

Chapter 1

Introduction

The cultural and social structure of society is formed by a complexity of factors. One of the fundamental factors is religion.¹ From a sociological point of view religion can be seen as the source of dynamic social change. Max Weber, in his famous study, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, demonstrated the influence of religious development on the transformation of society.²

Thai society has been historically shaped by Theravada Buddhism. Since the beginning of the thirteen century, Theravada Buddhism has played an important role as a state religion in this country. The influence of Buddhism on Thai society has, undoubtedly, a long history. Buddhism is recognized today as a key factor of social cohesion. The majority of Thais are Buddhists. It is known up to this day that to be Thai means also to be Buddhist. From the Thai standpoint, says Somboon Suksamran "Buddhism has long served as one of the most important source of political legitimation ...socializing, acculturating, and unifying forces in Thai society. It has profoundly influenced the cultural, economic and political development of the nation..."³

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Southeast Asian countries were faced with the challenge of the Western colonialism. Thailand presents a unique case in Southeast Asia because it has been able to maintain its independence. Only Thai Buddhism reached the present without severance from its tradition. Nevertheless, Thai religious tradition has undergone varying degrees of social, cultural, and political change, especially in the last century. A series of monastic reform was instigated by a monk of royal parentage who later left the monkhood to become King Rama IV, known as King Mongkut. The reorganization of the Sangha (the order of monks), involving a new system of monastic education throughout the country, was continued and institutionalized by the Supreme Patriarch

1 Evers, Hans-Dieter, *Monks, Priests, and Peasants*. (The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1972), Cover.

2 See Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. trans. by Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958a.

3 Suksamran, Somboon, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 6.

Wachirayan, a son of Mongkut and a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). These reforms had a tremendous affect on Thai Buddhism, and helped the Theravada tradition in Thailand to harmonize with the process of modernization that was taking place in Thai society.

At present Thai Buddhism continues to make adjustments, especially, toward a more dynamic and purposive role in a developing modern world. These adjustments are evident on the level of the educated elite both in and out of the Sangha, and among the upper strata of the urban Thai middle class, particularly, in Bangkok.⁴ It is widely held that the central figure of the dramatic change in Thai religious focus is Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who initiated a religious movement that has developed within Theravada Buddhism from the 1930s.

The dominant feature of the Buddhadasa movement lies in the interpretation of the Pali Canon⁵ by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa sees his work as an attempt to purify Buddhism by interpreting and criticizing the Theravada doctrine. Buddhadasa's movement is unique because as a religious movement it focuses primarily on the questions of doctrine and belief.⁶

Buddhadasa interprets Pali Canon intellectually, in a wider and more universal perspective; rejects many aspects of traditional Thai Buddhist thought and practice; and clearly distinguishes Buddhism from what he considers as superstitions and Hindu elements. Moreover, there is a strong constructive component which aims at a revitalization of the tradition by confronting the normative structure of Theravada Buddhism, and making its

4 In this context the term "middle class" is used in a broad sense, including officials who play important roles in many sections of Thai society. Many are Western educated and live in a Westernized style.

5 The Pali Canon, known as Tipitaka (three baskets), consists of Vinaya Pitaka (the monastic discipline which includes the core Patimokkha rules of discipline); Sutta Pitaka (the sermons and discourses of the Buddha); and Abhidhamma Pitaka (consists mostly of a complex arrangement and commentary on the discourses) see Tambiah, S.J., *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p 33.

6 Swearer, Donald K., "Reformist Buddhism in Thailand." in *Fifty Years of Suan Mokkh* Vol.I., ed. by Suan Usom Foundation (Bangkok: Suan Usom Foundation, 1982) p. 502.

teachings relevant to the contemporary world. It follows closely the shift of ideas and values of his audience by stressing on the positive autonomous action in the world. Religious action is identified with the whole of life. The internal quality of the person is emphasized. Buddhadasa declares that salvation is potentially available to any person. The achievement of the ultimate state of existence is not to be found in any kind of withdrawal from the world but in the midst of worldly activities. His interpretation is widely accepted and has spread throughout the country.

Buddhadasa's interpretations are enthusiastically supported by a section of the urban middle class which creates a strong base for the movement which may itself be seen as a religious revival. They contribute to religious discourse through the stimulation of interest in the new interpretation of Buddhism. Religious values are emphasized. Thus characteristic of the new situation in Thai society is that religion is no longer the monopoly of groups explicitly labeled "religious".

To a considerable degree, Buddhadasa's movement does not only manifest change in Thai culture and society but also suggests a stage of religious development which facilitate change.

Studying Buddhadasa's Movement

Buddhadasa's movement (Phutthatat line in Thai language), which began in the early 1930s, is widely held to be the most influential development within Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. In keeping with this view, scholars of contemporary Buddhism have devoted considerable attention to it. Their attention has been focused on two main aspects of Buddhadasa's work: his interpretation of Buddhism and of the social development, economic and political implications of Buddhist teachings.

Majority of the studies on Buddhadasa are devoted to his interpretation of Buddhist doctrine.⁷ The significance of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism is seen to be two-

7 Swearer, D.K., trans. & ed. *Toward the Truth*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971.

fold; on the one hand, making Buddhist doctrine relevant to the life of the layman in this world, on the other, returning to the pristine values and truths of Buddhism.⁸

Buddhadasa's interpretation is considered as an attempt to provide Buddhist teachings with a universal perspective by interpreting the central tenets of Buddhism as a way of life for contemporary man. To this end, all "metaphysical" interpretations of the doctrine, including the notion of the supernatural, as well as the post-canonical commentaries are rejected. On this point Tambiah noted that:⁹

"Buddhadasa's interpretations are compelling because they stem from one basic thrust, which is that for the Buddhist quest it is the world here and now that is relevant. This basic point has many ramifications and resonances: it calls for action here and now as being productive...the importance is Buddhadasa's adumbration of what he considers the central tenets of Buddhism as a way of life..."

The above studies point out that Buddhadasa's interpretation reveals a "rational" perspective of Buddhism and some striking analogies with the Protestant Reformation in Western Europe in the seventeenth century.¹⁰ Importantly, although these authors accept Buddhadasa's interpretation as one of the most enlightened and penetrating that has ever been produced in Thailand, they tend to believe that it has impact only among the intellectuals and a part of the educated middle class. The radically rationalistic teaching allows these intellectuals to rediscover the meanings of Buddhism and to search for appropriate means to

Jackson, P.A., *Buddhadasa: A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World*. Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1988.

Gabaude, L., Introduction a l'herméneutique de Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. unpublished Ph.D thesis, La Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, 1979.

Sirikanchana, Pattaraporn, *The Concept of dhamma in Thai Buddhism: A Study in the Thought of Vajiranana and Buddhadasa*. unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1985.

Phongphit, Seri, *The Problem of Religious Language: A Study of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Ian Ramsey as Model for Mutual Understanding of Buddhism and Christianity*. Munich, 1978.

Jacobs, M.C. Jr., *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa: A Thai Buddhist and the Psycho-Social Dialectic of Cultural Evolution and Transformation Through Religious Reformation*. unpublished M.A. thesis, The American University Washington, DC, 1974.

8 Tambiah, S.J., *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 411.

9 Tambiah: 1976, pp. 411-412

10 Mulder, Niels, *Everyday Life in Thailand* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1978), p. 152.

apply it in their daily lives and activities.

The other main thrust of the studies has been to generally acknowledge that Buddhadasa's interpretation of social development, education, economics, and politics as representative of, and based on central Buddhist teachings. Comparisons are central to Buddhadasa's interpretations. For instance, the comparison between Dhammic Socialism of Buddhadasa and Buddhist Socialism in Burma or Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka.¹¹ Many public and university seminars are held to discuss these concepts, and their application to Thai society. Buddhadasa's interpretations of economics and politics are very controversial, partly because they are seen as an attempt to offer a Buddhist utopia or a perfect society in this world.

The consideration of Buddhadasa's teaching as a catalysing "religious movement" -its origin and development, activities and its impact on society- has been neglected. Here I use the term "religious movement" to cover groups which, based on theological considerations, promote a particular religious or philosophical world view.¹²

In my opinion, studies which concentrate merely on the innovative ideas of Buddhadasa are inadequate in understanding the process of religious change and its relationship to change in other social spheres within the modern Thai context. Moreover, the formation of new religious ideas and practices should not be considered as an isolated event.

Max Weber's analysis of religions, especially Protestantism, demonstrated the influence of religious ideas, in particular "Wirtschaftsethik" on the rise of modern society. He also made clear that among the most important carriers of such religious ideas are various religious movements. Although most of Weber's works dealt explicitly with the relation of the Protestant Ethic to the economic sphere his work on religion in Asia contains extremely

11 See Swearer, D.K, ed. *Dhammic Socialism* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1986). Preecha Piampongsarn, *Sertasaat Chao Put* [Dhammic Economics: Socio-Economic Philosophy of the Buddhists], (Bangkok: Social Research Institute, 1988). Seri Phongphit, *Thamma kab Karnmuang: Buddhadasa kab Sangkhom Thai* [Dhamma and Politics: Buddhadasa and Thai Society], *Thammasat Journal*, March 1981.

12 Barker, Eillen, *New Religious Movements* (London: HMSO Publications, 1989), p. 145.

important analyses of the influence of the political ethic of the great religions on the institutional settings of societies.¹³

Bellah has also pointed out that religion is very bound up with social processes, especially in Asia, where religion still largely shapes the traditional forms of culture, and is deeply involved in social and personal life.¹⁴ It often has profound implications for encouraging or inhibiting economic, political and social developments.¹⁵

Some contemporary research argues that not all religious movements necessarily have direct impact on broader institutional organizations or promote fundamental changes in social and cultural structures. Nevertheless, when such "intellectual" interpretations are generated at the traditional and indigenous rather than the imported level they must be taken seriously. The expansion of Buddhadasa's movement among the intellectuals should not be simply identified as primarily reflected in the religious sphere. Buddhism occupies a central place in the Thai social system in which 95 percent of the population are Buddhists. Therefore religious change cannot be isolated, but interacts with other social institutions to create change in Thai society. The formation and the development of Buddhadasa's movement allow us to raise many interesting questions. Through a study of Buddhadasa's movement we can gain insights into religious innovation and the process of social change in contemporary Thailand.

13 Eisenstadt S.N. ed., *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization*. (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

14 Bellah, R.N., *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), Introduction.

15 Spencer, Robert F., "Introduction: Religion in Asian Society," in *Religion and Change in Contemporary Asia*. Spencer, Robert F. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 11.

Studies in the Sociology of Religious Movements

The study of religious movements has grown out of and remains inextricably related to the much broader effort to understand the mechanism or process by which religious movements first appear. There is a general interest in the appearance of religious innovation because it is thought to represent an instance of cultural adjustment that may have significant ramifications for societal values. The production of variations in religious forms serves as a starting point for examining the interconnections between specific types of religious symbolism and social environment.

Social science studies of religious movements are generally formulated at two levels: the structural and the individual. The first attempts to answer the question: Why do religious movements occur? The second tries to answer the question: Why do people join them?¹⁶

Among the various attempts to deal with this issue is the way sociologists open up important discussion on the dimensions of religious movements, particularly their systematic studies closely related to the formation of the religious movements in modern societies. Studies which focus on the formation of the religious movement are mostly based on an application of theories concerning the relationship between social change and religious functions. Thus the emergence of a religious movement is often interpreted as a response to social disruption and personal anxiety in times of rapid social change. In other words, religious movements arise because traditional religion and society are disrupted by radical social change; which creates an anomie or normlessness. Two systematic studies will now be selected as representative of this treatment. J. Milton Yinger's The Scientific Study of Religion¹⁷, and Robert Wuthnow's The Religious Movements and Counter Movements in North America¹⁸.

16 Wilson, John, *Religion in American Society* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), p. 94.

17 Yinger J. Milton, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Co., 1970), p. 170.

18 Wuthnow R., "The Religious Movements and Counter Movements in North America", in *New Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change*, ed. by Beckford, James A. (London: Sage

Yinger treats religious movements (in Japan) only briefly. He sees religious movements as responses to endemic social change. According to him, the significant cultural influences are closely related to individual motivation that predisposes many people to join religious movements. The effect of the simultaneous influence of urban migration, war, defeat, and occupation have been a great increase in anxiety and anomie because a sense of shared cultural values is difficult to maintain in such circumstances. Thus religious movements arise as antidotes to anomie.¹⁹

Wuthnow has explored religious movements in Canada and the United States where a number of religious groups have mushroomed since World War II. Wuthnow suggests that the rise of religious movements is closely associated with periods of rapid social and economical change, and times of religious and cultural unrest.²⁰ The formation of new religious groups may be understood as a response to a situation of strain within the system.

The above studies have considerable value for my present task, particularly the significant dimension of social change, which generates new religious ideas and practices. Interestingly, academic studies of religion are apparently in agreement on the fact that religious traditions are by no means static. Simultaneously, they accept that the rise of religious movements is not constant. Movements appear in some periods and not others. This is why it is important to investigate the connection between the emergence of innovative movements in religion and social conditions. When there arise crises that cannot be overcome by the dominant religions, the opportunity for new ideas is opened.

Although, the crisis-response theory has its strengths, its weak points are also apparent. The formation of religious movements, like all religious phenomena, is complex. Religious movements are not simple responses to socio-cultural crises. They should not be treated as automated products of external factors or as elements in an overreaching sequence

Publications Ltd., 1986), pp. 25-38.

19 Yinger: 1970, p. 170.

20 Wuthnow: 1985, pp. 27-28.

of historical events moving in a set direction. A problematic aspect of the crisis-response interpretation is that the importance of social conditions is mentioned as the single causative factor in the rise of religious movements. Do the influence of religious factors and the innovative ideas of the founders not play any role in the formation of a religious movement? It seems to me that this interpretation not only overlooks the role of religion as a source of social change but also denies that innovation is possible in history. The precise relevance of social conditions is less clear both in its estimation of the difference between the emergence of religious and of non-religious ideas and activities.

I agree with H. Bryon Earhart, who investigated religious movements in Japan. He concludes that religious movements are not merely responses to crisis; they are attempts at religious renewal through the interpretation of doctrine, which help people define their own lives and their world.²¹ The crisis-response interpretation is strong in accounting for the function of religion, but weak in accounting for religious significance. Therefore while, I do not deny that the crisis-response interpretation is relevant in the explanation of religious movements, I do argue that it is inadequate for comprehending the basic problem of the emergence of new religious groups.

So far I have discussed the limitations of the major approach of studies on religious movements. I now come to the problem of gaining a better perspective by drawing attention to two systematic theoretical statements on religious movements.

First is an attempt to give a new explanation about the formation of religious movements through a phenomenological approach. H. Bryon Earhart attempts to examine the emergence of what he calls "new religion" in Japan. The term "new religion" or "new religious movement" needs some clarification for it is problematic. He argues that new religious movements:²²

21 Earhart H.B., "The Interpretation of the 'New Religions' of Japan as New Religious Movement in *Religious Ferment in Asia*. Miller R.J. ed. (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1974), p. 184.

22 Earhart: 1974, p 170-2.

presuppose a prior tradition (establish religion)... they involve a radical break therefrom (not just an inner critique or reform)... the thrust of this break is towards renewal or revitalization. Finally, this results in a significantly new socio-religious organization.

Earhart tends to disagree with the approach that views religious movements as responses to social change.²³

various kinds of social change are directly related to the formation of religious movements... there were many religious movements, and the circumstance of their formation were too complex to be easily reduced to one grand theory....

But at the same time he did not deny the importance of social conditions. He suggests three interrelated factors which combine to produce an atmosphere in which religious movements can be born and nourished at least in the Japanese case:²⁴

- (1)The fossilization of the early tradition; the major "established" religions (Buddhism and Shinto) have become fossilized. The time was ripe for some forms of renewal outside of the existing organized religions.
- (2)Severe socio-economic hardship helped provoke the social crisis that raised the question of where people placed their real trust. This social unrest was a precipitating factor, in the sense of directing the timing of the new religious movements and, to a certain extent, in the sense of channeling the shape of the movements.
- (3)The personal innovation or creative inspiration of the leaders; it may be charismatic leaders or semi-divine leaders either rediscovering a vital religious element from the previous tradition or having received what they felt to be a new revelation.

According to his interpretation, it takes all three factors to account for the rise of religious movements. A religious movement could not arise if there were only a person with innovative ideas; the weakening of the traditional religion by itself, or even in combination

23 Earhart, H.B., "Toward a Theory of the Formation of the Japanese New Religions: A Case Study of Gedatsu-kai" in *History of Religions* 20/1-2, Aug-Nov 1980, p. 176.

24 Earhart: 1974, pp. 170-171.

with social factors. I argued that these factors interact to create a number of rather distinct new religious movements.

Although his works concentrate on "new religious movements" in Japan, he is still writing about Buddhist movements. Although the socio-economic situations in contemporary Japan and Thailand are quite different, they share some historical similarities. Socio-economic and political conditions from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century saw the genesis of many new religious movements in both countries. Some specific similarities are: the unbroken, continuous development of Buddhist tradition, the continuity of the monarchy; the lack of colonial experience; and indifference to reactions from the outside world.

Thus we may employ Earhart's theoretical concept to the formation aspect of religious movements. However, it is also necessary to understand how religious movements spread and persist after the conditions which gave birth to them have changed. When this happens it is possible for the religious movements to be studied on their own. However Earhart's approach is well suited to exploring the formation of religious movements in Thailand.

A second interesting attempt to conceptualize new religious movements is Bellah's analysis of the relationship between progress, religion, and modernization. Bellah discusses the terms "progress":²⁵

progress is an increase in the capacity of a social system to receive and process information from within and without the system and to respond appropriately to it. Progress, thus involves not merely learning but also learning capacity, an increasing ability to "learn to learn". This kind of learning capacity includes the "capacity for deep rearrangements of inner structure, and thus for the development of radically new functions...

From Bellah's standpoint progress requires some balance between structural

25 Bellah Robert N., "Epilogue in Religions and Progress in Modern Asia," in *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, Bellah, R.N. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 170.

continuity and structural change, so that the society will become neither rigid nor disorganized. The success or failure of a given society will depend very much on the nature of its inner structure, its deepest values and commitments. The degree to which the inner structures and values can provide identity, continuity, and coherence while actually encouraging profound structural changes is the degree to which they are conducive to progress.²⁶

"Religion" according to Bellah is a set of normative symbols institutionalized in a society or internalized in the individual personality. The central function of a religion is to act as a "cultural gyroscope", to provide a stable set of definitions of the world and, correlatively, of the individual, so that both the transience, the crises of life can be faced with some equanimity by the society and person in question. It is this stability, continuity, and coherence provided by commitment to a set of religious symbols that give religion such a prominent place in defining the identity of a group or person.²⁷

Bellah sees the identity function of religion as a cybernetic control mechanism in a society or personality. The religious symbols project what he calls a "set of limit images", which indicate what sorts of action are possible and desirable. These limited images operate to bring social and personal actions within the framework of a "higher power" or "wider meaning", so that some sort of action is encouraged and others avoided. Religion helps to place human action within certain boundaries.²⁸

From the above analytical definitions, we come to the question of how religion relates to the progress or the increase in learning capacity. Bellah pointed out that a religion with its general definitions of the world, society, and individual, especially its consequent set of limited images will have very considerable implications for the learning capacity of the society in which it is institutionalized or of the individual who has internalized it. Any particular religion is apt to contain all these implications in varying degrees and to shift its emphasis over

26 Ibid., p. 171.

27 Ibid., pp. 171-3.

28 Ibid., pp. 173-4.

time.²⁹

According to Bellah, while religion provides for stability, continuity, and coherence in society on the one hand; on the other, it inevitably changes in accordance with the whole process of socio-cultural transformation or the very degree to which societies were differentiated, religious symbol systems can evolve and become more rationalized. For Bellah the central dimension of religious evolution is what he calls the "rationalization of religious symbolism."³⁰ Important social and personal changes accompany this process. That is, on the whole, the more rationalized religious symbol system the more favorable the implications for progress.

The term "modernization" in Bellah's view is based primarily on his definition of progress. In defining modernization he argued that some discussions of modernity defined it too narrowly in terms of technology. Although technological development demonstrates the nature of endless innovation, it is not technology that grounds modern culture. Rather, it is modern culture that gives scope to technology.

The modernization of societies and personalities is not concerned solely with maximization of technical efficiency. For Bellah³¹

Modernization involves the increased capacity for rational goal-setting because it gives the system -society, organization, personality- a more comprehensive communications network through which it is possible to assess the needs and potentialities of all parts of the system.

Thus Bellah considers modernity can not be merely an external problem for religion. It is not something to which religion can merely adjust or not. Modernity involves a changed sense of identity and a new way of posing limited images. It is an internal problem for religion, in that it involves the heart of religious concerns. He also mentions that modernity in the West arose not only in the sphere of science and technology but also in the core of the

29 Ibid., p. 178.

30 Ibid., pp. 176-7.

religious tradition itself, namely the Protestant Reformation.

In the analysis of religion and modernization in Asia, Bellah explored the problem of tradition and change in terms of "Western impact". He saw the course of the nineteenth century as a difficult period for the whole of Asia, the collision between external pressures and indigenous traditions has very likely resulted in more or less structural change. Bellah viewed "Western impact" in the sense of the more superior social effectiveness of modern organization as having pressured premodern organizations and societies in Asia to question. Consequently, all previous forms of military, economic, political, ideological organization were criticized. Traditional values could no longer be taken for granted. Each society found its own identity becoming problematic. It was, of course, the intellectuals who felt earliest and more severely the cultural trauma of modern pressure. They were forced into a re-examination of their own cultural identity symbols, that is religious symbols.

In a consideration of the cultural response to modernization that occurred in Asian societies, Bellah suggested the four main cultural responses: conversion to Christianity, traditionalism, reformism, and neo-traditionalism.³²

(1) Christianity. Christianity through missionary and local converts, has had an influence on cultural modernization in Asia. A few traditional intellectuals were won over to Christianity. The proportion of the Christian converts is not large in number and there is great variability from country to country. However, Christian institutions, especially schools and colleges, transmitted modern ideas and expectations to the newly emerging educated elites and continued to circulate in the intellectual marketplace. Certainly, it has been an important catalyst for changes in Asian societies.

It is also clear that some forms of Christianity are in tension with many modern ideas and attitudes. As Western education spread, it became common for Asian intellectuals to use Western secular thought to attack Christianity.

31 Ibid., p. 195.

32 Ibid., pp. 203-215.

(2) Traditionalism. While modern conditions have actually strengthened traditional religion in many areas, traditional ideas have been declining among elite groups. Paradoxically, it is often among non-elite groups that religious ideas and attitudes characteristic of the traditional cultural elite have been spreading. Although this position tended to challenge or reject totally the whole of Western culture, a strong and growing traditionalism must be a definite barrier to modernization. However, to speak of "pure" traditionalism in the modern world can only be misleading, no group existing in the modern world can wholly ignore modernity or fail to be affected by it. The traditionalists overlap imperceptibly with the neotraditionalist -the former often do unconsciously what the latter do consciously, that is, utilize modern ideas and organizational forms for the sake of traditional value commitments.

(3) Reformism. Bellah defines religious reformism as a movement that reinterprets a particular religious tradition to show not only that it is compatible with modernization but also that the tradition vigorously demands at least important aspects of modernity.

This form of response is one of the most fruitful because it provides the potential impetus to modernization, while also providing a continuity with traditional identity symbols, thus furthering change with a minimum of traumatic disturbance. However, the position of reformism is unstable in that, it not only requires a quite sophisticated understanding of both modernity and tradition but also must reconcile some very deep tension between them. This problem is acute for reformism in Asia, where modernity has come largely from outside.

(4) Neotraditionalism. Neotraditionalism, according to Bellah, is a natural and early response to modernizing pressures in most Asian nations. One could maintain the traditional orientation as basic but utilize modern ideas and methods to defend traditional cultural values.

Neotraditionalism where it can generate intense energy and where that energy can be effectively channeled, may be a tempting alternative for modernity. But in some cases, the result has more often been stagnation than one-sided modernization because the elite has

utilized neotraditional symbols, though itself has remained more oriented to secular ideologies, simply to mobilize support to remain in power.

Of the four responses Bellah sees the role of religion in the modernization process in Asia, the category of reformism appears to provide the most appropriate perspective from which to approach the study of Buddhist reform movements in Thailand. Bellah characterizes reformism by the following traits: a return to earlier teachers and texts, a rejection of the intervening tradition, and an interpretation of the pristine teaching as advocating social reform and national regeneration.³³ It is basically a reinterpretation of the religious symbol system in the light of a variety of changes on both the social and personal levels. Looked at from the perspective of the concept of rationalization, reformism might be said to be the attempt to transform the particular cultural and institutional moorings which had characterized the tradition in order for its essential truth to be reinterpreted in the light of a new existential situation. We will attempt to examine Buddhadasa's movement through the use of Bellah's "reformist" category.

Data Collection, Organization, and Aims of the Study

Information gathered for this study is based on both documentary and empirical materials. A documentary research is necessary for collecting historical information. Secondary data, such as documents produced by Buddhadasa and his followers in the form of books, journals, pamphletes, articles, and newspaper reports were also utilized.

The field research covered four provinces in four regions of Thailand: Surat Thani, Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Chang Mai. Surat Thani in the South Region is where Suan Mokkh (Buddhadasa's temple) is located. Suan Mokkh, where Buddhadasa lives, is considered the center of the movement. Bangkok in the Central Region is where the main propagation centre is located. It is a highly strategic area for the dissemination of Buddhadasa's teachings and the expansion of the movement. Nakhonratchasima in the Northeast Region and Chiang Mai in the North Region were selected as areas of field research because here, more active member groups hold their activities and implement

33 Bellah: 1965, pp. 210-211.

development programs in the villages.

The qualitative data were collected through four main methods: interview, survey questionnaire, participant observation and case study. Though the majority of those interviewed are members of the movement, some observers and non-members were also interviewed.

This study is organized in eight chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the scope and purpose of the study, theoretical concepts, and methodology. Chapter 2, first, deals with a description and analysis of the historical background of the relationship between socio-political change and Thai Buddhism in the contemporary period. The second part of the chapter focuses on the rise of religious movements and their specific characteristics.

Chapter 3 explores the life history of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: his early life, social and educational experiences, and his life as a Buddhist monk. Through an analysis of his life experiences one can speculate on how he was able to formulate and develop his unique interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, and how his religious thought develops beyond the fabric of traditional Thai Buddhist teachings and practices. Chapter 4 focuses on the concept of Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism, the problems of the interpretation and his criticism of traditional Thai Buddhism. This chapter aims to answer the question why Buddhadasa considers it necessary to reinterpret Buddhist doctrine.

Chapter 5 is devoted to an analysis of the formation and development of Buddhadasa's movement, its ideology, structure, and activities. The movement's main characteristics, as well as the factors related to the expansion of the movement, will be investigated. This chapter attempts to understand what the movement's members seek to achieve. Chapters 6 and 7 are based on empirical research gathered during the fieldwork phase of data collection. The focus will be on the impact of Buddhadasa's movement at the community and individual levels. Thus Chapter 6 will describe what types of individuals are attracted to become members of the movement. Factors such as social backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations will be analysed. Which of Buddhadasa's teachings

particularly attracts them? How are their present religious views altered by contact with Buddhadasa's ideas? Finally in Chapter 7, the movement's developmental impact will be described by presenting the case study of Wang Nam Yaad village, Chomthong District, Chiang Mai. The villagers are exposed to the ideas of Buddhadasa through the resident forest monk who is his follower. We will analyse in what manner the monk adapts Buddhadasa's interpretation to the everyday life of Thai villagers. The last chapter (Chapter 8) presents the general conclusions of the study.

The study aims to examine two issues: first the formation, development, and social impact of Buddhadasa's movement; and second the implications of modernization in Thai society. These two issues will be treated as closely interrelated. The main questions are the following:

- (1) Why and under what conditions did Buddhadasa's movement come about?
- (2) What type of movement is it?
- (3) How did the movement develop and what were the factors which promoted and inhibited its development?
- (4) What is its function for the members, and why does it appear to be most meaningful for the intellectuals?
- (5) What is the social impact of the movement?

The particular hypothesis of this study is that Buddhadasa's movement has had and will continue to have a significant social impact on Thai society.