leaders were no longer as close to Wong as they had been at the beginning (Kwanchewan 2010; see also Gravers 2017 on the uneasy relationship between Huai Tom Karen and their aids and managers from outside).

4.3 NETWORKS OF MODERN *KHRUBA*

A local network is important since it is a fundamental source of *khru*ba's charisma before being recognized at of the national and international levels. This network comprises local people who have a belief in *ton bun* and the *khru*ba tradition idealized by Khruba Siwichai. Thus, the charisma of *khru*ba which rests upon Siwichai through the discourse of succession is very crucial for forming and maintaining the local network of modern *khru*ba. The network is later linked other groups of people who have come to *khru*ba for many other purposes. Networks of modern *khru*ba are thus more complicated than the networks of the former *khru*ba.

4.3.1 Khruba Don's Network

Don has formed a local network by borrowing the charismatic source of Khruba Siwichai which was symbolically transferred to Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong through the discourse of succession in the monastic lineage. The three *khru*ba are claimed to be Don's masters. He has gained recognition as the successor of Siwichai's lineage by Wong, who designated him to be the abbot of Wat Pha Nam, as I mentioned in chapter one and chapter three. He has become a leader of the Pha Nam community where Karen and Yuan devotees of Khao Pi have resided for four decades. Moreover, he was able to connect with the former networks of Khao Pi and Wong throughout the North, which have consequently contributed to the growth of Don's local network.

Don's local network was connected through many activities, as outlined below.

1. The Khruba Chao Apichai Khao Pi Foundation: As I discussed in chapter three, this foundation has benefited the networking through support of construction works for

monasteries in several areas. Using the name of Khao Pi is a strategy to reconnect the former network of Khao Pi. Although it has been forty years since his death (1997-2017), Don's activities helped refresh memories of people in many localities who used to see and work with Khao Pi while youths were also getting to know more about Khao Pi and Don. Don also planned to extend his support to a Karen community in the borderland of the Karen State of Myanmar with Tak province of Thailand, where Khao Pi's pagoda was erected during the B.E. 2470s (1927-1937) (Don's first visit was on May 3, 2016).

2. Promotion of Buddhist education (Thai: *pariyattitham*): Don made numerous trips to visit Karen villages in remote and mountainous areas of Lamphun, Tak and Mae Hong Son provinces to promote Buddhist education. Karen boys who needed to study *dhamma* as well as mundane subjects were invited to move to Wat Pha Nam where they underwent novice or monk ordinations. They would be enrolled in *Pariyattitham* School at Wat Huai Tom. Recently (2015), there were around fifteen Karen novices and monks under the care of Wat Pha Nam (not including Karen from nearby communities). Phra Songkran, a Pha Nam fellow monk, was currently in charge of acting director of the school.

3. Grand Rituals and Ceremonies: Religious activities were employed to affirm good relationships within the network as well as to display Don's leadership. I accompanied Don to a *tan kuai salak* festival at Wat Don Mun in Mae Ramat district, Tak province during October 24-25, 2015. The current abbot of Wat Don Mun was Khruba Kaeo, a senior disciple of Wong and a famous magic monk in that area. The borderland of Tak province was once Khao Pi's area of peregrination during the years 1927-1937. He built a sermon hall for Wat Don Kaeo in Mae Ramat in 1931 (see Kwanchewan 1999). Don came to Wat Don Mun with four cars carrying monks and lay followers (Yuan and Karen) from Li district, as well as a traditional music band under the support of Wat Pha Nam. The band consisted of Yuan and Karen schoolchildren from the Pha Nam community and Ban Hong district of Lamphun province. In the festival, Don, together with a group of devotees at Mae Ramat called *Khum Phawo* (*Phawo* village cluster), formed a grand procession. People on the monastery grounds were impressed by the folk music boy band wearing traditional Karen and Yuan dress. Don was accompanied

by Pha Nam fellow monks, followed closely by around a hundred people. Some were crowded together carrying three four-meter tall *salak* trees (Thai: *ton salak*). The trees were beautifully decorated in order to honor Siwichai, Khao Pi, and Wong. This was a symbolic practice to underline the saintly status of Siwichai, who was highly venerated as the founder of the *khru*ba tradition, while the other two *khru*ba were his direct successors. Don and his followers were, in addition, to convey a message that they all were brothers and sisters who shared the ethno-cultural identity of Lan Na as well as the *khru*ba tradition. Moreover, every year during *thot kathin festival*, Don presents a *kathin* tree (Thai: *ton kathin*) to Wat Ban Rai (the former site of Khao Pi in Doi Tao district, Chiang Mai province). He also joins the *kathin* festival of Wat Huai Bong in Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son province, which a former Pha Nam fellow monk was sent by Don to look after, in order to affirm good relationships as well as his patron status.

From these activities, Don has formed nodes for the local network across the region. During the course of fieldwork, I met many people who have served as active nodes linking people in different localities, such as Khruba Kaeo of Wat Don Mun in Mae Ramat district and Mae Liang Kai⁵ (pseudonym) in Mae Sot district of Tak province, Phra Ngoen of Wat Tha Ton Thongchai in Thung Saliang district of Sukhothai province, Phra Prakop Bun of Wat Mahawan in Lamphun city, Mae Liang Noi (pseudonym) of Mae Wang Lum village in Li district of Lamphun province, and Dok Kaeomi of a Karen village at Ban Dong Dam in Hot district of Chiang Mai province. Additionally, there are monks and laypeople who have connected with Khao Pi and Don for their own purposes, such as Khruba Yawichai of Wat Huai Muang Mai in Chom Thong district and Khruba Thueang of Wat Ban Den (mentioned earlier) in Mae Taeng district of Chiang Mai province, Khruba Game of Wat Ban Kaen in Sop Prap district of Lampang province, and Nong Man (pseudonym) in Tha Song Yang district of Tak province. Thueang, Yawichai and Game are amongst many young *khru*ba who have sought a connection with the living *khru*ba, especially those who have a direct relation with Khruba Siwichai, in order to enhance their charismatic status. Nong Man is a spirit medium who has claimed to be able to connect with Khao Pi's

⁵ *Mae liang* is a Northern Thai expression. It is used to refer to a well-to-do woman, while *pho liang* is used to refer to a well-to-do man. However, it is normally applied for those in middle age onward.

spirit. They all have become active nodes for Don and Pha Nam's local network. I shall discuss stories of some nodes as follows.

1) Mae Liang Kai (Wealthy Mother *Kai*)

Mae Liang Kai was 58 years old (in 2015). She was born in Mae Ramat district but later moved to Mae Sot district, a borderland of Tak province next to the Karen State of Myanmar. We had a long interview the first time we met (during a trip accompanying Don to the *tan kuai salak* festival of Wat Don Mun in Mae Ramat during October 24-25, 2015, mentioned earlier). Don stopped by her house to pay a visit and received a food offering (vegetarian food) from her family. Later, during November 3-4, 2015, my thesis supervisor, Phra Songkran (a Pha Nam fellow monk) and I visited Mae Liang Kai again during fieldwork for a research project on Khao Pi (see Kwanchewan and Pisith 2016). We spent one night at her house where we had a long conversation. Kai was born into a very poor family. She was raised by a single mother because of her father's untimely death when she was very little. When she grew up, she had to look after her siblings and cousins and, therefore, had no opportunity to go to school. However, she was a diligent person who could do any job to earn a living. In her youth, she was a food seller in a market, a ruby dealer (buying and selling) and went back and forth between Tak (crossed to Myanmar) and Chanthaburi provinces, a money lender and a real estate investor. Recently, (2015), Kai and her family had many businesses, such as cross-border logistics servicing, gardening, and food selling, and they also owned several houses and plots of land in that area (some for rent).

Kai revealed that her mother and grandmother were followers of Khao Pi, just as were many people in that area. Khao Pi had been around Tak and Mae Hong Son provinces during the years 1927-1937. During that time, he had carried out construction and renovation works for a school and for monasteries, including a sermon hall of Wat Don Kaeo in Mae Ramat and a pagoda along a borderland of the Karen State (see Apichai Khao Pi n.d.; Pradit 1982). As Kai recalled, she met Khao Pi only once, when she was around 14-15 years old, on a morning almsgiving with her grandmother.

Her grandmother also joined the construction work at Wat Don Kaeo. She claimed that Khao Pi foretold that she would be a wealthy person, and he told her grandmother to

raise her well (interview, October 24, 2015). This was the only time she met Khao Pi in person.

Until 2008, or 31 years after his death, she joined the robe-changing ceremony at Wat Pha Nam. She explained that, before 2008 she was very busy with many tasks making a living. Even though she wanted to see Khao Pi and join the robe-changing ceremony, she told other villagers that she did not have sufficient merit to do that yet (Thai: *yang mai mi bun*). Until she was ready, with money and time, she reconnected with Don and Wat Pha Nam. She invited people in a village to join her in the robe-changing ceremony, and to co-sponsor an almshouse for the event. She had usually been joined by spirit mediums in that area during the first few years. She and Nong Man (a spirit medium, mentioned earlier) were active nodes for Wat Pha Nam in Tak province.

Kai was a key devotee of Don. She and her husband visited Don at Wat Pha Nam very often in each year in order to join the major events⁶. She stated that each year she spent around 100,000 baht for an almshouse in the robe-changing ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi⁷. In 2015, she sponsored a new set of curtains and artificial flowers to decorate a hall housing the mummified body of Khao Pi. Moreover, her nephew, born in Mae Sot, was ordained as a monk in Wat Pha Nam. He was later sent to Wat Huai Bong in Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son province by Don (mentioned earlier). Her nephew was then in the charge of the abbot, and she was one of his key devotees⁸ (under Don's network).

She claimed that even though she was not a spirit medium, she could contact Khruba Khao Pi's spirit while she was in deep meditation. She said that she wanted to change the curtains and artificial flowers in the hall because Khao Pi asked her to do so while she was in deep meditation next to his mummified body (interview, November 3, 2015). On October 24, 2015, during a conversation with me, she suddenly turned to Don and told him that Khao Pi had contacted her the other day and warned her about a big flood

⁶ I found her *kathin* tree in Wat Pha Nam's *thot kathin* festival in November 2015.

⁷ In the robe-changing ceremony in 2016, I found Kai and her husband on the first day of the event (March 1-4).

⁸ For example, on November 6, 2015, Kai sponsored an almshouse in the *thot kathin* festival of Wat Huai Bong.

during *loi krathong* (usually in November). She said that the flood would cause severe damage to Mae Ramat and there would be a great number of victims. In order to reduce the damage, Khao Pi ordered her to give artificial lotus flowers, which were used to the decorating area around his coffin, to the villagers. Don listened carefully and said nothing. She added, that since she had observed the moral precepts (Pali: *sila*) strictly, she was able to contact Khao Pi's spirit. This made her believe fervently in Khao Pi's holiness.

Kai was a careful devotee of Don. She prepared vegetarian food for him every time he traveled to Mae Sot and Mae Ramat districts, such as on October 24, 2015. Don was a vegetarian and was sensitive to certain kinds of food. Importantly, Kai was the one, amongst others, who knew about him. She had, in addition, provided a medicinal herb regimen for Don to take regularly because he was suffering from anemia. She stated that this regimen was ordered directly from Bangkok. Significantly, this was the same regimen which was being served to very important persons in the country. It was because she believed that Don was a dedicated person, who had worked very hard for his masters, Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong. As a result, Don was on the way to becoming charismatic. A story to emphasize his early stage of charismatic status was conveyed widely by Kai as she had experienced it herself. She told me that in recent years, Don's age numbers won the lottery twice on his birthdays in 2014 and 2015, which took her by surprise, and consequently she had a firm belief in Don (interview, November 3, 2015).

2) Nong Man (Young Brother Man)

Nong Man was 23 years old when I met him in late 2015. He lived in Tha Song Yang district, the northwestern most district of Tak Province. He was a medium of several guardian spirits, mainly Chaopho Khomue Lek (the iron wrist guardian), Chaopho Mokhala (the Mokhala guardian) and Khruba Khao Pi. I recognized him when I visited his family in Tha Song Yang during a field trip for a research project on Khruba Khao Pi with my thesis supervisor (November 4-5, 2015), because he was the one I previously met at the *thot kathin* festival of Khruba Noi, the *tan kuai salak* festival of Khruba Kaeo (in Mae Ramat district), and the robe-changing ceremonies of Khruba

Khao Pi and Khruba Wong in 2015. After that, in 2016, I met him again in the robe-changing ceremonies of the two *khruba*. In every event, he came with a money tree (Thai: *ton ngoen*) and collected from people in his community.

Man's family was familiar to people in that area (Ban Mae Tan village) since his mother was a representative of the sub-district municipality (Thai: *samachik sapha thetsaban tambon*). Additionally, the second floor of their house was open for Man's mediumship business (Thai: *samnak rangsong*). They were Yuan natives of that area. In March of each year, Man staged a ritual to pay homage to teachers' spirits (Thai: *phithi wai khru*). On that day, the road in front of his house was closed for the ritual where hundreds of guests were attending.

Man started to be a spirit medium when he was 11 years old. After finishing high school, he passed the entrance exam to study in the Faculty of Fine Art, Chiang Mai University. However, after only one year he decided to drop out because some activities were not appropriate for him as a spirit medium. He came back and enrolled in a nearby community college (and has graduated). Staying in his house was, in fact, more convenient for spirit mediumship activities. However, he still kept in touch with his university friends and invited them to join his ceremony every year.

As a spirit medium, Man had a wide connection across the region with spirit mediums and monks who were credited for magical potency. Making a large donation by sponsoring a *kathin* tree or a money tree in the name of his spirit house was a technique to draw and maintain connections with these groups. Man explained that Chaopho Khomue Lek loved making merit and offerings. Therefore, he would attend every event he knew about, where he would present a money tree, and would also attend ceremonies of other spirit mediums and the major spirit worship events across the North. That was the reason I met him quite often at many events during the course of fieldwork. Man claimed to have a close connection with several famous *khruba* in the North, such as Khruba Noi, Khruba Ariyachat, Khruba Kaeo, Khruba Soi (in Tha Song Yang), Khruba Chantharangsi (in Chiang Mai city), Khruba Duang Di (in San Pa Thong) and Khruba Don.

During a conversation, Man showed me a red thread (Thai: *dai daeng*) on his wrist which was given and tied by Khruba Ariyachat, whom he went to see quite often. He stated that Ariyachat was a holy monk (Thai: *phra saksit*) who was believed to be a reincarnation of Khruba Siwichai. Due to their close relationship, Man received many red threads every time he came to see Ariyachat. These objects were then given to people in his community. The red threads had power to protect the owner from all sorts of danger, he added (interview, November 4, 2015).

Man revealed that in the area of Tak province the most famous *khruba*, in his view, was Kaeo of Wat Don Mun (whom I have mentioned several times), who replaced the late Khruba Soi of Wat Mongkhon Khirikhet (in Tha Song Yang). Kaeo was also known as a disciple of Khruba Wong and a senior friend of Don, as I mentioned earlier. Man provided spiritual healing, e.g., for those who were possessed by evil spirits or cursed by black magic, and if a patient's symptom reached a severe stage, he would refer them to Kaeo. Kaeo was also famous for *takrut* and magic tattooing (Thai: *sak yan*). Man had already undergone oil tattooing by him several times. He was often asked by his friends to take them to Kaeo, since his ritual services were not open to the public. People, thus, relied on Man's close connection to take them to Kaeo.

As a medium of Khruba Khao Pi's spirit, he tired keep in touch with Don and Wat Pha Nam. Phra Songkran stated that (November 5, 2015) Don would stop by Man's house every time he was on a trip along that area (Tak to Mae Hong Son provinces), because Man was the main devotee of Wat Pha Nam as well as a node of its network in that area. Every year Man, in the name of Samnak Chaopho Khomue Lek, would present a large money tree, collected from the villagers, to Wat Pha Nam during the robe-changing ceremony of Khao Pi (as well as that of Wong at Wat Huai Tom). The villagers (Yuan and Karen) in that area were followers and believers of Siwichai, Khao Pi, and Wong. Khao Pi renovated Phrathat Huai Luek⁹ (a reliquary) in Tha Song Yang district around 1927. As I observed during the robe-changing ceremony of Khao Pi in 2015 and 2016, Man was allowed to access the inner area where the robe-changing was held. Due to

⁹ Don also brought novices and monks from Wat Pha Nam to visit this reliquary.

their close relationship, our research team- my thesis supervisor, Phra Songkran and I- were also welcome to stay for one night at Man's house.

Man added that each year he could collect around twenty to thirty thousand baht from the villagers for a money tree for Wat Pha Nam. Before the robe-changing ceremony, his family would make an announcement to the villagers, calling for donations.

Each year after completing the ceremony, Man received a large white robe from Khao Pi from Don. He cut it into many tiny pieces that he gave to donors and everyone who came to ask for them. He said "if they [the villagers] know that I have come back from the ceremony, they will soon come to my house and ask for a piece of the white robe. Even though I say nothing, they know by themselves. The white robe is very sacred [Thai: *saksit mak*]; some people in Tha Song Yang had a car accident but they were miraculously saved because they kept a piece of the white robe of Khruba Khao Pi in their car. That's why they want it so desperately" (interview, November 3, 2015). Moreover, Don also gave him a number of Khao Pi medallions every year. In 2015, he received forty medallions to distribute in his community. One of them was hung on his grandmother's neck. Regarding Man's experience with Khao Pi's spirit, apart from being a spirit medium, he won the lottery after returning from the 36th robe changing ceremony.

Another *khruba* whom Man has a close connection with is Noi. The relationship grew after Man brought Noi a medicinal plant called *ton khrai hang nak* (a kind of climbing palm). This plant was said to be found only in that area, and Noi had searched for it for a long time. Man fulfilled Noi's needs. From then on, Man has served as a supplier of *ton khrai hang nak* for Noi. I also found the Man's mother hung a locket of Noi on her neck. Her name is Praphasi (pseudonym) (whom I will mention below). Therefore, Man and his family have also served as a node for Noi in that area. Each year, they present a *kathin* tree to Noi in the *thot kathin* festival. They invited the villagers to join by donating some money through voice online (Thai: *siang tam sai*) and their network in community monasteries. Their *kathin* tree was presented in the name of devotees from Mae Sot (Thai: *khana Mae Sot*)¹⁰. In return, Noi gave them several boxes of amulets.

¹⁰ I found Man during the *thot kathin* ceremony of Wat Si Don Mun in 2015.

For example, in 2015, Noi gave them boxes of *takut salika*,¹¹ which they distributed to donors and other villagers as usual. My thesis supervisor and I also were each given a *takut salika* during a conversation. Man's father claimed that Man was a very close disciple of Noi (Thai: *sit ek*). Noi gave Man first priority even though he was among V.I.P guests. Man added that he could access the inner area of Noi's residence (Thai: *kuti*) (interview, November 4, 2015).

As I have shown above, Don has a very strong local network as he has considerably relied on the charisma of the masters: Siwichai, Khao Pi, and Wong. Don has also formed a group of nodes in the central region even though of a smaller size. Similarly, they were connected by the charisma of the masters. Among them, Khun Kanya (pseudonym) is an outstanding case.

3) **Khun Kanya (Mrs. Kanya)**

I met Kanya and her family during the robe-changing ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi in 2015. During the private robe-changing ceremony on February 27, 2016, I met them again and had an opportunity to interview them. In fact, Kanya and her family were based in Singapore, where they owned a house on the most popular shopping street, Orchard Road. Her husband worked for a multinational company in there. Hence, they could travel to Wat Pha Nam only once a year or once every two years. That year (2016), they came to sponsor the private robe-changing ceremony which I discussed in chapter 3.

Kanya was a former devotee of Khruba Wong. Before that, she had heard a great deal about Wong whom the Northerners highly venerated as a disciple of Khruba Siwichai. She had faith in Wong after meeting him only a few times. Wong was reputed for his asceticism and austerity in *dhamma*. By the fourth time she met Wong, she devoted to be his follower. She recalled that two decades ago, Wong surprised her on many occasions. For example, he once paid a visit to her house without any appointment.

¹¹ This was believed to have magical power to enhance personal charm and evoke love.

He said that he came to give a blessing to a miniature statue of Siwichai, which Kanya had been given by one of his followers. He also said that he came to help her (Thai: *ma chuai luk*). It was a coincidence because during that time, she was having difficulty in trying to have a house construction completed.

One week before Wong died, she went to Wat Huai Tom. Wong said to her, “Khruba Apichai Khao Pi”. At that time, she did not really get what he meant. Long after he died, she prayed to Wong and asked the meaning of what he had said. Not long after, she was told by a Huai Tom fellow monk that Wong, before he died, he planned to build life-sized statues of Siwichai and Khao Pi. Those statues would be deposited inside a pagoda at Wat Pha Nam. She understood then that Wong wanted her to become involved in that project. She then decided to sponsor the project and to add another life-sized statue of Wong with the former two.

Two decades earlier, she had not heard of Khruba Khao Pi. But one night she dreamed of a white-robed monk coming to her house. She later told Khruba Wong about that strange dream, and Wong simply replied that the white-robed monk was his master. Wong then gave her a tiny sheet of paper which was used to enclose gold leaf. She received it with skepticism because it appeared to be just an ordinary piece of paper which should have been thrown away. She also wondered why she took it home and kept it in her house. She revealed that before she met Wong, she did not believe in magic or magic objects. She, in addition, had never venerated any monk before. She had come to realize later that everything was a matter of destiny. After the installation of the three *khruba* statues at Wat Pha Nam, she made numerous trips to pay homage to the mummified bodies of the two *khruba*, but she had never met Khruba Don. Eventually, through the charisma of the two *khruba*, she met Don at Wat Pha Nam. Don greeted her and took her and her family to the summit of Pha Nam Mountain. He described his vision for a construction project there. During that time, a golden pagoda on the top had just been finished and needed to be painted. She connected the story about the pagoda, which was built to commemorate Wong, and the dream about Khao Pi twenty years ago. Then, she decided to sponsor gold plates to cover the golden pagoda.

After the work was done, she prayed to Khruba Khao Pi again saying if she had merit, may he allow her to sponsor another project on the summit. After that, during a prayer before the mummified body of Khao Pi, she felt that he wanted her to develop the front area of the monastery. Then she sponsored a construction project at the front area followed by numerous works at the summit: the renovation of the white pagoda, the construction of a bridge connecting the two pagodas (Thai: *saphan bun*, the bridge of merit), the construction of stairs up to the summit, and the construction of a viewpoint enclosing the golden pagoda (Thai: *lantham*, the *dhamma* plaza). By the great charisma of the three *khruba* and the great effort of Don, the construction works on the summit were completed within a few years, Kanya claimed.

In 2015, Kanya and her family sponsored a *thot kathin* festival and a robe-changing ceremony, together with the dedication of the buildings on the summit (Thai: *chalong*). She also invited her relatives, friends, and monks in her network to join as co-sponsors. They were mostly from Bangkok and the central region. She said, “Someone asked me how I could sponsor the robe-changing ceremony, I simply replied that I had been waiting for twenty years, until now Khruba Don entrusted me. It is because of Khruba Don’s compassion [Thai: *metta*], last year [2015], I hosted *thot kathin*, too. Importantly, I had never joined *thot kathin* in my life, it was the first time. Without his [Don] compassion, nothing could have been possible.” I found that during 2015-2016, Kanya also supported monk ordinations for young men in Pha Nam community. She called them *phra lukchai* or the “monk sons.”

As the main sponsor for several construction works in Wat Pha Nam, she accepted that a family must have a lot of money, but that although money was important, it must come along with faith, and she felt that “Khruba Wong and Khruba Khao Pi gave me both”. The next construction work, with her daughter, was a reclining Buddha statue at the summit of Pha Nam Mountain. Significantly, she donated only to Wat Pha Nam even though she was a former devotee of Khruba Wong. She explained that it was because Wong wanted her to help Khao Pi, so it was her destiny. As a matter of fact, she had never been involved in construction work or grand ceremonies of Wat Huai Tom.

Recently, she had a collection of amulets of Khruba Wong and Khruba Khao Pi, such as *phra rot* (the votive tablet) and the white jade Buddha image given by Wong.

From Khao Pi, she had several pieces of the white robe of Khao Pi while the tiny piece of paper, mentioned earlier, was recently kept in a household altar. She revealed that after she had donated to the two *khruba*, she had gained more material wealth.

Then, she tried to redistribute it through hosting and sponsoring the construction works and the grand rituals as described above. She called this form of practice in Thai *ngoen to bun*, since money was a form of religious investment which brought her more material wealth in return.

4.3.2 Khruba Noi's Network

Noi's network was formed through the reputation of his master, Khruba Phad, because Phad was a renowned magic monk at the national level. His monastery had been patronized by the Royal Family for a long time. Moreover, he has drawn upon Khruba Siwicha's charisma through the narrative of succession in order to connect with a network of *khruba* followers and believers. It is interesting that Noi's network was heavily connected through his magical potency and amulets. He had also formed a strong connection with amulet entrepreneurs worldwide. As I mentioned earlier, large amounts of money for construction works at Wat Si Don Mun, as well as his community, were donated by wealthy devotees, especially from the big cities. Therefore, magic and amulets have become a crucial element in Noi's network.

We already knew Nong Man and his family, who served as active nodes of Noi in Tha Song Yang district of Tak province. Here I shall discuss some other nodes as follows.

Pa¹² Khiao was in his late forties (in 2016) and had served as the right-hand man of Noi for decades. He is actually a relative of Noi and lives near Wat Si Don Mun. Khiao had a small business, including that of an being amulet entrepreneur for Noi's products. Every day, Khiao came to the monastery to manage his schedule and deal with matters,

¹² A Thai-Chinese expression used to refer to a wealthy man in middle age and older indicating that he is generous like a father.

including trips to visit devotees inside and outside the country. With Khiao's permission, I was able to do an interview with Khruba Noi on March 4, 2016. I learned that he was a key figure in managing the annual ceremonies of Noi, e.g., *nirothakam* and *thot kathin* festival. He took care of the main sponsors and directed staff to make sure that everything was in order. Hence, he was a very important person for Noi, and was a key spokesperson for Noi's reputation. For example, after the interview with Noi that day, he came to explain to me more about the construction projects Noi had recently supported, such as 1,000,000 baht for a building at Pariyattitham School at Wat Phranon Pa Ket Thi (mentioned earlier) and 12,000,000 baht for a new building at Noi's hospital.

Khiao's message was chiefly to emphasize Khruba Noi's great compassion to society. It was because, in my view, he knew that I was a researcher who had come to Noi with skepticism. Khiao's message was also to point out that large amounts of donations Noi had gained, by his charismatic and magical powers, had been redistributed to society, not to Noi's own wealth. Furthermore, it was to indicate Noi's strong network of devotees and followers. Before I left, Khiao gave me two bottles of Noi's holy water. They were bottled and sterilized by the ozone sterilization system. Khiao claimed that the water was believed to have magical and healing powers (interview, March 4, 2016). Interestingly, one of Khiao's sons was recently promoted together with Noi as a young, handsome follower (Thai: *dek wat*) through various media channels. Khiao's son was a university student who had recently appeared in a movie. It was an effective public relations strategy to promote both Khiao's son, who had just been in the entertainment industry (Thai: *wongkan banthoeng*), and Noi. Khiao's son often accompanied Noi during alms-rounds in the mornings as well as in the grand rituals, such as *nirothakam* (as I found them in 2016). It became a social sensation as the news reported, for example, "*dek wat sut lo-katanyu*" [a very handsome and grateful temple boy] (Thairath Online March 2, 2016).

For a decade, Khruba Noi has formed close a relationship with amulet entrepreneurs around the world. Noi's amulets in the batch name *kin mai mot* (eternal wealth) and *phra phong* (the amulet made from clay and powders) imprinted with an outline of Noi's full body were awarded the best amulets of 2013 in a competition organized by

amulet entrepreneurs in Bangkok¹³. These two amulets then became more popular and sought after among amulet traders and collectors.

Moreover, I received great assistance from my Xiaolan, Chinese classmate in the Ph.D. program, who introduced me to a business connection of Noi, Miss Sally (pseudonym) from Beijing, China (interview, September 14, 2015). Sally ran an amulet business. She owned an amulet shop in Beijing and also an online shop on the Wechat application. Each year, she had to go back and forth between Thailand and China to select amulets for her customers. Even though she was a woman, she preferred to deal directly with the monks by going to their monasteries in person. Moreover, she preferred to see some of the production processes, such as the blessing (Thai: *pluksek*) of amulets in order to ensure her customers of their authenticity. She also took some photos and videos during this process.

Sally revealed that although her customers were a small group of middle-class Chinese, she earned a sizeable profit from this business. She sold a wide range of amulets brought from various places in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries, such as Myanmar and Cambodia. In Chiang Mai, as well as other places in the North, she dealt with Khruba Noi and other magic monks, such as Khruba Bun Yang in Lamphun province and Khruba Phonsit in Chiang Mai province. During a two- or three-day trip in Chiang Mai, she spent around one 1,000,000 baht for her purchases. She added that amulets from Thailand had recently become popular among middle-class Chinese while amulet shops in China had mushroomed¹⁴ (interview, *ibid.*).

Recently, she kept seeking new magic monks and new kinds of exotic amulets in order to increase business opportunities. She revealed that the Thai amulets currently popular among Chinese customers were Phra Somdet (Somdet To), Phra Phrom (English: Brahma), *phra pit ta* (closed-eyes Buddha), Ganesh, and *pan neng*, or a small piece of the central part of the human forehead inscribed with *yantra* and the sacred formula (Thai: *khatha*). Sally's answer, to the question of why Chinese needed these kinds of

¹³ Pramai Dot Com Company and the Association of Countrywide Collectors of New Amulets.

¹⁴ She had been in this business for four years. She came to see me because she wanted me to recommend new magic monks in the North to her.

objects, demonstrates the deterritorialized sacred realm and the diverse transnational community of faith. She replied that for Chinese, the greatest concerns in their lives are money, love, health, family business and prosperity. Hence, what is important about amulets is how well the objects respond to the owner's needs. The owners do not really care about the place of origin or the religion the amulets belonged to.

Subsequently, before an interview with Khruba Noi at Wat Si Don Mun on March 4, 2016, I was fortunate enough to witness a blessing session. While I was observing it at a distance, a female staff member in her early sixties came to explain to me that two Chinese women had bought a lot of amulets and asked Noi to bestow a blessing on them. Moreover, during the blessing session, they were allowed to make a video recording.

I presumed that this video would be circulated and shared on the Internet. If those objects were for resell, this video would be used to guarantee that the amulets were authentic and were fully embedded with magical power. The staff member then explained that Noi had recently become famous among Chinese people and his amulets were in high demand in the market. Many amulet entrepreneurs from China and other Asian countries had come to see and do business with Noi. This information correlates with what Sally had previously described to me. Thus, apart from Thais, Chinese have become the major group of customers for Noi, not only in China but also in other Asian countries, e.g., Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. They were attracted by Noi's magical potency, indicating that Noi's network has also been expanded through his node in each place. For Chinese patrons, Noi added Chinese language in his photo and a mantra of blessing¹⁵ to advertise. Additionally, Chinese Yuan banknotes were inscribed with *yantra* and the sacred mantra for selling.

As for devotees and believers in big cities as well as in foreign countries, they not only came to see Khruba Noi at his monastery, but they also invited him to their locales from time to time. Khiao revealed that Noi had recently become quite selective. He chose to visit only the major groups of devotees who had served as significant nodes for his network, such as a wealthy family that owned a large petrochemical company in Thailand. The family had supported the grand rituals of Wat Si Don Mun for a decade,

¹⁵ The *mantra* was a combination of several languages: Northern Thai, Shan, Chinese, Burmese and Pali.

such as *thot kathin* in 2015, as well as many construction projects at Wat Si Don Mun and Noi's hospital. Moreover, they supported many products from the company for Noi's activities, e.g., fertilizer, paint, and building materials¹⁶.

Khruba Noi's active node outside the country includes a *Dhamma* center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where he was invited to meet with devotees and believers in July, 2016 (Facebook @Watsridonmoon, posted on July 19, 2016). In the meeting, Noi was surrounded by around fifty Malaysian Chinese who came to pay him homage and undergo the popular rituals of prosperity: *phithi suepchata*, *nammon thoranisanluang*, *long na na thong* and *salika linthong*. Noi added that he had devotees and believers in many Asian countries, such as China, Malaysia, Singapore, Macao and in the West as well. He said that he had been invited to visit them many times, explaining, "I don't know how they know me, but merit and charisma are universal, it all depends on their faith in me" (interview, March 4, 2016).

4.3.3 Khruba Ariyachat's Network

Currently, Khruba Ariyachat has a very strong network of upper middle-class followers in big cities, such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Nakhon Ratchasima, along with monks holding ecclesiastical offices, high-ranked officials, and members of the Royal Family. Nonetheless, a local network has also contributed greatly to his national and international popularity. As I mentioned earlier, Ariyachat's charisma has relied primarily on his masters: Khruba Siwichai, Khruba Chum, Khruba Chan Thip, and Khruba Thueang. Through Thueang's network, Ariyachat was invited to Wat Dong Sima in Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province after spending several years at Wat Wang Mui in Lamphun city. At that time, Ariyachat was a close disciple of Thueang and had been designated by him to take care of the restoration of Wat Dong Sima as well as devotees and followers living in that area (interview, senior devotee of Thueang at Wat Dong Sima, November 9, 2015). Hence, Ariyachat was once a major node in the network of Thueang.

¹⁶ I found several vinyl posters hung around the monastery advertizing the company's products, and letting people know that Wat Si Don Mun had been supported by the company in its construction projects and maintenance. Moreover, I also found a booth to advertize the company's products at the *thot kathin* festival at Wat Si Don Mun in 2015.

During his three years and four months at Wat Dong Sima, Ariyachat had become known among villagers as well as followers of Thueang across the country.

As described in Ashley (2011, 2017), Thueang had strong connections with wealthy devotees, including high-ranking civilians and soldiers across the country. He received a large number of donations from his devotees for the construction of a grand monastery at Ban Den (Wat Ban Den) in Mae Taeng district, Chiang Mai province, as well as Wat Dong Sima. Ariyachat's contribution to Wat Dong Sima brought him into the spotlight as a young, charismatic monk, and led people to come and pay homage to him (interview, senior devotee of Thueang, November 9, 2015 and Siripha, November 7, 2015). From then on, Ariyachat formed his own network of devotees and followers growing inside Thueang's network. This was one of the major concerns of Thueang and some close devotees as Ariyachat's reputation was spreading and, at the same time, was competing with that of his patron.

By the time Ariyachat decided to leave Wat Dong Sima and Thueang, he had already formed connections with many groups of followers in various locales. Pho Luang¹⁷ Ya Thasi, the village headman of Ban Pa Tueng in the same district, immediately came, together with fellow villagers, to invite Ariyachat to stay in his village. Before long, Ariyachat was asked by the villagers to build a new monastery in the village. Then, Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan was built, and Ariyachat has served as the abbot until now (So Sutthiphan 2011, 64-70).

Through the establishment of the grandiose Wat Saengkaew, along with the practice in the *khru* tradition, *nirothakam*, Ariyachat has gained a reputation at the national level. Young and charismatic, he has attracted a large group of followers in the North and across the country, especially the upper-middle class (see also Amporn 2016, 2017).

Ariyachat has become the center of merit-making activities while a vast number of donations have been redistributed to the grandiose monastery, as well as to several construction projects across the region. For example, in 2016, Ariyachat, with the support of his wealthy devotees, presented *kathin* to Wat Pa Tueng Ngam (Facebook

¹⁷ Northern Thai, literally a village headman.

@saengkaewphothiyan, posted on November 10, 2016), Wat Chedi Luang and Wat Mae Suai Luang¹⁸ (ibid., posted on November 13, 2016) in Mae Suai district.

In Chiang Mai, he presented *kathin* for Wat Nong Si Chaeng in Saraphi district and Wat Ko Chok in San Pa Tong district¹⁹. In early 2017, he presented *phapa*, or the forest-robe presenting ceremony, to five villages in Chedi Luang sub-district of Mae Suai (ibid., posted on February 14, 2017)²⁰. These places were included in Ariyachat's network to demonstrate his charismatic status, in addition to contributing to the success of the grand rituals at Wat Saengkaew.

We heard about Man who came to Ariyachat because of his magical potency through amulets and the red thread (Thai: *dai daeng*). Man has served as Ariyachat's translator as well as a node to link people in the Tha Song Yang area. Other cases presented below are Pet Choen Yim and Na Siripha.

1) **Pet Choen Yim**

Pet, a well-known comedy star in Thailand and former president of Thailand's Association of Comedians, was attracted by Ariyachat's supernatural power and personal charm. Pet owned many TV programs, such as the Comedian Thailand and *Kon Bai Khlai Khriat* (comedy shows). Pet's story was included in one of Ariyachat's biographies, including his three miraculous incidents by Ariyachat's charismatic power

¹⁸ Around 600,000 baht for Wat Chedi Luang and Wat Mae Suai Luang, respectively.

¹⁹ Around 1,000,000 baht for Wat Nong Si Chaeng and around 640,000 baht for Wat Ko Chok.

²⁰ It is worth noting that Ariyachat had eagerly supported religious activities outside Wat Saengkaew more frequently during the last couple of years (2015-early 2017). This correlates with a rumor that he was a candidate for a royal title in the *sangha*. The rumor was found to be true after the king promoted Ariyachat to a high rank at *phra rachakhana chan saman (vipassana thura)*, with the title Phra Phawana Rattanayan, on December 5, 2016. Hence, he was a recent *khru* who had a higher rank in the *sangha* system compared with other *khru*, who were mostly in the *phrakhru* rank (such as Noi, Thueang and Don) or just the monastery abbot. Interesting activities he carried out during this time were the casting of a large statue of Phra Mahapa Kesonpanyo in Wat Lai Hin, Lampang province, the construction of a bell tower at Wat Nong Si Chaeng in Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province and the installation of a gold pinnacle (7 Kg. of gold) of Chom Yong Pagoda (Thai: Phrathat Luang Chom Yong) in Mong Yawng, Shan State of Myanmar (completed in May 2017). All activities were recorded and shared in the form of video clips by a hired professional studio on the Facebook page of Wat Saengkaew (@saengkaewphothiyan) and YouTube channel Watsaengkaew Phothiyan.

(see So Sutthiphan 2011, 180-19). Pet revealed that he had met Ariyachat in 2008 when his wife took him to pay homage to Ariyachat at her friend's house in Bangkok. His faith in Ariyachat gradually increased as he learned more and more about him. Pet said that Ariyachat was a development monk. He was also very calm and compassionate. He was a real giver and a spiritual consultant for his devotees and followers. After Pet experienced a miraculous incident- he saw a large shining crystal ball spinning in the sky- on the last day of the eighth *nirothakam* of Ariyachat, he had a firm belief in Ariyachat. After that, Pet often invited Ariyachat to his house in Bangkok and opened a house for his friends, relatives, fellows and employees to pay homage to Ariyachat.

As Pet explained, every time Ariyachat visited his house, he felt happy and relieved, especially when Ariyachat stayed overnight and performed a ritual at his home. As a result, Pet was free from difficulties both in life and business. Everything flowed very smoothly. Even though Pet was a pious devotee of several venerable monks who were renowned for *dhamma* practices and great compassion, Ariyachat was different. He was only in his early thirties but already very charismatic. Hence, Ariyachat was the key person whom Pet phoned every time he was stressed out or in trouble. Ariyachat would provide relief to Pet and enhance his spiritual strength. "Khruba always tells me that [you] have already been a Khruba follower [Thai: *luk sit*]...[you] will be rich, only rich...[you] will no longer live in poverty...rich and only rich" (So Sutthiphan 2011, 188). "I don't care if someone doesn't believe [in Ariyachat]. This is what I have experienced myself, and it has resulted in my strong faith in Ariyachat...Thus, when I prostrate myself [Thai: *krab*] to him, I feel very happy and proud, and I am willing to do it wholeheartedly" (ibid., 183, 188).

Pet's expression sheds light on the imagination of the middle and upper-middle class regarding charismatic monks which focuses on material wealth and mundane success in a modern life. Ariyachat has become an object of worship. One well-to-do devotee from Bangkok whom I met during *phithi sai huachai phrachao* (in the *thot kathin* festival of Ariyachat in 2015) said that he donated a large sum of money to Ariyachat each year because he would gain more material wealth subsequently (November 7, 2015).

Therefore, Pet has become an active node of Ariyachat in Bangkok. He has linked his relatives, friends, fellows and employees in the entertainment business with Ariyachat. He invited the sons of his friends and others to undergo monk ordination at Wat Saengkaew. They also built a modern-style residence (Thai: *kuti*) for their sons there. In the grand ceremonies of Wat Saengkaew, Pet, together with his wife and TV stars in his connection, sponsored an almshouse. Additionally, he staged night performances of famous comedy stars from his company at Wat Saengkaew, such as in the *thot kathin* festival in 2015 (November 10) and in Ariyachat's birthday celebration in 2016 (January 10). I observed both events and found that they attracted hundreds of people, mostly locals.

In Pet's network, a wealthy family who own a major television company in Thailand (Channel 3) is linked to Ariyachat. The family invited TV stars in their company to join the grand ceremonies at Wat Saengkaew many times. Pictures of them were posted and shared on social networks: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They also supported construction projects in the monastery, such as 1,000,000 baht for the grand sermon hall (Thai: *Wihan Luang Laikham Samphuttha Wihan*).

Hence, Ariyachat has a very strong wealthy upper-middle class network in the big cities. They have served as translators and active nodes for Ariyachat, which have consequently contributed to the growth of the network and his wide reputation. I also found other active nodes, like Pet, in Bangkok such as the owners of TQM Company (an insurance company, see Facebook @watsangkaewphothiyan, posted on July 18, 2016), DaraDaily (a well-known entertainment magazine, see *ibid.*, posted on July 19, 2016), and Koh-Kae Company (a well-known snack company, see *ibid.*, posted on September 8, 2016). They often invited Ariyachat to their places and arranged meetings where Ariyachat and his devotees and believers were connected. At each meeting, people came to pay homage and donated money or various sorts of things to Ariyachat. Ariyachat gave a blessing and amulets to them in return. Sometimes he was asked to perform a ritual to enhance fortune and prosperity for them, just as in the case of Pet. These people include the overseas nodes, such as in Malaysia, which invited Ariyachat to meet with his believers June 4-6, 2010. There, hundreds of people came to pay

homage to Ariyachat and bought his amulets (see YouTube *watsangkae*, posted on July 28, 2010 and August 13, 2010).

Another story of an active node of Ariyachat is Na Siripha.

2) Na Siripha²¹ (Auntie Siripha)

Siripha (pseudonym) was in her early sixties (in late 2016). She was based in Bangkok and London, UK. She was born into a wealthy family and raised in Bangkok. She ran several businesses, including real estate. She claimed to have been a close devotee of Ariyachat since he was a novice. I first met Siripha in the *thot khatin* ceremony (in 2015) at Wat Saengkaew and after that we were friends on Facebook. We had conversations many times through Facebook messenger (mentioned in chapter 3).

In mid-2016, she flew to London and stayed there until early 2017.

Around 10 P.M. during the ritual to install the Buddha hearts of Phrachao Khot Thanchai in *thot kathin* of Ariyachat (November 7, 2015), my friend, Nattaphong, introduced me to Siripha, who was accompanied by her husband. She handed me her husband's name card, which let me know his high position as a general in the royal Thai armed forces. Siripha and her husband had driven from Bangkok that morning to join this important event. During the ritual, we were chatting while waiting to pay homage to Ariyachat. Siripha started a conversation by sharing her first impression of Ariyachat. She recalled that she met him for the first time around fifteen years ago. At that time, Ariyachat was a little novice residing in Wat Wang Mui in Lamphun city (as mentioned in chapter 3). Siripha came to see Ariyachat by a recommendation of her friend, who knew that Siripha was suffering from a severe headache and an unhappy marriage.

In fact, Siripha had been treated by psychiatrists but her condition did not improve.

In choosing to be a devotee of Ariyachat she had nothing to lose. Ariyachat looked very ordinary, she thought, so did why her friend suggest that she see him?

²¹ It is a Thai custom to call oneself with a familial title such as *phi* (elder brother or sister) or *nong* (younger brother or sister). *Na* is used to call a woman who is older, but still younger than a mother.

During a series of meetings with Ariyachat, Siripha just sat and told him her story. While Ariyachat was listening to her, he was molding clay tablets (Thai: *pan phra*) and he gave some to her. Ariyachat told her that all the troubles in her life were because of karma from her previous lives that could be solved by practicing meditation and making merit regularly. Incredibly, she began getting better in time. She believed it was a miracle due to the supernatural power of Ariyachat. From then on, she has been an active devotee of Ariyachat. Later, she sponsored his ordination as a monk.

Regarding Ariyachat's charismatic status, Siripha addressed two things that signified it: first, merit accumulated in a past existence, and second, power in his words (Thai: *wacha sit*). When Ariyachat was a novice, he told Siripha that he was a reincarnation of Khao Pi²², and after that, during his stay in Wat Dong Sima, he said he would be the most famous *khru*ba in Chiang Rai province. Hence, in her view, Ariyachat was so meritorious because after the establishment of Wat Saengkaew, he had become the most famous *khru*ba in Chiang Rai, as he predicted (interview, November 7, 2015).

Siripha followed Ariyachat to Wat Dong Sima in Mae Suai district, when he was under Thueang. Siripha later bought a large piece of land close to the monastery. After that, during the first few years in Wat Saengkaew, she played a significant role as a key node for Ariyachat. She introduced her friends and relatives as well as those of her husband in Bangkok to Ariyachat, and invited them to support Ariyachat's newly-founded monastery. In late 2015 (until early 2016), she invited her son, who was based in London, to take part in a group ordination at Wat Saengkaew (which was held every year). During the program, she rented a house close to the monastery in order to stay close to her son. She also posted photos of her son and his activities on Facebook frequently.

On the night of November 7, during a conversation, she gave hand-molded tablets of Ariyachat to my friend and me. She instructed us firmly to take good care of these tablets since they were rare and valuable. During a conversation with Ariyachat, he called Siripha *yom mae*, or lay mother, which indicated their close relationship. In front

²² As I mentioned in chapter 3, in order to confirm this assertion, she later sent me a photo of young Ariyachat through Facebook messenger to emphasize the physical resemblance of the two *khru*ba.

of Ariyachat, Siripha opened her bag to reveal a collection of Ariyachat's amulets. Amongst other devotees and followers in the ritual, she said that those amulets were the first batches that Ariyachat made when he was very young. Some tablets were encased in gold. Ariyachat was surprised while other devotees, mostly upper-middle class people from Bangkok, looked on with interest as Siripha described the story of each item. For example, one item was made during forest wandering (Thai: *thudong*), and there were only 108 pieces that batch. The special thing about them was they were molded by the earth from a cave where Ariyachat had stayed and practiced meditation. Ariyachat smiled and then turned to other devotees sitting nearby and said, "These items are part of my first batch, I made them by hand when I was a novice". Then, he asked a male devotee, "Do you want one? Try it! Worship it and you will be super rich [Thai: *khot ruai*], richer than having *phra somdet*. There were only 222 pieces in this batch. In addition, the shape of Khruba Siwichai's peacock fan is inscribed on the back side of each tablet".

Then Ariyachat asked Siripha to give a tablet to that devotee. She seemed surprised and told Ariyachat again that those items were very rare and could not be found anywhere else. That devotee seemed very delighted as he received it from Siripha. She went on, saying in fact, that she intended to give all items for the auction the following morning, so that Ariyachat could receive more money donations. Previously she had given Ariyachat's amulets to friends, relatives and even acquaintances (like me) from time to time. Moreover, she added that she had the first edition of Ariyachat's poster and beeswax at home. She would bring them to him again on January 9 (in his birthday celebration) for the auction.

Again, via Facebook messenger, Siripha shared with me another story, among many, of Ariyachat's supernatural power that led her to believe in him (December 31, 2015).

She said that Ariyachat molded a small Buddha image for her birthday every year.

He used earth from under a Bodhi tree to mold them. She kept the images in her houses both in Bangkok and London. Importantly, Ariyachat inserted a Buddha relic at the base of each image. It was surprising that the relic multiplied by itself (to around a thousand pieces) after she worshipped it properly. In London, she asked her son to bring some relics to a Thai Buddhist monastery. After she came back to Thailand, she found that the

relics kept in Bangkok also multiplied themselves. She kept this story to herself until the 2101 crack down of the Red Shirts by the government in Bangkok, when the police came to visit her husband. She gave them some relics in order to protect them from danger. She was taken by surprise when the relics multiplied themselves again after the police left. She soon phoned Ariyachat and told him all that happened. Ariyachat replied, “Yes, I saw it by *nimit* [vision], the relics flew from my place to Bangkok and also to London.”

4.3.4 The Sacred-Magic Objects Themselves: Active Agents in *Khruba*'s Networks

A wide range of sacred-magic objects, ranging from votive tablets, medallions, Buddha images, coins, *takrut*, *yantra*, rosaries, etc., have been mass produced either for sale or as gifts. Sacred-magic objects in Thai terms, as Tambiah (1984, 196) explained, are *khrueng rang khong khlung* where *khong khlung* refers to an object having sacred or supernatural powers and *khrueng rang* refers to an amulet. Amulets are used to testify to a *khruba*'s magical and supernatural powers while simultaneously serving to satisfy the desires of devotees and followers of prosperity religions. Amulets have also been used extensively for merit-making and fund-raising schemes and have contributed to the expansion of *khruba*'s worldwide networks. Therefore, amulets have played a vital role in the construction of charisma by modern *khruba* while demonstrating the shift in *khruba*'s practices in their efforts to interact with the current context. In this section, I shall examine sacred-magic objects of modern *khruba* through production techniques, marketing strategies, and methods of circulation. This section provides an understanding of the common experience and imagination of people under the context of popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, while highlighting sacred-magic objects as active agents having the capacity to connect people to get involved in the networks of *khruba*, just as in human networks.

The official biographies of, and academic works on Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi, have portrayed the two *khruba* as *ton bun* or *bodhisatta* (Kwanchewan 2010, 2). Siwichai had never produced sacred-magic objects for sale. According to a report, during his entire lifetime Siwichai had made only a kind of miniature Buddha image

using sun-dried sticky rice blended with other ingredients in accordance with the local tradition known as *phra chao khao khu chivit* (the miniature Buddha image made from rice, the life partner) (Sirisak 2016, 343-344). In addition, other kinds of amulets were made quietly by his disciples and lay devotees without his knowledge. Miniature statues and clay tablets were made with Siwichai's hair embedded in them. Yet these amulets were meant to be circulated among the devotees and believers of Siwichai and not sold as they had never undergone chanting or consecrating (Thai: *plukse*) by Siwichai or others. All of the amulets for sale were mass-produced later after his death (see Sommai 2000, 54; Sirisak 2016, 345-364).

For Khruba Khao Pi, pieces of white cloth with the prints of his hands and feet were distributed for free while his first batch of amulets was officially produced for sale in 1952 (when he was 64). They were produced in the form of medallions (Thai: *rian*) under the batch name *run raek Khruba Khao Pi sali ha king* (the first batch of Khruba Khao Pi, the five-branch Bodhi tree). Three batches followed in 1957, 1975, and 1976²³ (interview, Inpan and Sukchai, senior devotees of Khruba Khao Pi July 25-26, 2015; see also Maitri n.d., 80-81). These amulets were produced to raise money for Khao Pi's construction projects. As repositories of power (Tambiah 1984), these objects were believed producers, contributors, and lay devotees to be embedded with magical and protective powers. One miracle story of Khruba Khao Pi's amulets that I have often been told by senior devotees is that before the medals in the batch name *102* (Thai: *rian run 102*) were made, Khao Pi ordered Mae Pa, a key producer, to put the numbers "02" on one side of the medals. But, eventually, they came out with '102'. The number '1' was added accidentally and by no one's intention. However, Khao Pi told his followers that it was good since it came out to protect everyone. This batch of medals also has a story of having self-multiplying like that of the Buddha's relics (interview, Inpan, July 25, 2015).

Both *khruba* above shared ideas about the sacred-magic objects which testified to a wide reputation and high degree of holiness, as a result of austerity in *dhamma* and meditation for a very long time. Tambiah (1984) has suggested that the charisma of

²³ Named "Khruba Khao Pi sali ha king" (Khruba Khao Pi, the five-branch Bodhi tree, second edition), "*rian maha lap*" (medal of super luck), and "*rian run 102*", respectively.

Buddhist saints is concretized and sedimented in objects as the repositories of power. These objects eventually become things purchasable for money in the market and are used by laymen to influence, control, seduce, and exploit fellow laymen for worldly purposes.

The cult of amulets in Thailand has roots in traditional beliefs and practices concerning magic and supernaturalism, while Pattana (2012, 112) noted that from the tenth or eleventh century to the fifteenth century, the religious situation in mainland Southeast Asia was fluid and informal. Buddhism was characterized more by miraculous relics and charismatic, magical monks than by organized sectarian traditions. In the 1980s and 1990s, rapid economic growth stimulated the proliferation of prosperity religions, such as the cults of King Chulalongkorn (see Stengs 2009), Guanyin (Thai: *Chaomae Kuan Im*) and some royal spirits (see also Jackson 1999a, 1999b; McDaniel 2011). The craze for prosperity religions continued to mushroom after the economic crisis in the mid-1990s and early 2000s (see Tanabe and Keyes 2002; Pattana *ibid.*).

Jackson (1999a, 1999b) and Pattana (2012) also discussed the marketing strategy in the naming of the batches of Luang Pho Khun²⁴ amulets. This practice reflects the shift in the meaning of amulets in contemporary Thai society, as well as in other Buddhist communities throughout Asia, where people believe that wealth is the answer to most problems in life. Pattana (*ibid.*, 96-100) pointed out that amulets become sacred signifiers that spiritually and psychologically assure their holders that they will achieve their goal of gaining material wealth rather than providing their holders protective power and moral strength as found in the past period.

This context sheds light on the social construction of the value of sacred-magic objects, or the way we perceive and consume these things. In a cultural perspective (material culture), Appadurai (1986, 3-63) has suggested that commodity has a social life just as a human being does. It means that these things could move in and out of a state of being a commodity (material and immaterial value). It is a paradoxical identity when things like sacred-magic objects are at work in the process of becoming commodities in the

²⁴ One of the most famous magic monks in Thailand during the last three decades (died 2015).

market place (exchange sphere) and the sacred-priceless place (personal sphere) (Kopytoff 1986, 64-91). Hence, this process enlivens sacred-magic objects and enables them to flow and connect people everywhere and on both the exchange and the personal level, as I have discussed earlier regarding the cases of key nodes in *khru*ba's networks, as well as what I shall discuss below.

Amulet entrepreneurs and monks have made linguistic and symbolic connections between a monk's supernatural power and the desire for material wealth and mundane success, as in the case of Luang Pho Khun's amulets suggested by Pattana (2012, 96-100). Modern *khru*ba's amulets are also named according to the same pattern, such as *phra arahan trai phakhi maha lap* (images of the three arahants, great luck) and *takrut setthi ngoen lan* (*takrut*, the millionaire) of Khruba Noi, *Nang Kwak sap saen lan* (*Nang Kwank*-a beckoning woman, wealth of a hundred billion baht) and *rian rahu ruai sap* (medal of *rahu*²⁵, wealth) of Khruba Ariyachat, *phra kring Siwali phokkhasap phu mi chai chana haeng phaendin* (miniature image of Phra Siwali²⁶ who has material wealth and victory over the land) of Khruba Chaiya Patthaphi in 2013 (in Wiang Pa Pao district, Chiang Rai province), and *salika riak sap* (medal of the Salika bird calling wealth) of Khruba Chao Nokaeofa in 2013 (in Khong district, Nakhon Ratchasima province).

Moreover, names of the projects to make amulets are strategically created to arouse the interest of the public. Some examples include *sutyot watthu mongkhon haeng tamnan prawattisat* (the greatest auspicious objects in history) of Khruba Ariyachat in 2014 and *khurang raek khurang diao nai rop kao pi haeng kan phian wiriya thana barami* (the first time and only time after nine years of perseverance, giving, perfection) of Khruba Yawichai in 2016 (in Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai province). Moreover, *khru*ba and amulet entrepreneurs, as well as their business connections, have employed many business strategies to attract the public as well as to create unique selling points. Two important strategies in particular have been found in various channels, including TV, printed materials, Internet websites, social media, and word of mouth. These strategies involve (1) provision of information about the production process and (2) amulet efficacies, as well as stories pertaining to the alchemy of the amulet holders.

²⁵ A god in nine celestial bodies in Hindu and Buddhist beliefs.

²⁶ Pali: *Sivali*.

With regards to the first strategy, among a wide range of amulets, one particular batch of miniature images of Khruba Noi with the name *rup muean Khruba Noi run 1*²⁷ (image of Khruba Noi, the first batch) in 2013-2014 is claimed to have the protective and magical powers to bring luck and success in everything upon request (vinyl poster in Wat Si Don Mun, May 25, 2015; Khaosod 2016). The consecration of the images was very special as they had undergone chanting and blessing (Thai: *athitthan chit lae pluksek*) by Noi for over three months during the rains retreat (Thai: *khao phansa*) and during *nirothakam* in 2013. Moreover, during this period, these amulets were submerged in an alms bowl filled with a special herbal oil, known as *wan kai daeng*²⁸ (made from the herbal plant named *kai daeng* [English: red cock]) together with 108²⁹ other magical herbs (Thai: *wan saksit*). Before being packaged, they were blessed again by Noi. The advertisement stirred the enthusiasm of the public by saying that this batch of amulets was a limited edition, with no rain checks, because the concrete molds of the amulets would be destroyed on February 23, 2014.

Miniature statues of Phra Sangkachai, Phra Siwali, Phra Upakhut, Phra Bua Khem (another version of Phra Upakhut), and Phra Poramaiaisuan are highlighted in the official biography of Noi (Wat Si Don Mun 2012, 50-74), while a set of Phra Sangkachai, Phra Siwali and Phra Upakhut with the name *phra arahan traiphakhi mahalap*, or a set of three arahants who bring great luck is highly recommended. They are reputed to have protective as well as magical powers to bring wealth, health, and success to the owners. Verses for invocations (Thai: *khatha bucha*) and procedures to worship them properly are also provided in order to obtain immediate results (ibid.). Furthermore, Wat Si Don Mun promotes two kinds of amulets of Noi which were awarded the best amulets of the year 2013 in a competition organized by amulet entrepreneurs and collectors in Bangkok (as I mentioned earlier).

²⁷ In varying masses and ranges of price, e.g., gold (100,000 baht) and brass (500-700 baht).

²⁸ This herb is believed to have a high magical potency to increase personal charm, luck, and protection. Additionally, it is very rare and most sought after because it can be found only in the deep forest in Myanmar, not in Thailand (Baanjompra.com 2015).

²⁹ 108 is an auspicious number in Buddhism and is often highlighted by modern *khruba* on many occasions.

For Khruba Ariyachat, seven kinds of amulets are highlighted as the best sellers in the official biography. They are (1) Mae Nang Kwak in the batch name Nang Kwak *sap saen lan* (Nang Kwak, hundred billion baht), (2) Mae Nang Rap (the receiving woman) in the batch name Nang Rap *sap saen lan* (Nang Rap, hundred billion baht), (3) *thian kao chan* (nine Monday candles), (4) Thep Thanchai (the Burmese Nat, Nat Bo Bo Gyi-the speedy god), (5) Thep Krasip (the Burmese Nat, Ahma Mya Nan New-the whisper goddess), (6) *si hu ha ta* (the four-eared, five-eyed creature, an avatar of the Lord Indra) and (7) *dai daeng* (the red thread) (So Sutthiphan 2013, 126-131).

Among them, Mae Nang Kwak has the specific name of Mae Thong Phanchang (the woman of a thousand weights of gold). It is a miniature statue of a kneeling woman beckoning with one hand, which is said to represent her calling clients and buyers to shops. Generally in other places, the Mae Nang Kwak image has a slender shape and a beautiful face, but in Ariyachat's version, she has a round shape and is called Nang Kwak Uan (the fat Nang Kwak). This is Ariyachat's own creation in order to represent fertility and eternal wealth. Recently Wat Saengkaew has claimed to be the originator of Nang Kwak Uan in Thailand, which is regarded as a symbol of Ariyachat, as well (So Sutthiphan 2013, 126).

Another example is *dai daeng*, or the holy thread, consisting of a red thread knitted and strung with five white beads representing the five Buddhas. *Dai daeng* is an important item as it indicates that the holder is a devotee of Ariyachat and is renowned for having great protective power (So Sutthiphan 2013, 131; see also So Sutthiphan 2011, 120-121).

Moreover, a number of amulets produced and chanted over (Thai: *pluksek*) during *nirothakam*, such as the miniature statue of Nang Kwak Mahalap (Nang Kwak, great luck) and *rup lo muean ong loi Khruba Siwichai* (the miniature statue of Khruba Siwichai) in the eighth *nirothakam* in 2010 (amulet.com 2009), or a single rosary bead of Ariyachat which was being used during the ninth *nirothakam* (his last *nirothakam*) in 2013. They are believed to have great magical power as they were consecrated at very important events. Moreover, they are very rare because Ariyachat has stopped practicing *nirothakam*. The price of each amulet depends on size, material, and rarity.

For example, the 9-inch statue of the fat Nang Kwak painted gold costs 7,000 baht while another, which is gilded by gold leaf, costs 11,000 baht. The price of a single rosary bead of Ariyachat which was being used in the ninth *nirothakam* with a necklace costs 25,000 baht.

Similar to the case of Khruba Noi, invocations and procedures to worship the amulets are included in order to obtain immediate, major results. For example, Mae Nang Kwak- Mae Thong Phanchang should be placed facing outward from the shop and should be worshiped with either a glass of water or a bottle of water every day. Fruits should be presented either every day or once a week. A wish can be made by lighting either nine or sixteen incense sticks and asking for help in commerce, luck, and wealth. Afterward, the verses for the request (Thai: *khatha aratthana*) should be recited. Below is my translation of verses for requests from Mae Nang Kwak-Mae Thong Phanchang (So Sutthiphan 2013, 127-128).

ohm the revered grandfather green mountain who has only one daughter
named Nang Kwak
she was loved by women and men who saw her
they, merchants keep me and go to trade up to the city of deities
I shall sell rings, and get a hundred thousands *tanam*³⁰ each day
I shall do all kinds of trade with the flow
I shall sell gold, and get a full basket of gold in return
take 103 baskets home, be a millionaire within three months
within three years, own a ship for trade
the hermit is the Lord who brings success only to me
(Pali verse) *e hi chit tang pi yang ma ma ma maha la pha pha wan tu me*
luck, money from all directions shall flood in to me
(Pali) *samathi ma e hi ma ma sap phe cha na pha hu cha na*
A short version: (Pali verse) *e hi chit tang maha la pha pi yang ma ma ma ma*

³⁰ Name of an ancient measurement, a vessel made of a coconut shell for ladling rice.

The other two examples from other modern *khru*ba are *phayan bun raksa namchok ruai namchai ruai phra in chamlaeng si hu ha ta thewada namchok run bandai sawan* (the *yantra*, merit protection, brings wealthy luck and wealthy victory, Lord Indra in disguise, four-eared and five-eyed creature, deity brings luck, the batch of the stairway to heaven) of *Khru*ba Bun Yang (in Li district, Lamphun province) and *phrakring Siwali phokkhasap phumi chaichana haeng phaendin* (the miniature image of Phra Siwali who has material wealth and victory over the land) of *Khru*ba Chaiya Pathapi. Bun Yang produced this batch of *yantra* in 2013 together with other kinds of amulets under the same batch name, such as the miniature statue of *si hu ha ta*, the locket contains auspicious masses and hairs, and the medals. These amulets are claimed to be the last batch before closing down the legend of *si hu ha ta* creature and they were consecrated by Bun Yang on October 26, 2013.

Bun Yang is one of the most famous charismatic, magic monks in Li district in recent times, and he is well known among amulet gurus throughout the region. The legend of the *si hu ha ta* creature was delineated by *Khru*ba Wong (a master of *Khru*ba Don) referring to Lord Indra who disguised himself on earth as a creature with four ears and five eyes who came help a poor but honest man. The creature ate pieces of hot charcoal, instead of food, and excreted pieces of gold. The poor man got rich soon after. Additionally, in order to protect oneself from fire, thunder, danger and all disasters, as well as to alleviate suffering and have great luck, the specific verses for invocations should be recited upon it every day (Facebook @Khanphee news, posted on December 23, 2015).

With regard to one amulet batch of *Khru*ba Chaiya Pathapi produced in 2013, *phrakring Siwali phokkhasap phumi chai chana haeng phaendin* which was imprinted with *yan nokyung thong*, or the *yantra* of the gold peacock at the backside. Phra Siwali is credited with the great power to bring luck while the *yantra* of the gold peacock brings success in business as well as eternal wealth. Chaiya Pathapi claims to be the originator of *yan nokyung thong*, which is a secret, sacred formula given by the deity (Thai: *wicha chak thep prathan*). The introduction of this *yantra* is touted in advertisements as “the great strength, the power of knowledge of Lan Na which was handed down by ancestors.

The power is accumulated for great results by the *yantra* of the gold peacock, a secret formula given by the deity, and is added up by the moral perfection of Phra Siwali, who excelled in multiplying merit to enrich life and change fate from bad to good” (Phanthakan 2013). This batch of amulets underwent chanting (Thai: *athitthan chit, plukse*) on September 12, 2013 in Bangkok by Chaiya Pathapi. Significantly, the ritual was portrayed by a miracle when Phra Siwali’s relics (Thai: *phrathat Siwali*) were found at the ritual site before and after the chanting (ibid.).

In the case of Khruba Don, I mentioned earlier that he has never produced his own batches of amulets, but this does not mean that he and his monastery completely refrain from producing these kinds of objects. Moreover, amulets have played a significant role for the prosperity of Wat Pha Nam recently. I found that the wat constantly reproduces amulets of Khruba Khao Pi, ranging from *takrut, yantra*, medals, and coins, to Buddha images and miniature statues of Khruba Khao Pi. These amulets were sold in huge amounts during the major events at Wat Pha Nam, such as the robe-changing ceremony.

I witnessed the amulet pavilion of Wat Pha Nam in the 2016 robe-changing ceremony, when a Pha Nam senior monk was in charge of encouraging guests to buy the products. He gave a brief introduction of each item alternating with its legend and efficacy through a loudspeaker from time to time during the event. These amulets were claimed to be the original creation of Khruba Khao Pi and Wat Pha Nam claimed the right to reproduce them even though we do not know whether or not Khao Pi ever produced such amulets.

Quotes below are examples of the senior monk’s selling technique at the amulet pavilion during the robe-changing ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi (during March 2-3, 2016).

This *yantra* costs 40 baht. It’s a formula of Khruba Khao Pi. It will bring luck, wealth, prosperity, charm and attraction to its holder, all in one piece.

Let’s come and *bucha* [buy]...hurry up! hurry up! Just keep it with you or in a house or in a car to save you from harm and bad spirits [laughed]. This is the original one. It is better to keep it in a clear hard case. It will then bring you

good profits in commerce. Agriculture also applies because it will prevent crops from insects and fire.

Salika lin thong costs 30 baht for good profits in commerce. For those who are doing *rong than* [almshouses] now, if you want to buy these auspicious objects [*watthu mongkhon*] please stop to come and buy them first. Otherwise, they will be all gone soon.

There are two types of Khruba Khao Pi medallions. They are in the same batch but in different colors. This one is embedded with Khruba's hairs, costs 200 baht and 399 baht for the larger size. Soldiers in the army should have it. Keep it with you when you are on duty, it will save you from danger. But if you run a business, it will bring you good luck and wealth [*khit ma kha khuen heng heng ruai ruai*] come! come! come!

Frequently, modern *khruba*, in collaboration with amulet entrepreneurs, broadcast video clips on TV and YouTube to promote their amulets by themselves, for example, *khui fueang rueang Phra Khruba Ariyachat* (a talk about amulets with Khruba Ariyachat) (Wanchai Suphan on YouTube 2012a-2012d)³¹. Another interesting technique in the amulet business was shared by Khong (pseudonym), the owner of a foundry and minting factory in Chiang Mai province³² (interview, September 7, 2016). According to Khong, a famous *khruba* in Lamphun province has made use of modern communication technology and a highly commercialized strategy to draw the crowds and channel the amulets to potential customers by opening advanced sales of his new batch of amulets only on Facebook. The sales began at 9 A.M. because nine is an auspicious number in Thai Buddhist culture representing growth, progress, and advancement. On a first-come-first-served basis, in less than a minute, approximately five thousand orders had

³¹ Also found are more video clips in the series *khui fueang rueang phra* with other modern *khruba*, such as Khruba Kritsana (in Nakhon Ratchasima province in 2013), and Khruba Nuea Chai (in Kanchanaburi province in 2012).

³² He is also vice-chairman of the northern Thai amulet association (Thai: *Samakhom Phra Khrueang Phra Bucha Thai Phak Nuea*) sub-region, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Mai, and Mae Hong Son provinces.

been placed by customers worldwide (mainly from China and Singapore) with an only few hundred left.

Regarding the second point, amulet efficacies and stories pertaining to alchemy are conveyed through the individual experiences of the holders in order to affirm the efficacy of *khruha's* amulets. This is another example showing the correlation of charismatic, supernatural powers of Buddhist monks with secular affairs. Below are examples of the stories.

(1) Praphasi (pseudonym) is a local politician serving as a representative of the sub-district municipality (Thai: *samachik sapha thetsaban tambon*) in Tha Song Yang district, Tak province. She is the mother of Nong Man whom I mentioned above. Her experience with Khruha Noi's amulets began in 2012 after deciding to run for election in the sub-district municipality. She was worried because she was an independent candidate and had no backup from any political party. At first, she did not know Khruha Noi but her son (Nong Man) took her to him to ease her worries. Then, Noi gave her magic candles called *thian Siwali doen dong* (Phra Siwali wandering in the forest). These candles are believed to have magical power to increase personal charm and to enable one to persuade others. Noi instructed her to light the candles and pray to them for three days before the election date. Even though he did not give her any mantra, she told me, "believe it or not elderly people in the villages can remember my number [number 7] while forgetting the numbers of other candidates". Eventually, among 30 candidates, she was elected by the second-highest number of votes (interview, November 4, 2015). Since then, she and her family have become devotees of Noi. Additionally, she also wore a locket of Noi, stunningly surrounded by diamonds, around her neck in order to protect her from harm while invoking luck and success for her business.

(2) Noina (pseudonym) had a full-time job in a travel agency. Since the first time she met Khruha Ariyachat, she had faith and wanted to have some auspicious objects (Thai: *watthu mongkhon*) of him. During that time, she had many difficulties in her life because, apart from a full-time job, her room rental business was in a troubled financial situation. Among the amulets she bought (Thai: *chao, bucha*) from Wat Saengkaew,

a miniature statue of Mae Nang Kwak- Mae Thong Phanchang, or what she casually called Nang Kwak Tui (the chubby Nang Kwak), was her favorite. She revealed that the room rental business had problems and, in addition, her clients themselves were also in trouble, with jobs, families and neighbors. These difficulties caused her severe headaches. Nonetheless, not long after she began to worship Nang Kwak Tui, her business incredibly. She stated, “Previously, my room rental business was not well known, and many rooms were often vacant for a long time. But after I had Nang Kwak, the rooms were rented. Additionally, renters stayed for a very long time and didn’t want to leave. But if some renters left unexpectedly, I would soon pray to Nang Kwak Tui to help me to have new and good renters. As a result, in just one or two days, I got new renters. Thus, clients kept coming to me all the time after I prayed to Nang Kwak Tui, and it never took longer than three days. Moreover, Nang Kwak Tui chose good clients for me, too” (So Sutthiphan 2013, 142-144).

However, Noina was in fact a skeptical person. Thus, before she had profound respect for Nang Kwak Tui, she also needed to prove it. She recalled a method to prove Nang Kwak Tui’s efficacy:

One day, my friend asked me to take care of her clothes shop in Sam Rong Night Market. I decided to put a 3-inch Nang Kwak Tui image inside my bag to test its efficacy. I didn’t tell my friend that I had Nang Kwak Tui with me. Normally, she took in around 5,000 baht each day. I opened the shop at 11 P.M. I couldn’t believe it because I took care of the shop alone but the clothes were sold out within less than an hour. I took in 50,000 baht that night. Nearby sellers were surprised and asked me what *khong di* [a good thing] I had. I simply kept quiet. I just placed Nang Kwak Tui facing outward from the shop and spoke softly to it, saying, “Nang Kwak Tui, please help me and show me how much you can do. May I get more money so I will get more earnings.” Finally, I got the extra money from my friend because I helped her to get more profit that night (So Sutthiphan 2013, 142-145³³).

³³ Three books by Khruba Ariyachat, printed by a well-known publisher in Bangkok, devote half of the space to the miraculous stories about his sacred-magic objects along with his supernatural powers (see So Sutthiphan 2011, 2013, 2015). Other stories such as *locket sut huang khong Pa Mali* (Aunt Mali and the most treasured Khruba’s locket), *Ai Bun Luea kap na mon chuai chiwit* (*Bun Luea* and



Figure 4.1: A vinyl board hung in Wat Si Don Mun advertizing Khruba Noi's amulets in 2014

Source: author



Figure 4.2: The Official Website of Khruba Noi (<http://www.watsridonmoon9.com>), where customers can buy his amulets online

life-saving holy water) (So Sutthiphan 2011, 111- 220; 2013, 132- 227). Moreover, the miraculous stories of well-to-do devotees and celebrities, such as TV stars and TV hosts, are highlighted, as well as those in high social status as they were addressed by social ranks like *achan* (teacher or scholar), *hia* (wealthy man) or *kaptan* (airplane pilot).



Figure 4.3: An advertisement for a new batch of Khruba Ariyachat's amulets to celebrate his new title in the *Sangha* system in 2017
 Source: Facebook @saengkaewphothiyan, posted on July 7, 2017

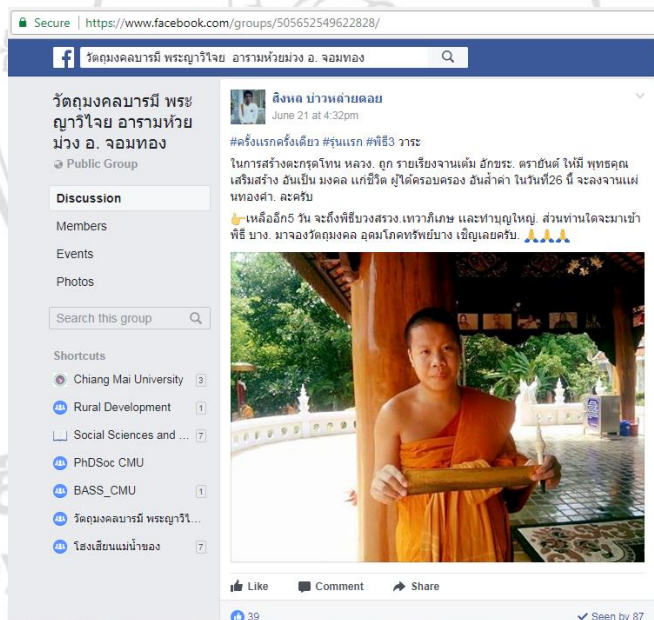


Figure 4.4: A Facebook page advertizing the amulets of Khruba Yawichai in 2017
 Source: Facebook วัดมณฑลบุรี พระญาณวิไล อารามห้วยม่วง อ.จอมทอง [auspicious objects, charisma of Phra Yawichai, Huai Muang Monastery, Chom Thong district], posted on June 21, 2016

4.3.5 Religious Events: Space to Display Networks of Multifaceted Charisma

To observe the networks of modern *khruaba*, religious events are a space to display their relationships as well as heterogeneous forms of consumption of *khruaba*'s charisma.

In Wat Pha Nam's *thot kathin* festival in 2015 (November 24-25), I found that the majority of participants were the (former) local network (Yuan and Karen) of Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Wong from Li, Ban Hong and Mae Ta districts of Lamphun province; Doi Tao, Hod, Chom Thong and Chiang Dao districts of Chiang Mai province; as well as a number of devotees from Lampang province; Mae Sariang district (Wat Huai Bong) of Mae Hong Son province; and Mea Sot district of Tak province.

The main hosts of *kathin* were a wealthy family from Bangkok (Khun Kanya, mentioned above) and Phra Achan Sakson from Wat Khao Sawantak in Chanthaburi province.

Sakson was connected by Kanya. He had supported a pavilion construction to enshrine the Phra Thammaracha Phothisat image in 2015, located next to the white pagoda on the summit of Pha Nam Mountain³⁴. For this event, Sakson brought sixty followers from Chanthaburi province, together with 500,000 baht on a *kathin* tree³⁵. I also found ten guests (from the Northeast and Malaysia) who accompanied Phra Phakhinai of Wat Umong in Chiang Mai city. Additionally, there were thirty-five guests who formed a group called the Khon Khaen-Bangkok group of devotees (Thai: *khana sattha*) and seven guests from Ratchaburi province. They came to join the ceremony by invitation of followers of Khruba Wong and Khruba Khao Pi in Lamphun and Bangkok. They have known Siwichai, Khao Pi, and Wong as the Buddhist saints of Lan Na, while Don was one of their successors. They also wanted to join a pure folk Yuan and Karen religious event in the *khruaba* tradition as seen on media.

In Khruba Khao Pi's 2016 robe-changing ceremony (March 1-4), the sponsor was the owner of a large textile company in Bangkok, and also the chairperson of

³⁴ During a conversation with his devotees, Saksorn claimed to be the key figure in several construction works on the mountain top together with Kanya, his devotee (November 24, 2015).

³⁵ The co-sponsors from Bangkok were also devotees of Sakson.

Wat Huai Tom Foundation of Khruba Phan. The chief of laity was the deputy supreme commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces³⁶. At this event, Don had invited four hundred monasteries (Thai: *hua wat*) to receive offerings (Thai: *thaiyathan*). They were from Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Mai, Tak, Sukhothai, Chiang Rai, Phrae and Mae Hong Son provinces (according to the event booklet). They had been the local network of Pha Nam since the time of Khao Pi. Each monastery brought a number of people to join together to present a money tree to Don. Even though the majority of attendees were northerners (predominantly Karen and Yuan), according to a survey³⁷, I also found attendees from Bangkok, Chonburi and Bueng Kan provinces, some of whom sponsored almshouses at the event. I believe that the attendees came from many other places around the country, but it was difficult to get the exact information since the event was reported to have more than 20,000 attendees and more than 100 almshouses (Thai: *rong than*).

In the *thot kathin* festival of Wat Si Don Mun in 2015 (October 31- November 1), the sponsor was a family who owned a major petrochemical company in Thailand. The co-sponsors included thirteen nodes of devotees from four regions, who donated nearly 7,000,000 baht combined. Additionally, one devotee from Bangkok who owned an automobile company donated an ambulance worth 2,000,000 baht to Khruba Noi's hospital³⁸. I also found *ton kathin* presented by a group of physicians, nurses and medical staff from Noi's hospital in order to show gratitude to their patron. That year, Noi would present *kathin tok khang* (the leftover *kathin*) to six other monasteries (100,000 baht to each)³⁹. The six monasteries also formed their own *kathin* trees at Wat Si Don Mun to invite people to donate.

On October 31, thirty army soldiers from the Chiang Mai military camp came to provide workforce to Noi. One senior devotee of Noi revealed that Noi had a good

³⁶ He also visited Khruba Noi and underwent *phithi suepchata* the following day (Interview, Khruba Noi, March 4, 2016).

³⁷ With the assistance of three students from Wiang Chedi Wittaya School in Li district.

³⁸ On November 1, the then-director of Saraphi Hospital came to receive the ambulance from Noi. The ceremony was held before the distinguished guests and local-national correspondents.

³⁹ In each year, Noi will choose monasteries in his network to receive *kathin tok khang*, ranging from six to nine monasteries.

connection with the military camp because he often sent amulets to them. In addition, before soldiers took up duty in the Deep South, they usually came to get a blessing from Noi in order to keep safe. The same devotee added that every year there would be around thirty buses transporting devotees and followers from Malaysia to join the event⁴⁰ (interview, October 31, 2015).

Ten almshouses in this event were sponsored by the middle-class devotees in Chiang Mai while the biggest one was organized by the monastery, and was taken care of by lay devotees from Si Don Mun village. I met one of the hosts who was a retired teacher from the Demonstration School of Chiang Mai Rajabhat University. She enthusiastically urged me to remember to buy (Thai: *bucha*) a magical candle *thian Siwali* (Phra Siwali candle) of Noi. The candle was reputed to have magical power to enhance personal charm and success. She had always received good results after worshipping with it, thus she recommended it to others with confidence (interview, November 1, 2015).

For Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan, in the *thot kathin* festival in 2015 (November 7-9), the then-deputy prime minister and minister of defense, General Prawit Wongsuwan, was invited to preside over the groundbreaking ceremony of a large statue that was given the name Phra Somdet Borom Phothiyan⁴¹. Nine Phrachao Khot Thanchai images were cast in this event by well-to-do sponsors from Bangkok (as I mentioned in chapter 3). In a religious ceremony on November 7, twelve senior monks, mostly from Chiang Rai province, were invited, including Chao Khana Phak 6 (head of the Ecclesiastical Office, Region 6), Chao Khana Changwat Chiang Rai (head of the Ecclesiastical Office, Chiang Rai province) and Chao Khana Amphoe Mae Suai (head of the Ecclesiastical Office, Mae Suai district). Additionally, a popular TV star and her family were also invited. More than ten almshouses in this event were sponsored by well-to-do devotees from Chiang Rai, Bangkok, and Nakhon Ratchasima provinces. They included the Choen Yim comedy group (mentioned earlier), owners of a tea

⁴⁰ However, in 2015, I did not find any bus from Malaysia as the devotee claimed. I asked him again why they did not come that year. He said it might be because of the economic downturn in Southeast Asia.

⁴¹ It will be 21 meters wide and 38 meters tall, standing right behind the statues of the three greatest *khrua*.

plantation in Chiang Rai, and the head of the division of public works of the Nakhon Ratchasima Provincial Administrative Organization.

A *kathin* procession on November 8 was sponsored by a wealthy devotee⁴², who ran a real estate development company in Chiang Mai city. Soldiers from the Chiang Rai military camp were hired for heavy work in the parade. At night, Pet Choen Yim staged a concert on the monastery grounds (as I mentioned earlier). Additionally, Ariyachat arranged a *salak yom* festival (one kind of *salakkaphat*, or *tan kuai salak*, originally from Lamphun province, Ariyachat's former base) during those days. As observed, the sponsors of *ton salak yom* (*salak yom* trees) were mainly local monasteries in Ariyachat's network from Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Lamphun provinces. Nonetheless, I also found twenty *ton salak yom* which were sponsored by devotees from Bangkok and the Central region⁴³.

At Ariyachat's birthday celebration in 2016 (January 8-10), he invited one of King Bhumibol's granddaughters to preside over the ceremony on January 9. The following day devotees held *phithi suepchata luang* (the grand ritual for life prolongation) for him. He invited a popular TV star and her family (whom I mentioned above), as well as a famous TV host from Bangkok. The TV host came with a team to make a TV special program about Ariyachat (broadcast on Modern Nine TV on January 24, 2016, see WoodyTalk on YouTube 2016a-2016d). Wealthy devotees from Bangkok and other big cities, as well as foreign countries, came as usual. They played a major role in the ceremony as guests of honor.

Among them, twenty-five devotees were purposely selected to light the candles for *nawalokutaratham*, or the nine supramundane states, and the candles for *maha mongkhon*, or the great auspiciousness. They were key devotees of Wat Saengkaew, and included the owner of a snack company, the owner of a fire extinguisher sales and service company, the owner of an insurance company, the executive of a real estate

⁴² The procession cost around 800,000 baht (interview, head of an event organizing team, November 7, 2015).

⁴³ On August 28, 2015, during a visit to Wat Wang Mui in Lamphun city, I found a group of senior laymen who were gathering on the monastery ground to make *ton salak yom*. They said that Ariyachat paid for them to prepare it for the upcoming event at Wat Saengkaew.

development company (the sponsor of a procession at *thot katin*), and the executive of the Provincial Administrative Organization of Nakhon Ratchasima province.

The master of ceremonies called them *rattana ubasok* and *rattana ubasika*, or laymen and laywomen who were as precious as gems, in order to highlight their close relationships and their great contributions to Ariyachat. Accordingly, they took center stage at the auction for four paintings (from a famous artist), and two of Ariyachat's teeth⁴⁴. At the same time, at a distance, groups of local devotees from Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Phayao, and Lamphun provinces kept coming to pay homage and present their money trees.

For the local communities, Ariyachat redistributed his wealth, gained mostly from wealthy devotees, by conducting a great donation, e.g., 212,000 baht for computers and amplifiers to Mae Suai Hospital, 5,000 scholarships to students in Mae Suai district (sponsored by the Government Savings Bank), 5,000 blankets to cold weather victims, and monetary funds for local communities in Mae Suai district. The giving ceremony was held in high prestige on November 9 because one of King Bhumibol's grand daughters came to preside over it.

I witnessed this event, and was impressed by the thousands of people, mainly locals, attending the ceremony and activities inside and outside the ceremonial hall. Inside the hall, where Ariyachat had undergone *phithi suepchata*, wealthy devotees from afar sat in the inner area, close to Ariyachat, while local people, in a larger number, sat in the back. Wealthy devotees were seated on more comfortable sofas. They dressed beautifully with valuable ornaments and gadgets while some wore company jackets to promote their businesses. The local people sat neatly and concentrated on the ritual while the devotees from afar did not care much about it. I overheard some female devotees from Bangkok say to one another, "the ritual is in the Lan Na tradition but that's okay, we don't have to actually join it, just go to pay him homage and leave" [for a fun trip in Chiang Rai city]. Outside the hall, the monastery grounds were crowded with local people, Yuan and hill tribes, including representatives from the local and

⁴⁴ A Singaporean Chinese who ran a cooking gas business in Singapore, together with his Thai wife, also joined the auction. The four paintings sold for 199,999 baht, 49,999 baht, 88,888 baht, and 111,111 baht respectively, while the teeth pulled from Ariyachat were sold at 1,299,999 baht and 1,008,000 baht respectively.

provincial administration offices, teachers and school students in Mae Suai and nearby districts. They were really enjoying the food and drink provided by the ten almshouses. I also liked the food there more than at other *khru*ba events, because it was so varied and delicious.

4.3.6 New Characteristics of Modern *Khru*ba's Network

The networks of modern *khru*ba are typified by the following characteristics:

1. Consumption of multifaceted charisma since *khru*ba's networks comprise diverse groups of people who have come to *khru*ba with different expectations. According to several cases of *khru*ba devotees discussed above, their imaginings and expectations of *khru*ba's charisma can be categorized in three separable yet overlapping aspects: prosperity *ton bun*, magic monk, and development monk. It depends on which aspect is emphasized in each *khru*ba. For this study, magic monk is emphasized in *Khru*ba Noi's charisma while prosperity *ton bun* is emphasized in *Khru*ba Ariyachat's charisma, and development monk is emphasized in *Khru*ba Don's charisma.

This multifaceted charisma has allowed modern *khru*ba to have widespread reputations and more diverse connections since their charisma can be interpreted and consumed in many different ways by many different groups of people. It is unlike the networks of *Khru*ba Siwichai and *Khru*ba Khao Pi, which were limited to specific groups of people in a specific area, the Lan Na region. The consumption of multifaceted charisma signifies the deterritorialized sacred realm, as Amporn (2016) has pointed out in the case of *Khru*ba Bunchum that religion today is not limited to a sacred realm as traditionally conceived. Rather it has become a floating signifier which makes it possible for a sacred figure to be consumed, reconstructed and redefined by different groups of followers (ibid., 403).

2. The increasing significance of sacred-magic objects in the networks, as they serve as active agents. Magical and supernatural powers perceived and consumed through rituals and sacred-magic objects have become a crucial element in *khru*ba's charisma and networks, while the lack of these powers may have affected the charismatic status of

Khruba Don, as he may have been seen as less charismatic. Magical and supernatural powers are used to serve strong desires for material wealth and mundane success of devotees and followers, which are consistent with the growing capitalism-consumerism in modern Thai society and throughout the world. Tanabe and Keyes (2002, 6-7; also Stengs 2009) have suggested that modernity gives rise to fragmentation and has thus produced the crises of modernity, which have made people insecure in the present and anxious about future. This term implies a variety of individuals as agents, including Buddhist monks who have established for themselves new forms of religious practices, while laypersons from various backgrounds have created their own pieties to meet their needs.

Pattana (2012, 112) adds that in Thailand the craze for magic, amulets, and prosperity religions continued to mushroom after the economic crisis in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. However, as I mentioned earlier, magical power and amulets are not new, since we have also found them in the time of Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi. But the craze for magic and amulets at the present time has reflected the shift in the meaning of amulets. They have become sacred signifiers that spiritually and psychologically assure their holders that they will achieve their goal of material wealth, rather than providing them with protective power and moral strength as found in the past period (ibid., 96-100).

As repositories of magical and supernatural powers for modern crises, sacred-magic objects themselves possess the capacity to flow and connect people everywhere.

As I have demonstrated above, these objects are used and perceived by different groups of people in many different ways. They reveal the social construction of value that makes them the things-in-motion, moving in and out of the state of being commodities in the market and being sacred things. In this regard, sacred-magic objects have lives, just like a human being (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). Through the process of exchange and circulation of these objects, mutual valuation of objects has been formed as well as new connections between people and people, and between people and objects in different localities.

3. Network of translocality: According to the first two points, modern *khru*ba have crossed the Lan Na cultural boundary, while the sacred realm has been deterritorialized. Even though modern *khru*ba claim to be successors of the *khru*ba tradition which is considered the ethno-cultural identity of Lan Na people, they have also become sacred figures for global devotees. Regardless of cultural and religious backgrounds, the networks of *khru*ba can be found in every nearly corner of the world. As we have found in the cases of *Khru*ba Noi and *Khru*ba Ariyachat, apart from devotees and followers in Thailand, their networks have been formed in many countries throughout Asia, such as mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore and Malaysia. Their relationships have been maintained by the meetings arranged by *khru*ba in association with their nodes at the locales. Therefore, modern *khru*ba are reported to have made numerous trips to visit their devotees and followers inside and outside the country.

4. Horizontal relationships: The relationships between *khru*ba and their followers and devotees are horizontal because they do not need true doctrine or sophisticated *dhamma* teaching, but instead, good and immediate outcomes in the present life resulting from the veneration of *khru*ba. At the same time, there is no specific teaching or ideology from *khru*ba. It is in the vein of prosperity religions, as suggested by Jackson (1999a, 1999b), that wealth is more important than salvation. The relationships indeed lie in the ability of modern *khru*ba to capture and fulfill the hearts and minds of followers by using their magic and supernatural powers, especially through rituals and sacred-magic objects. This is a sensual/emotional process linking *khru*ba and their following, as suggested by Lindholm (1990/2002, 2013). Devotees and followers venerate *khru*ba, believing that the higher magical and supernatural powers the monks have, the higher results those who worship them will gain. Consequently, the more followers the monks have, the more popularity and wealth they gain. For foreign followers, the relationship is more like one between spiritual entrepreneurs and clients.

5. Network of fluidity, flexibility and decentering: According to Castells (2010; Taylor 2003), network society in the modern era is flexible, fluid, and decentered. As I have discussed through many cases of nodes in *khru*ba networks, they are located in many different locations with many centers. Significantly, there is no one who is more

important than others. Amongst the nodes, they might have or might not have connections with each other, but they can contribute to *khru*ba's reputation and the expansion of networks. Additionally, a node is also flexible and fluid since it can serve for one *khru*ba and many other monks at the same time, just as in the cases of Man and Kanya. In the case of Ariyachat, he was previously a node under Khruba Thueang's network, but at the same time, he had formed his own network inside that of Thueang. Sometimes nodes compete with one another and some detach from the network, such as in the case of Thueang and Ariyachat (Ariyachat detached from Thueang's network while Thueang's node of devotees detached from Ariyachat's network). Therefore, the networks can be continued and discontinued or they can be reconnected at any time, such as the case of Khruba Don and Kai.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that in the *khru*ba context, there is a continuation of networks in local communities who have a strong belief in Khruba Siwichai and *ton bun*. They have also followed the disciples and successors, directly or indirectly, of Siwichai. Hence, even though the network of wealthy devotees and followers in big cities is increasingly important, the network of local people in the North is also important as a fundamental source of charisma in the *khru*ba tradition. In this sense, modern *khru*ba have to work wisely in order to balance both major groups in the networks.



Figure 4.5: In the procession of Khruba Ariyachat at the *thot kathin* festival in 2015, people were fighting over hundreds of banknotes thrown into the sky by Ariyachat.

Source: author



Figure 4.6: In the procession of Khruba Noi's *thot kathin* festival in 2015, two sponsors were seated in an elaborate chariot.

Source: author



Figure 4.7: Khruba Noi performing *phithi suepchata* for Chinese Malaysian believers during a meeting in Malaysia in 2016.

Source: Facebook @Watsridonmoon, posted on July 19, 2016



Figure 4.8: Khruba Don in a procession presenting *salakkaphat* (*tan kuai salak*) to Wat Don Mun in Mae Ramat district, Tak province on October 25, 2015.

Source: author

4.4 CONCLUSION

Having a large group of devotees constituted as networks is one of the main elements in, and testimony to, the charismatic status of *khruba*. Even though networks of the former-day *khruba*, Siwichai and Khao Pi, were characterized by informality and heterogeneity in terms of devotees and followers, and expectations of *khruba*, their networks were still limited to specific groups of people within the specific area- the Lan Na region. It was because of the ideology of the movements which principally aimed at (1) resisting the centralization of the *sangha* and the centralization of the state by the Siamese authority, and (2) revitalizing Buddhism in Lan Na.

In contemporary society, the networks of modern *khruba* are more complicated. We have found both the continuation of and the departure from *khruba* networks in former days. The continuation is found amongst the local communities in the North, who have a fervent belief in Khruba Siwichai and *ton bun*. They have also followed the disciples and successors, in direct or indirect ways, of Siwichai, and have served as a fundamental source of charisma in the *khruba* tradition, including that of modern *khruba*. As for the departure, the networks of modern *khruba* are typified by the following new characteristics: (1) consumption of multifaceted charisma,

(2) an increasing significance of sacred-magic objects as active agents in the networks, (3) translocality, (4) horizontal relationships, and (5) networks of fluidity, flexibility and decentering. Thus, even though wealthy devotees and followers in big cities, as well as in foreign countries, have become increasingly important for the wide reputation, wealth, and growth of networks of modern *khru*, success in the construction of charisma and networks depends on the ability to work wisely in balancing both groups.



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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation posits that *khru*ba should be reconceptualized as actors in the local Lan Na region who have demonstrated the articulation of the *khru*ba tradition and global culture. *Khru*ba have undergone a period of flourishing during the past three decades under the context of modern and globalized society. In order to respond to this social and cultural transformation and to be in accord with diverse expectations, modern *khru*ba have relied on different practices and activities along with the strict *dhamma* practices and construction and renovation of religious monuments that were formerly used to explain sources of their charisma in Lan Na Buddhism. Moreover, the proliferation of modern *khru*ba implies that the term *khru*ba is still meaningful and that it continues to play a crucial role in modern Thai society. The dissertation was conducted through the qualitative research method. This final chapter discusses the main research findings, critical debates, and recommendations for future studies.

5.2 MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

This dissertation has investigated the process of constructing the charisma of modern *khru*ba and illuminated the transformation in *dhamma* practices, religious activities, and the role of religious networks in contemporary Thai society. The study situates modern *khru*ba in the context of modern, globalized society, which is characterized by translocalities and transnationalization, flows of people and information, electronic media, the decline of state control of religion (the *sangha*) but strong nationalism, and heterogenization of religious beliefs and practices.

In the dissertation, modern *khru*ba are analyzed as actors in the articulation of local knowledge (the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism) and global culture (e.g., popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, Buddhist public leisure culture, and global Buddhist ecumenism). The rise of modern *khru*ba in the North of Thailand is part of a global phenomenon, as the dialectics to modernity and disenchantment of the world.

The dissertation reveals the dual identity of modern *khru*ba which consists of both the continuation of, and the departure from, the *khru*ba tradition and the Lan Na Buddhism idealized by Khruba Siwichai. Five crucial elements are analyzed in the construction of charismatic and authentic *khru*ba of the present time: (1) the discourse of the succession in Khruba Siwichai's lineage, (2) sacred biographies using the *ton bun* narrative), (3) grandiose monasteries, (4) heterogeneous practices and activities, and (5) religious networks. Further in line with the three research objectives, this section discusses the main research findings pertaining to modern *khru*ba, construction of charisma, and religious networks.

5.2.1 Traditional and Modern Sources of Charisma

In terms of *khru*ba's charisma, Khruba Siwichai has been established as the imagined ideal of *khru*ba or "the *khru*ba role model" representing Lan Na ethno-cultural identity. This imagined ideal reflects Khruba Siwichai's great influence on the perception of *khru*ba among modern *khru*ba as well as Thai people in general, as suggested by Isara (2011) and Nattapong (2016). Khruba Siwichai is the most renowned *khru*ba in Thai Buddhist history and recently he has become revered as a saint and as the spirit guardian of Lan Na. The constructing of charisma of modern *khru*ba has revealed the transition from Khruba Siwichai's charisma towards becoming *traditional charisma*. Traditional charisma refers to the claim of acquiring *khru*ba's charisma from Khruba Siwichai through the traditional manner in order to retain the faith of followers (Weber 1988; Taylor 2012), especially amongst traditional followers in the Lan Na Buddhist world. Therefore, modern *khru*ba's charisma (as the successors) is not exclusively constructed by an individual *khru*ba himself. One of the main sources of charisma relies heavily on a belief on the part of the followers that there is virtue in the sanctity of practices and charismatic authority, which are symbolically transferred to the next in line. Moreover,

the implicit identification with Khruba Siwichai through rumors of his reincarnations is clearly demonstrated through the discourse of succession in his monastic, and through the sacred biographies of modern *khruba* by using the *ton bun* narrative in chapter 3.

Both the *Ton bun* narrative and the display of supernatural potency found in the sacred biographies of modern *khruba* have also confirmed the importance of the local Buddhist tradition, which is characterized by a strong belief in *ton bun* (literally “person with merit”), as well as by the possession of magical and supernatural powers. This idea is one of the significant tools underlining the charismatic status of modern *khruba* who are considered to be endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.

Nonetheless, modern *khruba* have realized that the successors cannot acquire the same aura as Khruba Siwichai. Hence, a set of rules and practices have been developed to identify the next charismatic figures. As I have discussed throughout the dissertation, the external elements of monastic style, the *nirothakam* practice, and the construction and renovation of religious monuments are used as symbolic practices to identify with the monastic lineage of Khruba Siwichai (see also Nattapong 2016).

However, to respond to social and cultural transformation and to cater to the heterogeneous expectations of different types of people in the current situation, the constructing of charisma cannot be accomplished by relying only on traditional charisma. Other essential components are modern sources of charisma acquired through the redefinition, re-evaluation, and re-interpretation of the *khruba* tradition by modern *khruba* themselves. The lack of both historical sources for the *khruba* tradition and its teachings and practices, as pointed out by Isara (2011), allows room for modern *khruba* to develop their own *khruba* styles. As I have discussed in chapters 3 and 4, modern *khruba* have combined the traditional charisma of the *khruba* tradition with values of global culture in their religious practices and activities. Popular Buddhism incorporates the supernatural power of spirit deities, the magic of animism, supernaturalism, folk Brahmanism, and Chinese deities (Pattana 2008, 2012) to serve the strong desire for material wealth and mundane success of prosperity religions (Jackson 1999a, 1999b), especially amongst the middle and upper-middle classes in Thailand and around

the world, regardless of religious backgrounds. These followers have become the main supporters contributing to the wealth and the wide reputations of modern *khru**ba*. This process includes making use of advanced communication devices, mass media, and advanced transportation in the construction of charisma.

Furthermore, the process of redefining, re-evaluating, and re-interpreting the *khru**ba* tradition has signified the increasing importance of magic and supernatural powers. These powers have been emphasized heavily in every aspect of *khru**ba*'s practices and activities, including those involving sacred-magic objects, to display the continuation of a long practice in the local Buddhist tradition and the potential to solve existing problems of devotees and followers who feel insecure in the present and anxious about future (Tanabe and Keyes 2002). Nattapong (2016) has suggested that devotees and followers of *khru**ba* in contemporary Thai society have experienced uncertainty in at least four major areas: occupation and income, life and family, social welfare and public health, and social inequality (p. 279-280).

Therefore, the construction of charisma illustrates the transformation of the *khru**ba* tradition and *dhamma* practices in contemporary Thai society, which consequently, has made *khru**ba* translocal. Hence, the term “modern *khru**ba*” is introduced in this dissertation in order to highlight their adaptability and flexibility as they have deployed Khruba Siwichai as a fundamental source of charisma and, at the same time, as a point of departure, making it possible for modern *khru**ba* to be consumed and re-interpreted by different groups of followers (see also Amporn [2016, 2017] and Kataoka [2017] in the case of Khruba Bunchum). The charisma and reputation of modern *khru**ba* have relied on various sources, traditional and modern, rather than only on the strictness in *dhamma* practices and the construction and renovation of religious monuments that were previously used to explain sources of *khru**ba*'s charisma in Lan Na Buddhism. Moreover, modern *khru**ba* have represented the re-enchantment of magic-irrational beliefs which subvert and undermine imperial formal-rational logics and processes (see Jenkins 2000).

It is worth noting that even though they are modern *khru**ba*, I suggest that they cannot be viewed as a unified group since they have varying degrees of being “modern” or

degrees of departure from the *khru*ba tradition idealized by Khruba Siwichai. In my discussion of the three modern *khru*ba, I pointed out that Noi and Ariyachat have demonstrated a high degree of engagement with magical arts and prosperity religions while their networks are spreading to cover the middle and upper-middle classes in many countries who are marked their strong capitalist-materialist ambitions.

At the same time, Khruba Don is more traditional and has a lesser degree of engaging in prosperity religions and magical arts. He has never produced his own amulets.

He focuses more on the local network in the North while having a small group of wealthy devotees from other regions. Moreover, he is skeptical about the practice of *nirothakam* of Khruba Noi, Khruba Ariyachat, and other *khru*ba.

However, as I have demonstrated in chapter 3, Khruba Don has also departed from what is traditionally perceived about *khru*ba. Although he focuses more on construction works and has a strong connection with local followers, including the Karen, he keeps reproducing a wide range of sacred-magic objects which are claimed to be the original creation of Khruba Khao Pi. We also found a form of prosperity cults in robe-changing ceremonies, both private and official, in which the mummified body of Khruba Khao Pi is treated as a source of magical power to bring luck, material wealth, and success, especially among the middle and upper-middle classes.

Like his master, Khruba Wong, Don has a flexible view of the *khru*ba tradition. He has abandoned most of the teachings and practices of Khruba Khao Pi (see Apichai Khao Pi 1951, 1956, n.d.) while eagerly promoting the standardized ones. These *khru*ba have thus fallen into the category of “modern *khru*ba” as they possess a dual identity consisting of both the continuation of, and the departure from, the *khru*ba tradition and the Lan Na Buddhism idealized by Khruba Siwichai but in varying degrees. Here we have more a traditional *khru*ba like Don, a popular magic monk like Noi, and a prosperity *ton bun* like Ariyachat in the continuum of modern *khru*ba.

5.2.2 Contestation of *Khruba*'s Charisma

The ongoing process to construct the charisma of modern *khruba* can be regarded as a contestation. Three separable yet overlapping areas of contestation are discussed below.

1). As I have demonstrated in chapter 2, the meaning of *khruba* is one in which there are two major viewpoints of *khruba* - essentialist and modern - contesting to create a definite and valid meaning of *khruba* for society. While modern *khruba* believe that *khruba* could survive by adaptation and interaction with modernity, people of the essentialist view have argued that *khruba* is a cultural heritage which should be preserved and protected from the taint of modernity and consumerism. This contestation is also on the ground of the transition of charisma of Khruba Siwichai towards becoming traditional charisma of the successors since the two standpoints are contesting to set rules and practices identifying the next “authentic” *khruba* in Siwichai’s monastic lineage. Nonetheless, neither group can claim the absolute right.

2). In connection with the first area, the contestation is also found among modern *khruba* themselves. It is based on the same fundamental point that no one can claim the absolute right regarding the creation of the valid meaning of *khruba*, or how to be “authentic” *khruba*. Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that modern *khruba* are not a unified group and they usually have come into conflict with others. Most of the time their conflicts center on (1) deviant practices and (2) commercialized forms of Buddhism. The latter include, particularly, a series of scandals about immoral behavior, such as sexual relationships with male followers, drug abuse and drug trade, and conflicts with nearby communities. Numerous failures of modern *khruba* especially the young ones, in construction projects or *nirothakam* practice, for example, are explained by modern *khruba* and their followers as that the charisma of individual *khruba* was simply not sufficient (Thai: *barami mai thueng*). It is mainly because they are the “fake” *khruba*. Therefore, combined with religious practices are magnificent monastery buildings, the popularity of amulets, large amounts of money donations, and worldwide followers all of which serve as powerful tools of individual *khruba*, who together with their devotees and followers, proclaim authenticity, contesting other

*khru*ba as well as the discourse of *khru*ba *uk kaet* (literally “being ripened by ripening gas”) from the opposite standpoint.

3) In a broader picture, modern *khru*ba have more in common with popular monks in the North who have no connection with the *khru*ba tradition (e.g., Wo Wachira Methi of Rai Choen Tawan in Chiang Rai province or Luang Ta Ma of Wat Tham Mueang Na in Chiang Dao district of Chiang Mai province). Arguably, identification with Khruba Siwichai helps build a brand name and brand identity in a highly competitive market to attract devotees, wealthy patrons and funding, as well as tourists. This suggests that the construction of *khru*ba’s charisma is not only about distancing from ordinary village monks but also about modern *khru*ba distancing themselves (competing with) other renowned charismatic monks. Constructing gigantic statues of the Buddha or of Buddhist monks, mass-producing amulets, and organizing splendid rituals and ceremonies can be viewed as part of this contested process. Examples are Luang Ta Ma’s ongoing construction of a standing Buddha image 59 meters high and the reproduction of amulets and symbols of the late charismatic monks, such as Luang Pu Thuat, as a form of “franchise Buddhism”.

5.2.3 Networks of *Khruba*

With regard to the networks of *khru*ba, the findings reveal that networks have always played a crucial role for *khru*ba’s charisma and in *khru*ba’s movements since in the time of Khruba Siwichai. Nonetheless, even though networks of the former-day *khru*ba were characterized by informality and heterogeneity in terms of devotees and followers, and expectations of *khru*ba, their networks were still confined to the specific groups of people within the specific area, the Lan Na region. Modern *khru*ba’s networks have illustrated the continuation of networks from the past, specifically among local people who have a strong belief in *ton bun* and Khruba Siwichai (traditional charisma through the discourse of succession and use of the *ton bun* narrative). However, at the same time, modern *khru*ba’s networks are also typified by new characteristics: (1) the consumption of multifaceted charisma, e.g., development monk, magic monk, and *ton bun* in prosperity religions, signifying a deterritorialized sacred realm, since a sacred figure can be consumed, reconstructed, and redefined by different groups of people;

(2) the increasing importance of sacred-magic objects in the networks, revealing the social construction of value of the objects that enables them to flow and connect people in many different locations as active agents; (3) translocality, which recognizes modern *khru*ba as sacred figures for global devotees, regardless of cultural and religious backgrounds; (4) horizontal relationships, illuminating a sensual/emotional process formed between *khru*ba and followers which is usually based on supernatural potency, not sophisticated *dhamma* teachings or specific ideology; and (5) networks of modern *khru*ba which are fluid, flexible and decentering.

5.2.4 Transformation of the *Khru*ba Movement

In relation to subtopic 5.2.3, *khru*ba movements in the past, of *Khru*ba Siwichai and *Khru*ba Khao Pi, were characterized by the ideology to (1) resist the centralization of the *sangha* and the centralization of the state by the Siamese authority, and (2) revive Lan Na Buddhism which represents ethno-cultural identity of Lan Na. *Khru*ba Siwichai as well as *Khru*ba Khao Pi had mobilized the movements by travelling throughout the region, most of the time to rural, mountainous, and hard-to-reach areas to connect people, not only Yuan but also other ethnic groups, such as Karen. Messages of the movement were expressed through the organization of major efforts to construct and/or repair Buddhist buildings and monuments or to create their own Buddha Land, and the ordinations of novices and monks to establish their networks of monastic lineage. These messages included the teachings and practices which were highlighted as local knowledge as well as Lan Na cultural heritage. They had gained a large group of followers throughout the region who were provoked by a combined belief in *ton bun* and Ariya Metteyya in the time of crisis and the half-way mark of the life of Buddhism according to the Buddhist prophecy. A sense of belonging to Lan Na was formed through these actions while *khru*ba were seen as the charismatic monks of the Lan Na people, opposing those who conformed to the centralized *sangha*. Additionally, among ethnic groups who were marginalized by the state, *khru*ba movements were hope for better livelihood.

However, because of changing socio-economic context, *khru*ba movements, obviously after the demise of *Khru*ba Khao Pi (in 1977), are no longer driven by ideological

resistance to the state and the centralized *sangha*. As I have mentioned in chapter 4, *khru*ba, like monks in Thailand, are under the centralized *sangha* and conform to the Thai monastic order, obviously in the case of Khruba Wong as suggested by Kwanchewan 2010; and Gravers 2012, 2017). During the late Khruba Khao Pi period until that of Khruba Wong, the campaign to revive Buddhism in Lan Na and to create the Buddha Land was gradually redirected to serve the state's policy for development, education and infrastructure in this region in accordance with the launch of the first national economic and social development plan in 1961. After Khruba Khao Pi's passing away, those teachings and practices that were considered inconsistent with the standardized ones were gradually abandoned (by Khruba Wong and later Khruba Don and the former follower, as mentioned in chapters 3 and 4).

In recent times, Nattapong (2016) has suggested that the flourishing of *khru*ba during the past three decades has occurred in the context of Lan Na localism, in which Khruba Siwichai has been treated as the imagined ideal of *khru*ba for the present-day *khru*ba (whom Nattapong calls "neo-*khru*ba") to highlight Lan Na cultural identity (e.g., the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism). However, I argue that the flourishing of modern *khru*ba cannot be posited in the vein of Lan Na localism in the sense of a movement to highlight local history, local heroes, local culture, and local identity while opposing centralized government. Therefore, I suggest that modern *khru*ba have emerged under Lan Na localism but with strong loyalty to the Thai state, the monarchy, and the *sangha*. Thus, unlike Khruba Siwichai and Khruba Khao Pi, modern *khru*ba have emphasized the ethno-cultural identity of Lan Na only in certain aspects, e.g., language, arts, way of life, external elements of monastic style of Khruba Siwichai, and *nirothakam*, while identifying themselves as good members of the Thai nation-state and the national *sangha*.

As I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, many modern *khru*ba have been promoted to different levels of monastic titles in the *sangha* system (e.g., monastery abbot, *phrakhru*, or *phra rachakhana*) while many others are seeking to be promoted in the same way. In fact, modern *khru*ba, similar to many other monks in Thailand, have formed close connections with wealthy patrons, high-ranking government officials (civilians and military), ruling monks in the ecclesiastical offices at local and national

levels, and members of the Royal Family either for their career growth in the *sangha* or for wealth and fame. We have found strong reliance on such networks in three cases of modern *khrua* which has made them far removed from the ideology of the *khrua* movement in the past, especially ideological resistance to the centralized *sangha* and the Thai nation-state.

The study found that Khrua Siwichai's political movement to resist the Siamese State and the centralized *sangha* during the reign of King Chulalongkorn has not been discussed by modern *khrua*. Furthermore, in the context of political conflict between the Red Shirts and the Yellow Shirts during the past decade, their representation of Lan Na identity and Khrua Siwichai operates cautiously by not making a sharp contrast between the Lan Na and the standardized tradition, or anything that may seem threatening state security. The reason for this caution is that this political conflict is viewed as a region-based schism (mainly the northern and northeastern regions versus the central and southern regions). The North is generally viewed as the home of the Red Shirts as it is a stronghold of Thaksin Shinawatra, the ousted Prime Minister and his political faction. Therefore, if not careful, local monks might likely be considered Red Shirt monks by the opposite side as well as the state, which would affect their public image as charismatic figures at the national and international levels.

This situation signifies the transformation of the *khrua* movement from one of ideological resistance to the state and the centralized *sangha* to one that connects people in the former Lan Na region. It does so by selecting aspects of local Lan Na identity of modern *khrua*, such as the *khrua* tradition through external elements of Khrua Siwichai's monastic style, *nirothakam*, the *ton bun* narrative, or construction projects. While modern *khrua* have relied on strong connections with wealthy patrons from outside, the *sangha*, the state, and the monarchy, they have also retooled local Lan Na Buddhism to serve more materialist-capitalist desire of people in different groups.

The continuation of the *khrua* movement has been demonstrated through the connection with traditional followers who still have strong belief in Khrua Siwichai and *ton bun* in the North, as well as other Tai Buddhist communities in the Upper Mekong region. Therefore, modern *khrua* are still able to draw large groups of

followers in the Lan Na Buddhist world. Furthermore, ethnic people, especially in the borderlands, still have connections with modern *khru*ba as they are somehow considered a source of new hope for a better livelihood under state suppression and marginalization, as found in the cases of Khruba Don, Khruba Ariyachat, or Khruba Bunchum and Khruba Thueang. Their traditional followers have consequently served as a source of charisma in the view of wealthy patrons, the *sangha*, the state, and the monarchy.

Nonetheless, it should be noted here that the strong reliance on wealthy devotees from outside as well as close connections with ruling monks in ecclesiastical offices, high-ranking officials and army officers, popular politicians, celebrities, and members of the Royal Family might lead to a decline in the role of the community and the relationships between *khru*ba and local people, especially the traditional followers. As I have pointed out in chapter 4, modern *khru*ba have to work wisely in order to balance the influence of the two major groups.

5.3 CRITICAL DEBATES

Throughout my dissertation, I have argued four points, which I summarize below.

1. The proliferation of *khru*ba during the past three decades not only demonstrates the dynamics of Buddhist society within the northern region, but it also bears significant implications on national and the global dimensions. Modern *khru*ba represent a dual identity, the continuation of and the disjuncture from the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism delineated by Khruba Siwichai. By employing the concepts of modernity and translocality of Appadurai (1995, 1996), the correlations of the proliferation of modern *khru*ba with global culture (translocalities and transnationalization, electronic media, popular Buddhism and prosperity religions, Buddhist public leisure culture, and Buddhist global ecumenism) are demonstrated.

Additionally, modern *khru*ba represent the re-enchantment of magic and supernatural and irrational beliefs in modern society which has insisted that first, there are more things in the universe than are imagined by rationalist epistemologies and ontologies of

science and that second, the notion that formal rationality is always the “best way” is no longer dominant (Jenkins, 2000). Modern *khru*ba are part of the largest, liveliest, and most dynamic religious space in contemporary Thai and Asian society (Pattana 2008, 2012). This analysis has viewed *khru*ba through a wider and more flexible lens than those used in the past, which are have focused Lan Na Buddhism and Lan Na’s ethno-cultural identity alone and are, thus, too narrow and static for a comprehensive understanding of these charismatic monks and their followers.

Moreover, Lindholm’s suggestion (1990, 2013) that we pay more attention to the sensual/emotional process in the constructing of charisma helps us to understand the social process linked by emotional interchanges in the veneration of *khru*ba with individual experiences of magic and supernatural powers. This process reveals a connection between circumstances and the anticipation of charismatic status, or a matching capacity between *khru*ba and their followers.

2. The *khru*ba concept has never been linear or static. The *khru*ba concept has always been re-interpreted, redefined, and re-evaluated by *khru*ba as well as their followers since previous times in order to fit specific contexts. *Khru*ba’s charisma is, therefore, multifaceted. In this dissertation, the *khru*ba concept is re-interpreted, reconstructed, and redefined by modern *khru*ba and different groups of followers and believers in three separable yet overlapping facets: *ton bun*, magic monk, and development monk, and each *khru*ba emphasizes different facets.

3. *Dhamma* practices, religious activities, and the production of sacred-magic objects have shed light on the active role of modern *khru*ba, who are seen as adaptable and flexible in the way they are *khru*ba for global devotees. Moreover, these practices and activities has revealed the effort of modern *khru*ba to remain balanced in their process of serving as translocal *khru*ba as they interact with global culture, while remaining strategically loyal to the Thai state, the monarchy, and the *sangha*. This approach helps us to understand modern *khru*ba and their proliferation in the broader picture rather than looking through the lens of essentialism and Buddhist reformism, which consider modern *khru*ba and their proliferation a sign of moral decay and deterioration of the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism.

4. Castells's network society (2010; Taylor 2003) helps us to understand new characteristics of networks in the modern and globalized world. In modern *khru*ba's networks, the connections can be made by different levels of linkages around the world through the flows of information which are assisted considerably by modern communication technology, the Internet, and social media. The networks have become more diverse and transreligio-cultural since they include many groups of people who have diverse backgrounds and expectations of *khru*ba (e.g, traditional followers, Thai middle and upper-middle classes, amulet entrepreneurs and their clients, and believers in foreign countries). The relationships in the networks are horizontal while the connections are flexible and fluid both between *khru*ba and followers (as nodes of the networks) and between followers, connected, disconnected or reconnected at any time. Additionally, each node is independent of the others.

Furthermore, apart from human agents, sacred-magic objects are recognized as active agents. The idea of the social life of things of Appadurai (1986; also Kopytoff 1986) allows us to consider the social construction of the value of sacred-magic objects and acknowledge their potential to form relationships between people and objects and between people and people.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This dissertation has investigated the articulation of local knowledge (the *khru*ba tradition and Lan Na Buddhism) and global culture in constructing multifaceted charisma in the modern and globalized world. Many issues discussed here are often neglected by mainstream studies. In order to enhance the study of charismatic monks in the Lan Na Buddhist world, future studies can be made to explore the role of modern *khru*ba as conveyors of modernity and Thai ways of being Buddhist. As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, modern *khru*ba, including Bunchum and Thueang, have good relationships with local *sangha* in the eastern Shan State of Myanmar and Xishuangbanna of China. They have made numerous trips to visit local people and initiated many projects for religion and communities. These were regarded as the process of constructing charismatic status as well as forming networks. They linked wealthy sponsors in the big cities with monks and people in the rural areas. Modernity

is not only about a modern life style but also about heterogeneity in religious beliefs and practices, such as popular Buddhism and prosperity religions.



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- Inpan Maruean, a senior follower (Yuan) of Khruba Khao Pi, Ban Pha Nam village, June 25, 2015.
- Sukjai Trakunphatthana, a follower (Karen) of Khruba Khao Pi and Khruba Don, also a village headman of Ban Namdip Chomphu village in Li district, Lamphun province, June 26, 2015.
- Khruba Don Athakamo, abbot of Wat Pha Nam monastery in Li district, Lamphun province, July 4, 2015; July 30, 2015; August 28, 2015; February 27, 2016; March 1, 2016; August 3, 2016.
- Khruba Phan (Phrakhru Phinitisaratham), abbot of Wat Huai Tom monastery in Li district, Lamphun province, August 15, 2015.
- Khruba Soda (Phrakhru Phutthithamsunthon), abbot of Wat Mae Tuen monastery in Li district, Lamphun province, also the Deputy Ecclesiastical Governor of Li district, August 22, 2015.
- Dok Kaeomi, a senior follower (Karen) of Khruba Wong, Ban Dong Dam village, Hod district, Chiang Mai province, August 22, 2015.
- Six senior villagers (Yuans) of Ban Pha Nam village, together with Khruba Don, Phra Songkran and Khruba Chuan of Wat Pha Nam monastery, in a group interview, August 22, 2015.
- Phra Songkran, a fellow monk (Karen) of Wat Pha Nam monastery, also in charge of acting director for Pariyattitham School at Wat Huai Tom monastery, Li district, Lamphun province, July 31, 2015; August 23, 2015; November 3-6, 2015.

Male senior follower (Yuan) of Khruba Chum at Wat Chai Mongkhon (Wang Mui) monastery, Mueang district, Lamphun province, August 29, 2015.

Phra Athikan Winuwatwatthanasiri, abbot of Wat Chai Mongkhon (Wang Mui) monastery, Mueang district, Lamphun province, August 29, 2015.

Phra Prakop Bun, a fellow monk of Wat Mahawan monastery, also the patron of Wat Cham Khi Mot monastery, Mueang district, Lamphun province, September 4, 2015.

Miss Sally (pseudonym), a Chinese amulet entrepreneur from Beijing, PRC, September 14, 2015.

Siwai Putphasi, a senior follower (Yuan) of Khruba Khao Pi, Ban Huai Sala, Li district, Lamphun Province, October 11, 2015.

Mae Laing Kai (pseudonym), a close follower (Yuan) of Khruba Don, together with her husband (Thai), Mae Sot district, Tak province, October 24-25, 2015; November 3-4, 2015.

Male senior follower (Yuan) of Khruba Noi, Wat Si Don Mun monastery, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province, October 31, 2015.

Female follower of Khruba Noi, together with her son and daughter (Yuans), the sponsors of two pieces of *kathin* robes in the *thot kathin* festival at Wat Si Don Mun monastery, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province, November 1, 2015.

Female senior follower (Yuan) of Khruba Noi, the sponsor of one almshouse in the *thot kathin* festival at Wat Si Don Mun monastery, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province, November 1, 2015.

Nong Man (pseudonym), together with his mother Praphasi (pseudonyms), close followers (Yuans) of Khruba Don and Khruba Noi in Tha Song Yang district, Tak province, November, 4-5 2015.

Phra Wit, a fellow monk (Karen) of Wat Pha Nam monastery, Li district, Lamphun province, November 6, 2015.

Phrom, a follower of Khruba Don, Mae Sariang district, Mae Hong Son province, November 6, 2015.

Female visitor (Yuan) at Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, November 7, 2015.

A drone cameraman in the *thot kathin* festival at Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, November 7, 2015.

Head of the organizer for *thot kathin* festival at Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, November 7, 2015.

Female follower (Thai) from Bangkok in the heart installation of the Buddha images (*phithi sai huachai phrachao*) in the *thot kathin* festival at Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, November 7, 2015.

Na Siripha (pseudonym), a close follower (Thai) of Khruba Ariyachat from Bangkok, November 7, 2015; also via online Facebook messenger, December 31, 2015.

Khruba Ariyachat Ariyachitto, abbot of Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, November 8, 2015.

Female senior follower (Yuan) of Khruba Theung at Wat Dong Sima monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, November 9, 2015.

A salesperson at the amulet shop in Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, November 8, 2015.

Four senior followers (Yuans) of Khruba Yawichai during the monk ordination at Wat Phrathat Si Chom Thong, Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai province, November 23, 2015.

Female follower (Thai) of Khruba Ariyachat from Bangkok, December 9, 2015.

Male follower (Yuan) of Khruba Ariyachat in birthday celebration of Khruba Ariyachat at Wat Saengkaew Phothiyan monastery, Mae Suai district, Chiang Rai province, January 10, 2016.

Somdet Atyartham Khantharawangso (the supreme *dhamma*) of Mong Yawng *Sangha* (Lue), also abbot of Wat Ratchathan Luang Hua Khuang monastery, Mong Yawng, Shan State of Myanmar, February 23, 2016.

Khun Kanya (pseudonym), together with her husband and two daughters (Thais), the sponsors for the private robe-changing ceremony of Khruba Khao Pi at Wat Pha Nam monastery, Li district, Lamphun province, February 27, 2016.

Khruba Sam Nuan Chaiyamangkhalo (Phrakhru Palad Anon Athitathammo), abbot of Wat Tha Kradat monastery, Mueang district, Chiang Mai province, February 18, 2016.

Female follower (Yuan) of Khruba Noi in *nirothakam* at Wat Si Don Mun monastery, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province, February 18, 2016.

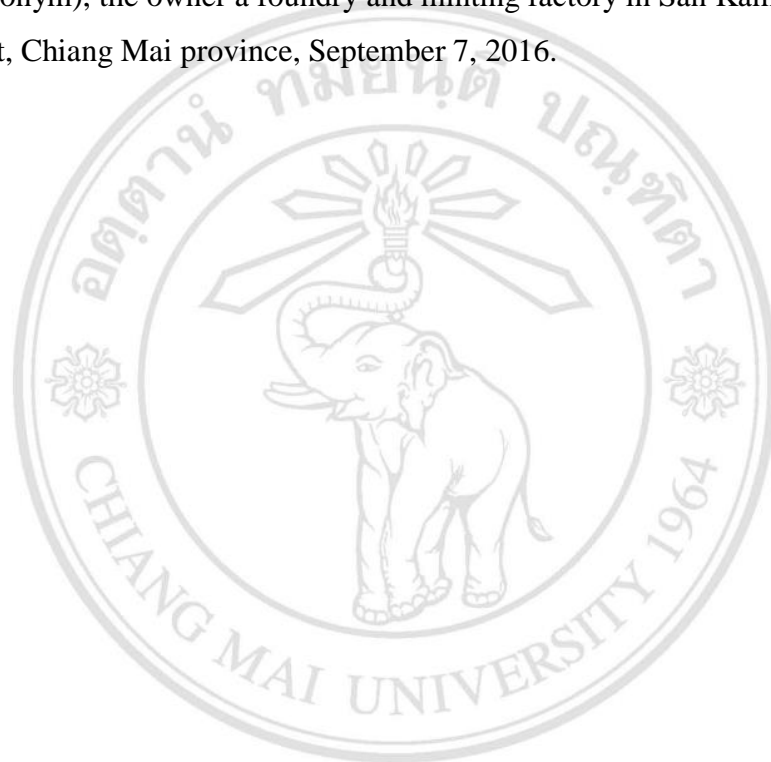
Khruba Noi Techapanyo, abbot of Wat Si Don Mun monastery, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province, February 18, 2016; March 4, 2016.

Khiao, a close follower (Yuan) of Khruba Noi, Wat Si Don Mun monastery, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai province, March 4, 2016.

Phrakhru Adunsilakit, abbot of Wat That Kham monastery, also Ecclesiastical Chief of the Tambon, Haiya, Mueang district, Chiang Mai Province, March 9, 2016.

Wilak Sripasang, June 1, 2016.

Khong (pseudonym), the owner a foundry and minting factory in San Kamphaeng district, Chiang Mai province, September 7, 2016.



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