

Chapter 2

Social Change and Religious Movements in Thailand

The nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries were marked by colonial expansion in Southeast Asia. Thailand is unique in Southeast Asia in that it was able to maintain independence. However, the impact of colonialism led ultimately to the institutional reform of Thai society, dividing the era of traditional from the modern nation state.¹ The twentieth century, as Suwanna stated, is the turning point in the history of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand.² However, the mid-nineteenth century marks the initial stages by which one can trace the continuity of religious development. During this period, a religious reform movement, known as Thammayutnikai, emerged within the Thai Sangha parallel with socio-political modernization and the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in Thailand. This movement played a prominent role in the development of Thai Buddhism throughout the mid-nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries.³

This chapter therefore seeks to provide the historical context through which an examination of the relationship between socio-political change and the formation of religious movements in contemporary Thailand becomes possible. This in turn will enable an exploration of relevant aspects in the continuity and discontinuity of Thai religion.

In order to understand the relationship between socio-political change and the development of Thai Buddhism, it will be necessary to briefly consider the essential features of the reform movement (Thammayutnikai) which was established by a monk of royal parentage who spent twenty-seven years (1824- 1851) in robes and later left the monkhood to become King Rama IV popularly known as King Mongkut. The movement took "root" at the very top of the Thai Sangha, in a hierarchical society in which the "absolute" monarchy was supported by a secure traditional hierarchical polity.

1 See Wyatt, David K., *The Politics of Reform in Thailand* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969). Girling, John L.S., *Thailand: Society and Politics* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1981).

2 Satha-Anand, Suwanna, "Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand," *Asia Survey* 30/4, 1990, p. 396.

3 See Reynolds, Craig Jame, *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand* (unpublished Ph.D., thesis, Cornell University, 1972). Tambiah: 1973.

Mongkut and His Religious Reforms in the Nineteenth Century

Mongkut (1804-1868) was the eldest son of Rama II by a royal wife and was therefore considered by most as the logical heir of the king. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk at Wat Mahathat, a royal temple, in 1824. Shortly after his ordination Rama II died and one of his elder, half-brothers (a son of Rama II by a non-royal wife) was chosen to be crowned as Rama III. Mongkut decided to remain in robes but took up residence at Wat Samorai (now Wat Rachathivat), a forest monastery near the capital (Bangkok) which specialized in meditation rather than Pali studies. Apparently he was dissatisfied with the spiritual training because his teachers could not provide him reasons for the meditational practices they taught. He found that meditation and ascetic practices which are uninformed by learning were of little value. Thus, he returned to Wat Mahathat to take up Pali studies. He later became one of the leading Thai Pali scholars.

The study of the Pali Canon led Mongkut to see serious discrepancies between Buddhist scriptures and the actual practices of Thai monks. He saw that the Sangha of that time did not strictly follow the monastic discipline in the Vinaya Pitaka, but rather followed traditional practices. Most monks were in many ways lax, easygoing, unwilling to reform, and some important vinaya rules of conduct were being ignored.⁴ He was also anguished to find that Thai ordinations probably were invalid. He understood that the authentic line of descent from the Buddha for the Thai Sangha had been broken after the fall of Ayudhaya.⁵ He vowed that he would disrobe if he did not receive some sign that the monastic line of succession back to the Buddha had not been broken in Thailand.⁶ Shortly after making this vow Mongkut met with a Mon monk⁷ who was a chief of the Mon sect, living at Wat Bowonmonkhon, a temple near Bangkok. From discussions with him, Mongkut became convinced that the Mon

4 Nareumol Teerawat, *Nael-Kham-Kit Tang Karnmuang Kong Ratchakal Tee Sae* [The Political Thought of King Mongkut], (unpublished M.A Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1973), pp. 84-85.

5 Ayudhaya used to be the second capital of the Thai Kingdom (1350-1767).

6 Reynolds, C. James, *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*, (unpublished Ph.D., thesis, Cornell University, 1973), p. 79.

7 The Mon was an ethnic group with a long and venerable history in both Thailand and Burma.

monastic practice was closer to the original Buddhist practice as set out in the Vinaya. He returned to Wat Samorai to practice the new discipline and adopted it as his own and gathered a number of Thai monks of similar persuasion around him. They were reordained according to strictly defined ritual prescriptions and wore their monk's robes in the Mon style.⁸ In 1836 Mongkut was appointed abbot of Wat Bowonniwet by Rama III, his group settled there and formed the center of what was to become a new stricter "sect" (nikaya or nikai) within the Thai Sangha.⁹ Mongkut called his group of monks Thammayutnikai (Dhammayuti nikaya in Pali), meaning "those adhering strictly to the dhamma-vinaya" as contrasted with the Mahanikai (Maha nikaya) majority whom he deemed "those adhering to long standing habit".

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Mongkut's religious reforms were directed at upgrading monastic discipline (vinaya) and making it more orthodox. It involved changes in details of rituals and technical matters in the vinaya. The accent is on the correct procedures of the ordination ceremony,¹¹ correct pronunciation of the Pali language in recitation, the style of wearing the monastic robe, the fixing of the uposatha day (the days for special meetings of the order, and for recitation of vinaya rules) according to the real phase of the moon rather than according to the calendar, the particular size and the position holding of alms-bowl. Thammayut monks were expected to eat only food that was placed in their alms-bowls and produced an unappetizing mix of foods while Mahanikai monks accepted side-dishes offered separately from the rice placed in

8 The Mon monks wore their robes in such a way that both shoulders were covered. While the majority of Thai monks wore their robes to leave one shoulder bare. This style was adapted apparently to conform to a Pali textual reference that monks should not remove the outer shawl when entering a building. There is no prescribed style that can be attributed to the Buddha, see Tambiah, S.J., *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 210.

9 Tambiah: 1976, p. 209.

10 Kirsch, A.T., "Modernizing Implications of Nineteenth Century Reform in the Thai Sangha," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*. Smith B.L. ed. (ANIMA Books: 1978), p. 58.

11 Legitimate ordination has to take place on unencumbered land, but Mongkut saw that it was impossible to be absolutely sure that any in the Bangkok area was completely unencumbered. Hence, strictly considered any ordination carried out in Bangkok might be questionable. Mongkut had himself reordained under what he took to be impeccable conditions -in his case on a raft moored in a river and insisted his followers do likewise. This method, called *dal'hikamma*, was adopted because the raft on water was space untarished by private property rights (Kirsch: 1978, p. 58).

their alms-bowls.¹² The Thammayut monks were encouraged to attain some proficiency in meditation, Pali study and preaching extemporaneously using Pali stanzas as the themes rather than to read or recite memorized sermons filled with Pali words which laymen could not understand. They were very austere in following the 227 precepts of the vinaya while Mahanikai monks were more lax in this standards.

However, Mongkut's effort at religious reform also manifested another remarkable feature. Mongkut denied many traditional beliefs, particularly, Traiphumikatha (The Three World Cosmology), a famous religious text which had stood at the core of Thai traditional belief for centuries.¹³ He argued that the notion of heaven and hell which was described in Traiphum was superstition incompatible with Buddhism. Mongkut also employed a rational view of Buddhism to criticize various miraculous legendary stories concerning the Buddha's Life as irrational accounts. He asserted that Buddhism is a rational religion and there is nothing in Buddhism opposing scientific views that he had learned in his contact with the Christian missionaries both while in his monkhood and later as king.¹⁴

12 Kanungnit Chantabutr, *Karnkluanvei Kong Yuwasong Ruan Raeg 2477-2488* [The First Movement of Young Sangha 1934-1945] (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1985), pp. 10-11.

13 Traiphumikatha (The Three Worlds), a famous cosmological work composed in 1345 A.D. by a prince who later became king of Sukhothai.

In the Traiphum the universe was represented as consisting of an infinite number of solar systems, each depending on a central mountain, Mt. Meru. Around Mt. Meru there were belts of mountains and oceans littered with islands. The cosmos included three worlds which were divided into 31 levels. The highest world contained four levels, each level occupied by the high brahma deities (phrom in Thai). The middle world contained 16 levels occupied by lower grades of phrom deities. The lowest world consisted of 11 levels with human beings dwelling in the fifth level from the bottom. The six levels above the "world of mankind" were inhabited by beings of higher status than humans. Below it were hells, inhabited by spirits (phi) and demons (pret) of various sorts. The text describes the nature of each level, the conditions of existence for its inhabitants, how they came to be there and how they might change their status.

The central emphasis of the Traiphum was to illustrate the effects of good and evil kamma (merit and demerit). The destination of each category of beings and deities as determined by the kamma of each being. All beings were ranked, from demons to gods in a hierarchy of merit which accrued according to kamma. It stresses the people who have good kamma are rewarded, in contrast with those who acquire bad kamma, after death. Rewards and punishments for certain kinds of good and bad kamma are described. For example, when a person who has accumulated great merit died, he goes to a higher level in the three worlds, depending on the amount of merit acquired while he was alive. He might even go straight to a phrom level, if he had sufficient merit (Krisch: 1978, p. 55).

14 Krisch: 1978, p. 58.

It is interesting to note that while Mongkut criticized many forms of traditional beliefs as superstitious, in some respects the Brahmanical deities were still worshipped by Mongkut.¹⁵ The miraculous accounts credited to Mongkut himself at that time were not refuted by Thammayut monks but were widely accepted instead.¹⁶ Moreover, the doctrine of kamma and multiple rebirths (reincarnation) were emphasized amongst them. They also made a strong distinction between material world and religious activity.¹⁷ This interpretation is shared by Jackson who commented that Mongkut's religious rationalism was incomplete.¹⁸

Thammayut movement was highly divisive in character. It arose and developed in opposition to the established ecclesiastical authority of the time within the traditional Thai Sangha. Though Rama III had given Mongkut considerable support in his various monastic endeavors, the Mon style of wearing the monastic robe adopted by Mongkut troubled the King.¹⁹ It was out of fear that Mongkut might impose a "foreign" style of dressing on the entire Sangha that Rama III rejected Mongkut's candidacy as his successor to the kingship.²⁰

Mongkut left the Sangha and ascended to the throne on the death of Rama III in 1851. With a new role, he performed the traditional royal responsibility of supporting the Sangha as a whole. He did not impose the Thammayut discipline on the entire Sangha, but he clearly favored the Thammayutnikai that he himself had founded. Throughout the period of his rule (1851-1868) a series of religious and social reforms were carried out. He encouraged the introduction of western knowledge and technology which helped develop the structure of Thai society more in line with western practice. Simultaneously, a number of royal coronation ceremonies of divine kingship which were heavily Brahmanistic were replaced by a more Buddhist ceremony in order to emphasize the role of the king as a Buddhist monarch. This

15 Jackson, Peter A., *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 1989), p. 59.

16 Naruemol: 1973, pp. 99-100.

17 Krisch: 1978, p. 58.

18 Jackson: 1989, p. 45.

19 Krisch : 1978, p. 56.

20 Ibid., p. 58.

has had the effect of gradually changing the public image of the monarch as Dhammaraja (a king who rules in accordance with the dhamma) or the righteous king who ruled with propriety, justice, and impartiality that persists until the present day.

However, the effect of Mongkut's reforms which generated the new sect within the Sangha not only created dissension but also brought a historical twist to the model of the relationship between the monarch and the Sangha. All later kings after Mongkut favored the of Thammayut sect, and the members of the royal family were ordained into it.

The initial impact of Thammayutnikai was felt most strongly by the very limited numerical strength of religious and secular leaders in the capital, especially, among the princes and members of the nobility. In the year Mongkut left the monkhood to assume the kingship in 1851, there were 130-150 Thammayut monks and seven Thammayut monasteries, compared with 28,000 Mahanikai monks.²¹ However, the emphasis on the monastic standard base of the fundamentalist principle in its return to the original Buddhist practice had the effect of attracting interest in learning canonical texts, thereby producing canonical scholar-monks. And because of the royal patron, Thammayutnikai became more than just a group of monks seeking to tighten the discipline in their monasteries and among their followers. Its leaders later assumed important positions in the national ecclesiastical hierarchy and were very influential in activities.

The reform of monastic standards began to be translated into institutional forms to benefit the entire Sangha. In other words, the political support given to the Thammayutnikai greatly contributed to the expansion of its initial influence. Mongkut died in 1868. He was succeeded by his son Chulalongkorn whose long reign (1868-1910) brought Thai society into the modern world.

It is important now to analyse the socio-political change and religious development in

21 Achara Kanchanomai, *Karn Fuan-Fu Phuttasasana Samai Thon Rattanakosin 2325-2394* [The Revival of Buddhism During the Early Bangkok 1782-1851] (unpublished M.A Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1979), p.154.

two periods, each representing a distinct type of regime: from 1868-1932 (the period under absolute monarchy), and the constitutional era (1932-).

Socio-Political Change and Religious Development- 1886-1932

Socio-Political Change

The impact of Western colonialism upon Thailand was first felt during King Mongkut's reign. Since then, socio-political modernization has become the aim of Thai leaders. It was during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) that socio-political change along Western lines was carried out. The early years of his reform were marked by political conflict around the throne which arose from disagreements over the need to reform. To avoid direct conflicts with the old powerful nobility who disapproved of any changes that might harm their power, Chulalongkorn set up a Council of the State and Privy Council with advisory, investigatory, and legislative powers, in order to launch a series of reforms.

Both Councils were dominated by young members of the royal family and noblemen who were educated in a combination of traditional Thai and modern Western styles. This group, as Wyatt noted, was youthful and had a reforming zeal.²² Initially, the traditional Thai machinery of government (since the 15th century) which was multifunctional with overlapping jurisdictions and functions was transformed into a modernized bureaucracy. A loosely organized provincial administration which endangered the territorial integrity and independence of the kingdom was centralized. The centralization of local administration resulted in the imposition of Thai political control over the formerly semi-vassal states and brought about three rebellions in the north, the northeast, and the south.

While the government administration expanded, the government officials came into frequent contact with the masses both in the capital and in the provinces. Communication and transportation networks extended to the regions where security consideration were as

22 Wyatt: 1969, p. 67.

important as economic and administrative concerns. Western medical standards were widely adopted, hospitals were set up, a water-supply system was constructed, and importance of Western knowledge and technology were recognized. Foreign experts were brought in to help reorganize the police, legal and court system as well as to advise on education, financial and economic policy.

It was during this period that the major concern of government was national education. Modern education was introduced to the provinces where more than 90 per cent of the nation's population lived. Significantly, the task of expanding mass education was placed in the hands of the Sangha. A program separate from the Ministry of Public Instruction was established under the leadership of Prince Wachirayan, a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn and the head of the Thammayut sect. The traditional association between education and Buddhist monasteries was maintained, but the content of the new education was adapted to the changing world. Wat Bowonniwet, the birthplace and stronghold of the Thammayut reform sect became a center of teaching and training in modern education for a number of monks.

The traditional education in Thailand prior to the reform was characterized by the lack of system, and little secular quality. It was organized in monasteries in almost every village and town throughout the country. The education offered by the monks in all levels was free of charge. Classes were held when it suited the teacher-monk and pupil. The study centered on literacy, Buddhism and religious values.²³ Henceforth elementary schools were built in every province to act as the models for other schools; all monasteries were made places of study and abbots in every monastery were enlisted as teachers.

Monks taught monastic schools following the modern form and curriculum with government textbooks which provided not only a basic literacy and religious ideas but also modern mathematics, science, history and geography. Though the popular response to them at the beginning was extremely slow, by the turn of the century though there were 12,000

23 Ibid., pp. 66-67.

monastic schools.²⁴ Village youths began to attend such schools in their local monasteries. Importantly, textbooks attracted the interest of many monks as they prepared to modernize the modern educational system in their schools. The younger monks and novices in the process of completing their education also attended modern schools. There was also a growing literacy rate as textbooks were widely printed and provided to various monasteries.

Linked with the rapidly growing government bureaucracy, specialist schools for training civil servants were opened, for example a law school, a medical school, school for training police, postmen, foresters, civil servants for railways. For higher education teaching colleges and a military academy were established in Bangkok. Over the years a number of deserving and able "King's Scholars" as well as members of the royal family and sons of nobility were sent to Europe to study and obtain western training. Through all these channels, the emphasis on recruitment was placed on educational qualifications of a formal, Western standard; and it was this recruitment standard that defined the early twentieth century Thai elite.²⁵

The opening of the country for free trade through the Bowring Treaty partly encouraged a remarkably expanding rice cultivation for export by Thai farmers. Moreover, corvee labor was replaced by taxes and wage labor, and the abolition of "slavery" (typically a form of debt bondage), allowed free men to set up farms on their own. The government also granted exemption from land tax for newly cultivated holdings. Thousands of peasants worked in effect full time in growing rice for the marketplace.

Between 1850 and 1907, rice exports increased from about 5 percent of the total crop produced to 50 percent.²⁶ Almost all rice exports came from the Central Plain -only 2

24 Watson, K., *Educational Development in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Heinemann, 1980), p. 99.

25 By 1910, the 15,000 officials of the Interior Ministry outnumbered the 12,000 bureaucrats of which the entire salaried state bureaucracy had been composed in 1892. See Siffin, William, J., *The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional Change and Development* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), pp. 90-94. Wyatt, D.K., *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982), p. 220.

26 Ingram, Jame C., *Economic Change in Thailand 1850-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), pp. 40-42.

percent from the largely subsistence holdings of the North and the Northeast.²⁷ Peasants generated cash income by producing a rice surplus, which was sold to the local and the Chinese middlemen who in turn would sell the rice mainly to the Chinese major firms that were part of an international network of rice dealers. The population in the central region had increased and the country's wealth was much augmented. Alongside with the economic change was the increase of the Chinese immigration to Thailand.²⁸ At the lowest economic level they were urban laborers and artisans; at the high level they were middlemen in the staple export trades - buying, storing, and transporting rice- and in retail throughout the country.²⁹ While Thai peasants were prospering through rice agriculture the Chinese middlemen profited by the rice-export economy. There was obviously the division of labor between Thai agriculture producers, Chinese middlemen, and Thai (elite) officials.

It was also during this period that political ideas challenging the position of the monarchy began to be expressed. A group of Western-educated princes and officials petitioned to King Chulalongkorn in 1886 for an end to absolute monarchy and the creation of a constitutional monarchy. This was, as Chai-anan stated, a totally new attitude toward politics in Thailand -the first time in Thai political history that the Western idea of citizenship had been proclaimed. The King took their criticism well and agreed for the need to change but expressed his doubt as to the applicability of Western political models and practices since there were not enough educated men available to assume such a broad range of executive and legislative responsibilities.³⁰ If the introduction of Western politics was the solution what was really needed was reform from inside. Reform and modernization, but not westernization, should be brought about by education.³¹

27 Ibid., p. 44.

28 Chinese migrants had settled in Thailand since Ayudhaya period (probably earlier), but had began to immigrate in large numbers in the early nineteenth century. The Chinese population only in Bangkok in 1875 was estimated at 100,000, see Skinner, G. William, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 87.

29 Girling: 1981, p. 62.

30 Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Political History" in *Government and Politics in Thailand*, Xuto Somsakdi, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 27.

31 Watson: 1980, p. 92.

Democratic ideas, however, were not limited to the Western-educated group but also appeared among the commoners. Tienwan, a commoner and Buddhist scholar, criticized the government system, bureaucratic abuse of power, and corruption in a magazine called *Tulawipak Pojanakit* published from 1900-1906.³² Tienwan also pointed out that instituting a parliamentary form of government would be the most effective way to promote justice and the welfare of the people. He was caned and jailed for advocating a change to parliamentary form of government.

Similarly, *Wachirayan Wiset*, a journal for the Western educated (upper-class) Thai published an article "Sanuk Nuk" (Fun Thinking) by Krom Luang Phichit Preechakorn, a prominent young foreign-educated nobleman, was banned. This article discussed a conversation between four young Buddhist monks at Wat Bowoniwet the central temple of Thammayutnikai, about their future: some spoke of soon leaving the monkhood to resume civil service careers, while one rather matter-of-factly pointed out the practical advantages - economic security and peace of mind- offered by remaining in robes. The abbot of Wat Bowoniwet who was Supreme Patriarch of Thammayutnikai saw Phichit's article as an irreverent, insulting rapportage of the actual state of mind of young monks at the temple. Thus the publication of any further episodes of the conversation was forbidden.³³

Social mobility was not the only issue giving rise to the democratic challenge. The birth of a free press at the turn of the century contributed to the spread of democratic ideology. Thailand, at that time, already had 47 magazines and 17 daily newspapers.³⁴ Articles on politics, commentaries on Thai society and the Sangha as well as science such as physics, chemistry, and medicine appeared in many magazines and newspapers.

Before his death in 1910, King Chulalongkorn had successfully engineered Thailand's transition to a centralized and more stable state -a condition unique to the rest of Southeast

32 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 27.

33 Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. and Ruchira Mendiones, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in American Era* (Bangkok, Duang Kamol, 1985), p. 13.

34 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 23.

Asia.³⁵ Chulalongkorn was succeeded by his son Vajiravudh (Rama VI) who had been known for his literary gift and devoted little attention to political reform. During his reign he emphasized public relations and "nationalism".

The early years of King Vajiravudh's reign (1910-1925), absolute monarchy in many countries, such as Turkey, Russia, and China, was abolished. Chinese Nationalism (Kuomintang) spread among the Chinese in Thailand, fostering as it did allegiance to China.³⁶ Chinese society was beginning to have a coherence and self-consciousness which reflected in an increasing emphasis on Chinese education: Chinese schools supported by Chinese community expanded. In 1910, the Thai government passed a capitation tax law, applicable to all residents in Thailand, irrespective of race. The Chinese secret societies ordered a general strike: Chinese business and shipping in Bangkok were brought to a standstill for three days. Not only were the Chinese seen to be devoid of any sense of justice but the extent of their economic stranglehold was fully realized for the first time.³⁷ Thereafter, growing resentment against the Chinese, which had for so long been felt by the Thai elites, were now shared by the mass of the people.³⁸

It was expected that Vajiravudh, as the first Thai king educated in England, home of the prototype of parliamentary democracy, would adopt a more democratic form of government, but the king rejected the calls for an immediate change towards constitutional

35 Pye, Lucian W., *Southeast Asia's Political Systems* (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), p. 23.

36 The tide of Chinese nationalism generated after China's defeat by Japan in 1895 and was quickly felt in Southeast Asia, and its specific forms -the royalist reform party and revolutionary movement- were reflected in overseas Chinese (Skinner: 1957, 55).

37 Watson: 1980, p.119.

38 Thai government policy towards the Chinese resident in Thailand during the nineteenth century was generally favorable: unrestricted immigration and low direct taxation, except when the Chinese activities openly thwarted Thai sovereignty or threatened peace and order. Corruption, vice, even anarchy within nineteenth-century Chinese society were of no vital concern to the government so long as the Chinese continued to foster the country's trade and pay ever larger sums into the treasury in the form of annual tenders for the monopoly farms. Difficulties arose in connection with disturbances of the peace and the Chinese recourse to the protection of Western treaty powers. During Nangklao's reign (Rama III) and Chulalongkorn period, there were several Chinese rebellions and uprisings both in the capital and provinces. The most important of the riots in Bangkok occurred in 1868, 1883, 1889, and 1895 (Skinner: 1957, 143-4).

monarchy. He saw that the majority of the people were not educated enough to sustain effective parliamentary government. Although a model of local self-government known as Dusit Thani was introduced, this experiment was limited to a small group of courtiers and never spread outside the palace.

In 1912, a group of junior army and civil officials attempted to stage a coup to replace the absolute monarchy with the republican government. King Vajiravudh responded forcefully to the challenge by publishing several articles, attacking republicanism. He also wrote a series of press articles under the pen-name Asavapahu (Pegasus) attacked the Chinese as the "Jew of the East". The main gist of them was the Chinese accepted the privileges of citizenship but they refused to undertake its duties. They were united by loyalty to their race but not to their adopted country, for they were out to make as much money as possible and then depart. He urged the Thais to take a more active role in their own economy.

The king took, moreover, an active step to promote the spirit of "nationalism" in his people. Boy Scouts' Organization and the Wild Tigers' Corps³⁹ (Sua Pa) were created in order to promote the unity of Thai nation and identity which lay in the evocation of a sense of communal self-consciousness and to install in the mind of people of own race, devote and loyalty towards the Nation, Religion, and Monarch (chat, sasana, and phramahakasat). All these were the High Authority that controls and maintains justice and independence of the nation; it was thus something worth fighting and dying for.

It was King Vajiravudh's reign that compulsory education was announced, requiring boys and girls to attend schools.⁴⁰ Private schools had been also started. The status of civil servant colleges was raised to that of a university called Chulalongkorn university, the first university in Thailand. The most striking result of the act was the dramatic increase in girls' enrolment. Women did not lag behind in education. They went in for law,

39 The Wild Tiger, a nationwide paramilitary corps, served the King as a kind of territorial army after the British pattern, see Syamananda, Rong, *A History of Thailand* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1981), p 148.

40 Thailand became the second Asian countries, after Japan, to introduce compulsory education (Watson: 1980, 105).

jurisprudence, teaching, arts, medicine and science.⁴¹ Social status was much more broadly dispersed. A person's social position became dependent on education. King Vajiravudh spent many years writing a variety of articles and plays espousing modern values and patterns of behavior designed to mobilize the educated section of Thai populace. It was largely through his influence that the Thais assumed surnames, public holidays, international New Year, and adopted Western dressing, sports, and athletics.

Significantly, King Vajiravudh's period was marked as the age of popular press of daily newspapers and weekly magazines. The freedom of the press was granted and enjoyed to an enormous extent. More newspapers took up political themes. Articles attacking and challenging the traditional basis of legitimacy and essays concerned with the conflict between Western and Thai culture or personal and social cost of modernization appeared in the pages of daily newspapers. Notable journalists and essayists who trenchantly criticized the government policy, the existing social, and economic order were commoners, namely Tienwan and K.S.R Kulap. The king himself was rather pleased with his writings which debate the newspaper writers that criticized his government.⁴²

There was increased publication of fictions, essays, translation of Western novels, and books in wide range of fields such as Buddhist and agricultural journals. It was also the period when the well-educated, urban class expressed themselves in writing and elite opinion was being shaped through the popular press. The government and the educated elites regarded newspapers as the voice of public opinion. In the First World War, newspapers played an important role in encouraging the government to enter the war on the side of the Allies in order to end the unequal treaties of the nineteenth century.⁴³ Pro-Allies articles came out in press. Military interest and military values grew among the people as the war progressed, and

41 Watson, K., op. cit., p.107.

42 Pornperom Aemtham, *Botbat thang Karnmuang kong Nangsuaphim Thai nai Samai Karnpativat 2475 lae lang Songkarmlok krang thi song* [The Political Role of Thai Newspapers from the Revolution of 1932 and the End of the Second World War] (Bangkok: Thaiwatanapanich, 1977), p. 12.

43 Wyatt: 1982, p.230.

in 1917, the Thai government declared war on the Allies.⁴⁴ By 1920, the number of newspapers and weekly magazines expanded from 59 to 149 including those for women run by women.⁴⁵ In Bangkok, there were seven Thai, three English, and three Chinese daily newspapers. They multiplied and competed with one another for the print-market. The professional writers and journalists emerged as a new figure in Thai society.

During the postwar period, Thailand suffered severely from the economic crisis. Rice, Thailand's chief export went through a brief boom-bust cycle in 1919-1921. The balance of trade incurred an enormous deficit. A disastrous crop year between 1919-20 brought economic chaos. One major contributor to the situation was royal profligacy and the rapid increase of public expenditures.⁴⁶ Government revenues were declining steadily. Financial crisis became one of the pressing problems facing the new King, Prajadhipok (1925-1935) on his accession to the throne.

Once the crisis had passed and political criticism died down, anti-Japanese trade boycotts among the Chinese arose in Thailand, Communist versus Nationalist struggled among them. At the same time Thailand also became a base for Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, and Burmese Nationalists working against colonial rule in their home countries. In the late 1920s there was communist activity in Thailand involving other ethnic groups, particularly the work of Ho Chi Minh among the Vietnamese minority in the northeast Thailand. The exposure through the daily press to nationalist politics in the neighboring countries had a great impact on the intellectuals in Thailand.

It was from 1910 onwards that the absolute monarchy as a system of government gradually lost its appeal and legitimacy among a growing group of intellectuals and bureaucrats. Government became increasingly professional in the hands of civil servants and

44 The only other Southeast Asians involved in the war were 200,000 Vietnamese employed as coolies in France (Wyatt: 1982, p. 230).

45 Kanperom Suwannanon, *Phrabatsomdetphramongkutklao chao yoo hua kab Karnsaang chat* [King Vajiravudh and His Nation Building Programmes] (unpublished M.A Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1980), p.83.

46 Wyatt: 1982, p. 233.

military officials. These changes were signified by the transfer of power and authority from the monarch to the new elites; the military and the bureaucrats who had returned from studying abroad. This shift came not only from Western imposition but also from the kings themselves. In other words, the new elite groups were the product of the changes that the monarchy introduced.⁴⁷ Constitution and democracy for Thailand was considered during King Prajadhipok's reign but the King's advisers both the high ranking princes and foreigners agreed that while constitutional government might be desirable and even inevitable, it was still premature to establish such a system in the country.⁴⁸

Since the mid-1920s, the overwhelming majority of young men who studied in Europe returned home with their western ideas of democratic government. At the same time, the expansion of bureaucracy came to a sudden halt due to financial difficulties, chances of promotion decreased and limits on upward mobility which led to dissatisfaction with the absolute monarchical government. Moreover, the world economic depression which started in 1929 hit Thailand badly. The price of rice dropped by two thirds. With greatly reduced cash income, peasants could not pay their taxes.

The government chose not to resort to increasing taxes which would cause suffering for the people but instead cut the government expenditure by cutting the budget of all the ministries drastically, retrenching many hundreds of government officials, and reducing official salaries while increasing taxes on salaries.⁴⁹ All these severely affected the government officials more than any other group. In other words, the Thai middle class was hit hard while the Chinese and the upper class and royalty were taxed lightly. Economic crisis, in turn, had bred political problems at various levels. In June 1932, a group of young military and civil official calling themselves the People's Party staged the bloodless coup which replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy.

47 Suksamran, Somboon, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (London, C.Hurst & Company, 1977), p. 47.

48 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 30.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Religious Impact

The development of Thai Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was inextricably related to the process of socio-political stabilization and change. The implication of Mongkut's monastic reform were carried out by his son, Chulalongkorn, and indeed the major change in Thai Buddhism took place during King Chulalongkorn's reign as part of the "modernization" of the country. As I have mentioned, the need for educational reform and the spread of modern education on a country-wide basis led King Chulalongkorn to place the provincial education in the hand of a princely monk, Wachirayan (1859-1921), the head of Thammayut sect, who later became the supreme patriarch.

Prince Wachirayan decided first to reorganize the Sangha administration to discharge this secular responsibility. The Sangha Act was enacted in 1902 and with the support of royal authority, Prince Wachirayan launched the programs of Sangha reform. The thrust of the reform of the Sangha administration, however, not only came from the secular aim of spreading modern public education but also from the need for national integration and the unification of the Sangha itself, including the need to purify the Sangha.

The Sangha administration prior to the reform was characterized by the lack of systematic and clearly defined Sangha administration, a loosely organized provincial administration, and an absence of the centralization of power.⁵⁰ The Sangha Order was divided into three main divisions: division of the north (khana nua), the central (khana klang), and the south (khana tai).⁵¹ Each had its own patriarch to rule the division without any supreme authority over the administration of the whole Order. The monasteries were the basis of administration and there was no monk who had authority over the administration of other monasteries. The relationship between monasteries arose from the relationships of

50 Suksamran, Somboon, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 36.

51 Niramol Kangsadara, "Prince Wachirayan's Reforms in the Buddhist Order (1898-1921)," in *Anuson Walter Vella* (In Memory of Professor Vella), Renard Ronald D. ed. (Chiang Mai: Walter F. Vella Fund, 1989), p. 253.

teacher to student, leader to follower. This informal monastery network effectively bypassed the formal structure of authority within and without the Sangha.⁵² Many monasteries were semi-independent of the formal control of the civil and Sangha authority. Scholar-monks had the chance to advance themselves to high ranks through the ecclesiastical examination while administrative skill was not valued highly for promotion.⁵³

52 Ibid.,

53 Ibid., p. 249.

Through the Sangha Act of 1902, the formerly autonomus grouping of monks which had their own variant tradition of Theravada Buddhism in the northern, northeastern, and southern was brought into a unified Sangha structure. The hierarchical ecclesiastical structure with the supreme patriarch (Sangharat) at the top became a firmly established institution. The Sangha administration consisted of four parts (khana yai), three which were divisions of the Mahanikai sect -the north, south, and central regions- the fourth being the Thammayut sect, which was given for the first time official recognition as a separate entity within the Sangha. Each division had a senior monk as governor general (chao khana yai), who in turn had a deputy. These eight elders formed a Council of Elders (mahatherasamakhom) which was the highest authority in the Sangha hierarchy, acting as an administrative body and an ecclesiastical tribunal.⁵⁴ The hierarchical level in between the governors general and their deputies at the top and the vast numbers of abbots of monasteries at the bottom were the four important levels: monthon (circles), changwat (provinces), amphor (districts), and tambon (sub-districts); and each level had ecclesiastical governors. This hierarchy paralleled the civil administrative structure in all levels and were under the government control and supervision. In short, the 1902 Act produced a degree of unprecedented centralization in the Thai Sangha.⁵⁵

In addition, every monk and novice had to be registered upon entering the Order and had to have a certificate of identity issued by the abbot. They must have fix residency in monasteries. Vagrant monks would be arrested and forced to disrobe. National standards for monks, monastic disciplines, and Buddhist rituals were for the first time set down in writing such as qualifical restriction on ordainer, abbot, and upatcha (a monk who can give ordination); consecrated areas within which the ordination ceremony is legally valid. Monks were encouraged to partipate in administrative works as well as in academic one. Ranks (samanasak) and titles (ratchathinnanam) were conferred on them for each field.

54 Suksamran: 1982, p. 38.

55 The notion of the monastical control of the Sangha did not begin with the Sangha Act of 1902. Indeed evidence of such control survives from the Sukhothai, Ayudhaya, and early Ratanakosin periods. But it concern only royal monasteries that the king appointed monks to ecclesiastical officeo, and most of the royal monasteries were in the capital, see Ishii, Yoneo, *Sangha, State, and Society: The Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 71-72.

Appointments to office came to be made on the basis of the candidate's ability and it became possible for competent monks to rise to high office. Under the Sangha Act of 1902, the foundation of the ecclesiastical administration was laid to link Bangkok with the approximately 80,000 monks and novices scattered throughout the country.⁵⁶

Significantly, the reform of Sangha education was carried out to elevate the level of Buddhist study.⁵⁷ Hitherto, the traditional ecclesiastical studies mainly rested on popular Buddhist scriptures such as *Traiphum* and *Phra Malai*.⁵⁸ Even the traditional "doctrinal study" (*rian pariyattham*) was no more than Pali language study and it was only in a handful of urban monasteries and Thammayut sect at *wat Bowoniwet*; in almost none of the provincial monasteries were these scriptures ever read. Although, state ecclesiastical instruction had long been established in Thailand, only a tiny proportion of monks became *parian* (the Pali degree) and advanced in *Tipitaka*. Partly, because of the difficulty of learning Pali through the classical grammars, and strict traditional examination which consisted of only oral translations of Pali texts, verbatim rendition into Thai, candidates were permitted to give only one answer and could not correct themselves. Moreover, the examination was held only once every three years.⁵⁹ These reasons caused many monks to abandon their studies. A systematic understanding of Buddhist doctrine was virtually inaccessible to the average monk.

In order to redress the paucity of doctrinal knowledge among monks and novices which partly came from the lack of suitable doctrinal textbooks, Wachirayan wrote many textbooks for instruction of newly ordained monks such as *Nawakowat* (Buddhist teachings for newly ordained monks), *Phutthaprawat* (The Life of the Buddha), *Phutthasasana Suphasit*

56 Ishii: 1986, p. 71.

57 On tour of the Chantaburi region in 1887, King Chulalongkorn was amazed at the nonsense he had heard preached at the monasteries where he stopped, and sent a letter to Prince Wachirayan stressing the need for reform of ecclesiastical education (Ishii: 1986, p. 86).

58 *Phra Malai*, another popular Buddhist work, found widely not only in Thailand but in many parts of Southeast Asia. This work is reportedly based on the Ceylonese (*Metteyasutta*). It tells the legend of a ceylonese monk, having attained supernatural powers through his ascetic practices, traveled around heaven and hell, and eventually met with the Future Buddha, Sri Ariya Metteyya. This story describes the conditions of heaven and hell and sets the belief that Sri Ariya Metteyya will one day come to this world to save mankind (Ishii: 1986, p. 184).

59 Ishii: 1986, p. 85.

(Selected Buddhist proverbs), *Winayamuk* (The entrance to the Vinaya). At the same time, a new curriculum of doctrinal studies (*nak tham*) with a written mode of examination in Thai language was introduced.⁶⁰ It provided both monks and laymen with the means and opportunity to understand the Buddhist doctrine in their own language and to express in Thai their understanding the dhamma. The *Thammayut* sect played an important role in spreading the new curriculum throughout the country. Many local temples opened *nak tham* schools (school of doctrinal studies) and held their own examinations while in Bangkok, the number of teaching schools was increased and examinations were held.⁶¹ Through this way *Wachirayan's* theology became established as the orthodox doctrine of Thai Buddhism.

Along with the introduction of the doctrinal study, the traditional curriculum of Pali study was revised in order to combine the two levels of ecclesiastical study.⁶² However, the Pali Text used for study, non of them belongs to the Pali Tipitaka; are all extracanonical commentaries and still concentrated on Pali-to-Thai and Thai-to-Pali translation, interpretation is not acceptable.⁶³ *Wachirayan*, moreover, wrote a Pali study book in six volumes (*Bali Waiyakon*) which had greatly alleviated the difficulties of learning Pali. The traditional Pali examination was replaced by a new form of written mode of examination, and was held annually. *Thammacaksu* (the eye of dhamma), the first Buddhist journal was issued by *Thammayut* sect. The Tipitaka was revised and the first complete set of the Tipitaka was published in book form , and 1,000 sets were distributed to the main monasteries in the country. Two Buddhist universities, *Mahamakut* and *Mahachulalongkorn*, were established in Bangkok, one for each of the two sects, providing for monks advanced Buddhist studies

60 *Wachirayan's* books, particularly, *Nawakowat* was set as the most important textbook which almost all monks studied. Likewise, it also became the basis textbook of doctrinal study for laymen. It presented Buddhist doctrines and history with reference to canonical text, commentaries, and accepted historical sources rather than with reference to any popular texts (Ishii: 1986, p. 89).

61 Ishii: 1986, p. 91.

62 The new curriculum of doctrinal studies consisted of three grades: elementary level (*nak tham tri*), intermediate level (*nak tham tho*), and advanced level (*nak tham ek*). Success in these exams was made an essential qualification for candidacy for Pali studies which began at grades 3 to 9. And success in the Pali exams earned a monk the appellation of parian degree (*maha parian*), a *nitayaphat nitayaphat* allowance from the king, the respect of society, and opened the way way to advancement within the Sangha (Ishii: 1986, p. 77).

63 Ishii: 1986, p. 95.

along with modern higher education.

Wachirayan's achievements were significant for the future of the Thai Sangha. His reform established the stability of the Sangha organization and the continuous development of Thai Buddhism. It was for the first time in Thai history that a national Buddhist ecclesia was organized and has been one of the nation's greatest institutions. During the reign of King Vajiravudh and Prajadhipok, Buddhism was designated as one of the three pillars of Thai nationalism: Nation, Religion, and Monarch. Each depended on the others and had to be preserved if the Thai nation was to survive and progress.

Constitutional Era (1932-)

Socio-Political Change since 1932

After 1932, with the monarchy and aristocracy being moved from political power, a growing conflict developed between the civilian and military components of the Coup group. The dominant civilian leader, Pridi Phanomyong, a successful student at the Sorbonne Law Faculty, and chief public exponent of the People Party's claimed to be inaugurating a new era of democratization and social reform. Around him gathered progressive politicians, journalists, academics and writers. Perhaps symbolic of his role was his founding in 1934 of Thai's second university, Thammasat, which ever since has been the most important institutional center for the spreading and defence of democratic ideas in Thai society.⁶⁴ Meanwhile the military came under Plaek Phibunsongkhram, educated in France (St. Cyr military academy) who became the proponent of a rightwing populist nationalism.

It was Pridi's group who dominated the first constitutional regime until the late 1930s. The new regime faced an unstable political situation: a provincial military rebellion, conflicts between the military and civilian political groups.⁶⁵ The majority of the people had little

64 Anderson & Ruchira: 1985, p. 16.

65 Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Political Institutions and Processes," in *Government and Politics of Thailand*, Xuto Somsakdi, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 42.

interest in "democratic system". The lack of mass support made the People's Party modify political structure and to respond to the non emergence of "real parliamentary democracy."⁶⁶ Moreover, the conflict between King Prajadhipok and the government developed due to the undemocratic nature of the new regime and this led the King voluntarily to abdicate in 1935. From then on until after World War II, the function of the monarchy were performed by a Council of Regents.

As far as religion is concerned the commoner-recruited political leaders continued to support Buddhism and the Constitution of the Kingdom reaffirmed in law the traditional relationship between the King and Buddhism: "The King professes the Buddhist Faith and is the Upholder of Religion".⁶⁷ The Sangha adapted itself to the new politics while the Supreme Patriarch stressed the Sangha's stance in support of the government.

Inevitably, the new political ideas penetrated into the temple grounds and many young monks in Bangkok formed themselves and expressed a need for reform in the administration of monasteries (wats). This movement, however, was short-lived; the ringleaders were forced to disrobe under the order of the Supreme Patriarch. At the same time, the popularization of Buddhism had begun. Groups of well-educated laymen came to the fore in rationalizing Buddhist teaching, in organizing religious organizations such as Samakhom Phutthamamaka, the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), in spreading Buddhism through the medium of schools. Samakhom Parien aimed at raising the educational standards of the Sangha and made all monks worthy of respect.⁶⁸

There was also even an attempt to interpret Pali Canon and open a meditation center in a remote district of Chaiya, Surat-Thani province. The general trend of the religious thinking of this period was to return to pristine Buddhism as a way of life, back to ethics as oppose to rituals, miracles, superstitions, and accepted beliefs in the light of scientific thought. The usual solution among the minority of the highly vocal intellectual Buddhists was to

66 Chai-anan: 1987, p. 30.

67 Ishii: 1986, p. 100.

68 Landon, Kenneth P., *Siam in Transition* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 223.

explain that science and Buddhism are rational and that Buddhism supplied what science lacks in ethics and morals.⁶⁹ In 1934, a missionary movement led by an Italian Buddhist monk, Phra Lokanat, organized 64 Thai monks to go to Rome for the purpose of foreign mission work.⁷⁰

With the liberal atmosphere, Thammayutnikai was placed in a defensive position. Certain questions were raised: criticisms related to the predominance of Thammayut monks in the provincial administration, the centralization of power in the Council of Elders (Mahatherasamakhom) which was mainly in the hands of an administrative elite of Thammayut monks.⁷¹ In 1935, a delegation of about two thousand Mahanikai monks from twelve provinces arrived in Bangkok to petition the prime minister to transfer the Sangha administration in line with democratic principles, including the inequality of treatment for the both sects. The new political leaders tended to support the majority sect (Mahanikai) rather than the aristocratic Thammayutnikai.⁷² However, the request was not granted by the Assembly until 1938.

In 1938, Plaek was appointed Prime Minister. It was an age of militant nationalism. The national reconstruction was proclaimed through three main policies: economic nationalism, the development of a sense of national unity, and the creation of a literate population through education. "State enterprises" were established, and the Thai people were encouraged to engage in trade and banking, and numerous occupations were reserved for Thais. The co-operative movement was expanded among farmers. A series of ten State Conventions were issued aimed at uplifting the national spirit and moral code of the nation, and instilling a newness into Thai life such as the use of national language, to salute the flag and know the national anthem.

69 Ibid., p.227.

70 Ibid., p. 226.

71 The Sangha Act of 1902 permitted Thammayutnikai to control a significant proportion of the powerful positions at the upper level of the Sangha. Although the Act stipulated that Thammayut monks could govern Mahanikai monks and vice versa, in practice Thammayut monks refused to be governed by Mahanikai monks. They insisted their separate and privileged status was received from the founder, King Mongkut. This conflict is still in practice until today (Jackson: 1989, p. 69).

72 Reynolds, Frank E., "Civil Religion and National Community in Thailand," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, No 2, 1977, p. 276.

People were encouraged to work hard in order to achieve a good standard living. It was the first time that the whole set of Tipitaka was translated into Thai language in order to be available to all people. The government, moreover, attempted to unify the two sects of Thai Sangha by building Wat Phrasimahathat, where monks of both sects would coordinate, and plan a council of the dhamma-vinaya; and use its power of appointment to turn the imbalance in the Sangha's power structure, introduced by the Sangha Act of 1902 which had been enacted on the initiative of Prince Wachirayan.

In 1941, a new Sangha Act was passed which contained democratic features, the tripartite separation of powers: the structure of the cabinet system (Khana Sangkhamontri) together with the Supreme Patriarch as the President which had limited power, legislative assembly (Sangkhasaphaa), judicial division (Khana Winaiton), and various levels and agencies of administration. Accordingly, the administrative structure of the Sangha became once again a replica of the political and administrative system of the civil government.⁷³

It was under Plaek's regime that economic nationalism was combined with anti-Chinese sentiments. This resulted partly from the large amount of money remitted each year by Chinese to China which was a serious obstacle to the development of Thai economy.⁷⁴ A series of anti-Chinese enactments were put into effect: restricting Chinese immigration, increasing taxes on the commercial class, and all aliens were required to pay a registration fee. The number of Chinese schools was reduced from 218 to 61 and by 1944 only two Chinese schools remained open in the whole country. Ten of eleven Chinese newspapers were closed and several prominent Chinese were jailed and deported for remitting money to China.⁷⁵ Despite Plaek's dictatorial rule, during his office (1938-1944) the military played an important role in protecting the Constitution.⁷⁶ With all these efforts, Plaek was able to establish himself

73 Suksamran: 1982, p. 42.

74 These remittances between 1946-1949 were estimated at 25-30 million baht a month (about U.S \$ 1.25-1.5 million) (Girling: 1981, p. 77).

75 Watson : 1980, pp. 125-6.

76 Suchit: 1987, p. 45.

as an unchallenged national leader. When the Second World War broke out, he brought Thailand on the side of the Axis power and this led to Plaek's fall from power. During the war Pridi, who was appointed Regent of the young king, Ananda (Rama VIII), organized an underground Free Thai Movement against the Japanese and this helped to mitigate the harsh demands imposed on Thailand when the war ended.

After World War II, the great powers profoundly affected Thai life and politics. Pridi dominated Thai politics and presided over Thailand's first Parliament election. The civilian government was faced with disastrous post-war economic and social problems: rapid inflation, serious rice shortage, unemployment, corruption amongst government officials and politicians, and particularly the mysterious death of King Ananda. These led to the Coup of 1947 which forced Pridi into exile and inaugurated a quarter of a century of almost unbroken military government. Because of the growing communist threat in Indochina, Malaysia, Burma, and the decline of Kuomintang in China, the Western allies welcomed the military government into the anti-communist fold. The post-war military regime differed from the pre-war one in the sense that they were heavily supported by the United States, which aimed to prevent the further expansion of Communist China in Southeast Asia.⁷⁷

Plaek's post-war regime was far less stable than his previous one. The real power was in the hands of his two rival subordinates, Police General Phao Sriyanon and Army General Sarit Thanarat. They came from provincial small towns, and were educated wholly in Thailand.⁷⁸ Phao in particular became a dreaded figure for organizing the imprisonment, and assassination of political opponents, including progressive politicians and intellectuals. This period was also a difficult time for the Chinese, particularly after the triumph of Communism in China (1949) the military regime equated anti-Communism with being anti-Chinese.⁷⁹

77 Anderson & Ruchira: 1985, p. 17.

78 Ibid.

79 Chinese schools were deduced from 490 to 148, 10,000 immigrants a year was cut to 200, the alien registration fee was raised to 400 baht, Chinese newspapers were closed. This followed by riots, a great fire in suburb of Bangkok in which hundreds of houses were destroyed and 20,000 rendered homeless. The government quelled the riots by shooting the "ringleaders," mass arrests and deportations followed (Watson: 1980, p. 127).

During the mid 1950s, the power-struggle between Phao and Sarit⁸⁰ led to Sarit's coup in 1957 which drove Phao and Plaek into exile.

Sarit came to power at the period of great American alarm about "Red China" expansionism in Southeast Asia. Thailand was conceived as a bastion of the "free world" and its strength and stability was regarded vital to the United State in the period of "cold war" in Asia.⁸¹ During Sarit's regime (1958-63) and that of his successors Thanom Kittikhachorn and Praphat Charusathian (1963-1973), Thai security in the widest sense required an intensification of political and administrative control which combined an emphasis on national development, national integration with traditional symbols of king and Buddhism. Sarit abrogated the constitution, dissolved parliament, and banned all political parties. The country began to experience the period of absolutism and strong anti-communism: popular participation in politics was totally prohibited; the press was severely restricted; hundreds of critics, politicians, writers, monks were arrested and accused of being communists, and most of them were imprisoned without trial.

At the same time a sectarian conflict between Thammayut and Mahanikai was sparked off in 1958 due to the strong schismatic character of the Thammayut sect and a disagreement between the two sects over the succession to the Supreme patriarchate. Sarit saw the discord in the Sangha as reflective of the democratic features introduced by the Sangha Act of 1941. If the Sangha was to be an effective tool for national integration, it must be strong, disciplined, and well organized.⁸² The administration of the Sangha, for him, was not a matter to be based on the principle of separation of powers for the sake of balance among both sects as was the case under the current law.⁸³ The government also believed that communists were operating in the Sangha. Thus every problem occurring in the Sangha such

80 Phao who controlled the police and was strongly backed by CIA for his help supporting clandestine Kuomintang operations inside Southwestern China and Sarit who controlled the army, and was backed by the Pentagon for his role in modernizing the military along American line (Anderson & Ruchira: 1985), p. 17.

81 Anderson & Ruchira: 1985, p. 19. and Girling: 1981, p. 233.

82 Ishii: 1986, p.116.

83 Ibid.

as the conflicts among administrative monks, criticism of government and the Sangha by monks, were seen as part of a communist plot to destroy Buddhism and to induce people to lose faith in the religion and the Sangha.

In 1962, the Sangha Act 1941 was abolished and replaced by the Act of 1962. The new Act swept away all the democratic provisions of the 1941 Act and concentrated power in the person of the supreme patriarch. It provided for an organization through which he could control the Sangha through a Council of Elders, allowing him to dominate the council through his power to appoint the majority of members. This together with the abolition of the ecclesiastical assembly and cabinet, represented a strengthening of the Supreme Patriarch's power to an unprecedented degree.⁸⁴ The 1962 Act faithfully reflected once again the change of Thai political system of that day.

It was under Sarit's government that the first national economic development plan (1961-1966) was announced; regional centers had been set up in the North, Northeast, and South; many state enterprises were dismantled, and offered very favorable conditions for foreign investment. By 1964, there were huge American military expenditures in Thailand as the Indochina war intensified; Thai economy went into a sustained decade-long boom.⁸⁵ Development of infrastructure, such as highways, ports, communication system, electrification, irrigation dams brought large numbers of peasants into commercial economy increasingly geared to exports.⁸⁶ Foreign capital and private investment spread to many parts of the country. There was substantial growth in regional centers and in other towns such as important industries and manufactures were located in the Center; a commercial center for rubber in the South; and eight American military bases in the Northeast and the East. There

84 Ibid., p. 118.

85 The total U.S. "regular military assistance" to the Thai armed force from 1951 to 1971 amounted to \$ 935.9 million. A further \$ 760 million was spent for the acquisition of military equipment and payment for a Thai division to fight in Vietnam (\$ 200 million over 4 years). U.S. payment for construction of air and naval bases amounted to a further \$ 250 million. Expenditures by American servicemen in Thailand for "rest and recreation" and other items added a further \$ 850 million (Girling: 1981, p. 236).

86 From 1950 to 1975, the United State provided Thailand with \$ 650 million in support of economic development programs. Most of the money was granted in the years after Sarit's ascension to power (Girling: 1981, p. 235).

had been enormous increase in administrative, executive, professional and technical personnel both in government and private sector. The expanding of middle class was evident.

In the farming sector, while the amount of usable land increased only one per cent a year, the population growth had been over 3 per cent annum for many decades.⁸⁷ Consequently, landholdings became smaller. Inequalities in land tenure and rent, the insecurity of tenant farmers, and rural indebtedness were other serious problems. Rapidly rising land prices which produced a new stratum of provincial rich, force large number of dispossessed peasants migrated to urban in search of work. The urban laborforce, which until World War II had consisted largely of Chinese immigrants, became more and more Thai.

Educational expansion took place along with economic development, new universities and technical colleges were founded in the provincial centers. The tenfold increase in the number of university graduates over the previous two decades, from less than a hundred thousand to nearly a million, coupled with a similar rise in the number of secondary school graduates, has given Thailand's middle class a mass.⁸⁸ More and more able young Thai were going to the United States for advanced study, rather than to Europe (especially England) as had been before.⁸⁹

In the same period, two Buddhist universities have widened the secular learning. They provided their students with secular courses such as Asian studies, political thought, sociology, economics, education, and public administration. A number of monks, moreover, furthered their studies abroad, especially in India. Many young monks from Mahachulalongkorn (the Buddhist University of Mahanikai), are involved in two government programs: the Thammajarik and Thammathut sought to integrate the hilltribes into Thai society, and to strengthen the allegiance of remote Thai populations to the Thai policy in order to counter the spread of communist ideology. These partly contributed to the growing

87 Suksamran: 1982, p. 63.

88 Wyatt: 1982, p. 295.

89 By 1973, 6000 Thais were studying in the U.S alone. By the late 1970s, about 36,000 Thais go abroad to study every year (some 30,000 of them to the United State) (Girling: 1981, pp. 82, 150).

social and political consciousness among them.

In 1969, a general election was held, and Thanom continued to be prime minister. In 1971, they staged a coup against their own constitution and returned to an absolutist regime. Factionalism within the ruling military clique grew and led to the shattering of the unity of the military high command. In upcountry areas, communist insurrections and rural insurgency increased, and in the increasingly violent fighting the government suffered losses.⁹⁰ The economic growth rate dropped, and the inflation rose alarmingly which accelerated the public loss of confidence in the ability of the military to govern. A growing coalition of students, academics, intellectuals, professionals, journalists, and politicians began to exert increasing pressure on the military regime.⁹¹ In October 1973, the massive demonstration of people organized by the Soon Klang Nisit Naksuksa Haeng Pratet Thai (National Student Center of Thailand, NSCT) called for the new constitution which led to the collapse of the dictatorship and the exile of Thanom, Praphat.

In the aftermath of October 14, 1973, the King appointed Sanya Thammasak, a former rector of Thammasat university and president of Supreme Court and Privy Council, as prime minister and it was accepted by the students and public. The military was, for a time, removed from the center of power while the NSCT became the driving force for social reform. It was an era of hope and anticipation during which common people expressed grievances and expected to see things changed. Several voluntary associations and political oriented groups were formed, important among them were the NSCT, Prachachon Phau Prachathipathai (the People for Democracy, PDG), Sahapan Naksuksa Issara Haeng Prathet Thai (the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand, FIST), Sahaphab Chaona Haeng Prathet Thai (the Federation of Farmers of Thailand, FFT), and Sahaphab Kammakorn (the Labour Unions). Similarly, groups of monk-students from two Buddhist universities were organized for various purposes, Ongkan Saha Dhammik (Organization of Sangha

90 Suksamran: 1982, p. 62.

91 For example, in 1972 students protested against the government Decree 299 which was designed to consolidate the regime's power by placing the judiciary under direct bureaucratic control, see Phudhisana Jumbala, "Interest and Pressure Groups," in *Government and Politics of Thailand*, Xuto Somsakdi, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.138.

Brotherhood) supported the movements that were fighting for equality and justice in economic, political and social matters, and worked closely with the secular leftist movement,⁹² Yuwasong (Young Monks) confined its activities within the Sangha affairs such as the campaign for reform of the Sangha administration and education.⁹³ While the Buddhacak, a monthly Buddhist journal of Mahachulalongkorn discussed political, economic and social problems that the monks themselves experienced in the villages.

The interim government encountered all aspects of social, political, and economic demands: strikes and demonstrations in many industries, schools, police, teachers, farmers, and monks. Buddhist monks marched in the demonstration of the Farmers' Federation demanding that the government allocate land for farming and solve unfair land losses of the farmers. This unprecedented act was strongly criticized from many sectors of Thai society: the high military leader of that time said that the monks' action was the end of everything and there was nothing more serious than this; the president of Buddhist Association said that the event signified that Buddhism was under serious threat as the moral base of the nation; and the government believed that the monks were instigated by communists.⁹⁴

The mushrooming of pressure groups and free press contributed to the development of the most free political atmosphere that Thailand had ever experienced. The socialist ideas were revealed through daily newspapers, weekly magazines, and irregular pamphlets, as well as the profoundly intellectual works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao. The writings of Thai Marxist intellectuals, such as Kulap Saipradit, Pridi Phanomyong, were reissued; the thought and lives of the Third World heroes for instance Chou En Lai, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara, appeared in bookshops.⁹⁵ In 1974 and early 1975 the NSCT and the government organized the large group of students involved in the program of democracy propagation in the rural areas throughout the country. As urban well-educated youth experienced rural poverty, many of them became much more politicized. Some of them took the opportunity to pass on

92 Suksamran: 1982, p. 90.

93 Ibid., pp. 84-85.

94 Ibid., p. 108.

95 Ibid., p. 73.

socialist ideas to the rural masses.

In 1975, a general election for an unicameral, fully elected parliament was held, after which a civilian government was installed. Meanwhile the communist triumph in Indochina, rapid American troop withdrawals from Thailand, and the abolition of the Laotian monarchy in 1976, had aroused enormous alarm amongst conservative Thai, particularly the military. The rightist groups, particularly the Village Scouts⁹⁶ (Luksua Chaoban), NAWAPOL⁹⁷ (New Forces) began to counteract the radical leftist movements. Importantly, NAWAPOL attracted a number of strong anti-communist monks, namely Kitthiwuttho who declared "Holy War" on the Communists by advocating that "killing communists is not demeritorious".⁹⁸

As early as 1975, student activists, leaders of peasants and labor unions, were subjected to intimidation and assassination. The media campaign over radio and television propagated the slogan "right kill left". The backlash culminated in October 1976, when Thanom had returned from exile to lead the life of Buddhist monk at Wat Bowonniwet (the birthplace of Thammayutnikai). Huge demonstrations began at Thammasat University and demonstrators were assaulted by police and rightwing fanatics, and hundreds of students were killed. The military took power once more; thousands of students, left intellectuals, writers, and politicians went underground, many of them seeking refuge eventually with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungles of the North, Northeast, and South.

96 To counteract the farmers' organizations and to resist leftist activities at the village level, the Village Scouts which was modelled on the South Vietnamese "grass root" defence organization against communists, were set up throughout the country. The villagers were taught to resist radical elements and to mobilize peasant support. Their ideology involved the protection and upholding of the nation, religion, and monarchy (Suksamran: 1982, p. 79).

97 NAWAPOL was founded by a group of high-ranking military, leading businessmen, and high civilian bureaucrats. It advocated to nationalist unity and strong anti-communism. Of all the right-wing movement NAWAPOL was the most articulate, and best defined in its organization. The Ministry of Interior, through provincial governors, police chiefs, and district officers, provided NAWAPOL with facilities such as meeting places, transport, and accommodation. Government officials were permitted to join the meetings as they were government duties. Financial support came mainly from anti-communist businessmen. More important, NAWAPOL attracted a number of monks, namely Kitthiwuttho who was the most important and influential member (Suksamran: 1982, p. 81).

98 Suksamran: 1982, p. 149.

In 1978, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the Chinese assault on northern Vietnam affected the CPT which adhered to the Chinese position. Finally, a liberalization policy pursued by General Kriangsak Chamanan (who overthrew the extremist rightwing regime in 1977) -a policy which included virtual amnesty for all those willing to return from the jungle- led to a swelling stream of defections. By 1981, the majority of those who had fled in 1976 were back where they had come from. If the 1976 slogan was "all roads led to the jungle," the epitaph for the 1981 was "the jungle was broken."

Problems in the Development of Thai Sangha

As the process of modernization on the part of secular section continued, changes and improvements took place in both Mahanikai and Thammayutnikai so that at present the two sects do not differ substantially in any way from each other.⁹⁹ However, after a half century of social change and political instability, the Sangha had lost the intellectual leadership of Thai society, particularly in the modernized sector. Monks were retired from their role in public education, secular and non-secular education were separated though many public schools were in monastery compounds. The religious teaching of the young went to the hands of laymen and many of books on religious subjects were the product of lay pens.¹⁰⁰ The Thai youth educated through the modern education system were often alienated from their religious and cultural tradition. The monks were recruited from the underprivileged, nearly entirely from the peasant's sons.¹⁰¹

Strong centralization of the Sangha administration increased numerous internal problems within the Sangha themselves. Further, the attitude of strict traditionalism of the elite in the Sangha maintained the traditional system of monastic education initiated by Wachirayan in the past century. At the same time, a diminution of interest in higher Pali studies on the part of young monks and novices was accompanied by an increased interest in

99 Ratjavoramuni, Phra, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress Press, 1984), p. 21.

100 Landon: 1968, p. 218.

101 Ratjavoramuni: 1984, p.108.

acquiring modern secular knowledge for secular ends.¹⁰² Monks became less and less prominent in the religious field, particularly the Buddhist philosophy. Affording secular knowledge to novices and monks aggravated the chances of their disrobing upon completion of their education.¹⁰³ This was the crisis in monastic education of the Thai Sangha.

Simultaneously, more and more monks focused their attention on rituals and the building of monasteries; some have become involved in activities that were not usually considered religious. Monks who lived in large temples in the cities led their lives much attached to worldly ways. This period also witnessed a remarkable prevalence of animistic and superstitious beliefs and practices, including faith healing and mediumistic practices. The Sangha itself had a strong tie with polity and, more and more reliant on the secular government, and lacked strong dynamic leadership.

Generally speaking, the Sangha was weak in its structure and practice. The progress and success of Thai Buddhism in the latter part of the modern period both regional and national levels was credited to private personalities and organizations or lay sectors.¹⁰⁴ Under such a condition it was not difficult to begin any new endeavour without opposition from the Sangha. In order to understand the loss of the prominent place of the Sangha in modern Thai society, a brief historical role of monks as intellectual leaders will be discussed.

For several centuries, education in Thailand was in the hands of the Sangha. Wherever the monks settled and established monasteries, they also established schools. The monastery not only taught Buddhist scriptures but also secular subjects such as traditional medical, law, language, fine art, astrology, construction, and the art of self-defence. Religious

102 As Bunnag writes there is evidence that sons of provincial farmers enter the Sangha with the intention of obtaining as good an education as possible in the monastic schools and in the Buddhist Universities in Bangkok; an education which they realize will stand them in good stead when they return to lay life. Significantly, many of the high officials in civil service ministries in the capital were once monks who had completed Grade 8 or 9 of the Barian (Parian) course of studies, see Bunnag, Jane, *Buddhist Monks, Buddhist layman* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 46-47.

103 Tambiah: 1976, p. 200.

104 Ratjavoramuni: 1984, p. 115.

instruction as well as secular ones were given solely by the monks. The popular primary education was the sending of young boys to the monasteries to learn elementary dhamma, reading, writing, and arithmetic.

For higher education, it was also a Thai custom that every young man (at age around twenty) stay for a time in the monastery and acquire a religious training and secular knowledge. When after a period of months, years, or decades, a monk left the robe, he was not looked upon as a drop-out but is respected by society since entry into the monkhood was considered part of a man's education. The cleverest of them were allowed to pursue their studies till they were qualified to fill public positions and offices. They then disrobed, but many intelligent and talented monks remained in monasteries in order to become heads of temples, ecclesiastical office-holders, religious specialists and professional teachers.¹⁰⁵

The monasteries not only produced a minority of literate specialists who serviced the country at large but equally important made accessible diverse kinds of secular knowledge to monks who spent a period of time in robes, which they were able to put to good use when they disrobed. The Buddhist monasteries were centers of learning and transmission of religious and cultural values. Monks were society's intellectual elite in secular matters as well as religious. They were more knowledgeable than laymen.

The history of the Sangha as an intellectual elite which contributed to the creation and transmission of both religious and secular values enhanced its prestige and the prosperity of Buddhism in Thai society. At the present time, society's progress in modern Thailand has eroded the Sangha's former roles, particularly in its "elitist" area.

Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand

The second half of twentieth century is characterized as a dynamic period of Thai Buddhism. An unprecedented number of religious movements have arisen and developed both in size and influence paralleling rapid social change and a cultural "identity crisis" in Thai society. The various movements emerged both at regional and national levels, involving change in all major aspects, namely, doctrinal interpretations, monastic discipline (vinaya), strictly religious observance and meditation practice, the revival of forest monks, the growth of learning one's religion from books, the roles of laymen, the establishment of Buddhist communities, and the incorporation of high technology in the propagation of Buddhist messages. These movements can be seen as varying attempts to cope with the stress of cultural and religious disruption, value disorientation, and sought to restore the traditional Buddhism. Here I will discuss three of these major movements, namely, Thammakai, Santi Asoka, and Buddhadasa's movement. These three movements are examples of attempts to communicate and to answer the spiritual needs of the Thai people, particularly among the urban middle strata in the modern Thai context. Before undertaking this discussion, however, it is necessary to review the forest monk tradition in Thailand. Significantly, the above three movements which seek to make Buddhism more relevant to everyday life have been inspired by the tradition of forest monks. Indeed, it could be said that current religious movements constitute a sort of revival of the forest monk approach.

From the early days, the Buddhist tradition has been associated with renunciation of life as laymen and the pursuit of monastic training in the forest gardens or centers removed from towns and cities. In the Theravada tradition a distinction emerged between "town" monasteries in which the principle activity was study and teaching, and "forest" monasteries where monks pursued the practice of meditation.¹⁰⁶ Traditionally, the village-and-town-

106 Traditionally, in all the Theravada Buddhist countries, including Thailand, the order of monks (Sangha) has been divided into two kinds: the forest dwellers (arannavasin) and the town or village dwellers (gamavasin). The former are usually associated with the vocation of meditation (vipassanadhura) and practice (patipatti), and the latter with the vocation of books (ganthadhura) and learning (pariyatti). The two labels are entrenched and describe two stereotypes of monks: one contemplative, reclusive, and devote to meditation and ascetic

dewelling monks have been the core of the mainstream ecclesiastical establishment, while the forest monk orders have tended to be excluded from honors and privileges conferred by the establishment. Thus, the forest monk in Thailand do not participate in the monastic examinations and do not receive scholarly titles; indeed, they remain outside the Sangha's system of royal and administrative titles altogether.¹⁰⁷ In ideal terms the forest monk tradition has been perceived as being closer to the monastic environment of early Buddhism and, therefore, more authentic.¹⁰⁸ Theravada reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th century in Thailand included a revival of the forest monk tradition. At the present, a certain number of forest monks have established forest monasteries and combined meditation practice with teaching and propagating Buddhism in different parts of the country. Meditation has become a lay as well as monastic practice of daily life, which traditionally was exclusively a monks' task. Significantly, this development has not precluded a movement to formulate an activist social ethic. In contrast, many forest monks in contemporary period are active in community development as well as help to solve particular social problems such as forest conservation. One such forest monk will be described in Chapter Seven.

Thammakai Movement

The Thammakai movement was initiated by two graduates in economics from Kasertsat University (Bangkok), Chaiboon Suthipol and Phadet Pongsawat who indicated great interest in Buddhism and practiced meditation under the famous spiritual leaders Phra

practices; the other living amidst the laity, engaged in doctrinal learning and teaching, practicing rites and ceremonies, and inhabiting architecturally substantial monasteries. See Tambiah, S.J., *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

107 The forest monks are referred to as Luang Pu, Luang Phau ("grand-father" and "father" respectively) and as Acharn (teacher), not as Chaokun or Phrakhru, names that signify the holding of official titles, (see Tambiah: 1984).

108 Historically, the Buddha meditated in the forest. When he attained enlightenment he then went to teach the dhamma. From the beginning, meditation and teaching have been the two sides of a single path, the dhamma.

The forest monk tradition has been examined in several studies of Theravada Buddhism. (See Tambiah: 1984). Carrithers, Michael, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). Hawley, John S., ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1987).

Mongkol Thepmuni, the deceased abbot of Wat Paknam Phasicharoen, Bangkok. Chaiboon was born in 1944 in Singburi province in the Central region of Thailand. His parents divorced when he was young, and he was brought up by his father, a well-off government official. Phadet was born in 1940 into a merchant family in the Central province of Kanchanaburi. After graduation in 1969, they were ordained at Wat Paknam, Chaiboon assuming the monastic name of Dhammajayo and Phadet the name of Dattajivo. Both young monks made a vow to revive Buddhism and in 1970, Wat Phra Thammakai (Thammakai Temple), a religious center of the Thammakai movement, was established in Pathum Thani province, about 30 kilometers north of Bangkok.

The Thammakai, Teachings and Practice

Wat Phra Thammakai is formally within Mahanikai but the monastery has established itself as a distinctive movement dedicated to the renewal of Thai Buddhism. The Thammakai temple is different from traditional temples as it was built for the purpose of both serving as a temple and a pilgrimage site (Tudunghastan). The temple consists of a non-traditional stylised Thai chapel (boot) and other modern constructions emphasizing splendor, grandeur, cleanliness, and orderliness. It is situated in the forest garden on an area of 800 acres (2,000 rais). The Thammakai monks are expected to have a certain standard of secular education and a strong sense of religious commitment by making a vow to ordain for life.¹⁰⁹ Monks from outside the group are not permitted to take part in the monastic activities.

The central feature of the movement is a particular form of meditation practice, delivered from Phra Mongkol Thepmuni who claimed to be the first person rediscovering the Thammakai method, based on the visualisation of "bright gem" (duang kaew), located at the psychic centre of the body, which the meditator visually penetrates in order to realize on ever

109 Unlike the conventional Thai monastic order, the Thammakai monks are university educated. In the Sangha at large even monks who have attained high positions in the Sangha hierarchy have been educated through monastic system with varying degrees of training in Pali and traditional subjects of Buddhist studies, but have had very limited secular education. In contrast, most of Thammakai monks have dedicated their lives to the monastic life after graduation. This means that Thammakai monks are much better educated in secular subjects, but lack background in Pali and traditional Buddhist studies (Swearer, Fundamentalistic Movements in Thailand, draft).

subtler "gem" which exists in different layers (spiritual bodies). The most refined layer is the ninth body in the form of a pure white lotus-shaped Buddha image which leads into nibbana. The Thammakai instructor equated its practice with the normative teaching of the Buddha: the vision of "bright gem" was interpreted as the Dhamma, the first stage of realization, and the internal visualisation of the Buddha image in the middle-part of the body, corresponding to the entry of the Middle Path, it is what the Buddha referred to when he declared "those who see the Dhamma see me".

Thammakai's meditation practice is clearly explained. It offers members a simple formula for enlightenment available to everyone, maintaining that there is no other way to attain nibbana (nirvana) except this way. It is also promoted to help success in material life, pointing out that regular practice leads to improved memory and thinking ability, more success in business and studying. Advanced Thammakai meditators may visit past lives and other miraculous visions.¹¹⁰

At the same time, the message of Thammakai movement is prepared for the majority of people. It focuses largely on moral and ethical concerns, emphasizing the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, as well as providing strong encouragement for grandeur of rites, merit making and accumulated merit for this life and the next one. Thammakai, moreover, does not reject the traditional Buddhist cosmologies of multiple heavens and hells, legends of the Buddha's miracles and the stories of previous lives. On the contrary, it has elaborated them suitably to offer to its members.

The Thammakai's messages are not concerned with canonical texts and ignore complex philosophical discussions. Though all Thammakai monks including its leaders are well educated in the secular sense, they neither know Pali nor Pali scriptures. The movement, moreover, neither challenges the authority of the Sangha nor criticizes the socio-political order. In contrast it sought support from senior monks in the high Sangha hierarchy as well as royal family, important military and government figures.

110 Zehner, Edwin, "Reform Symbolism of a Thai Middle-Class Sect: The Growth and Appeal of the Thammakai Movement." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21/2: 1990, p. 407.

Thammakai is the fastest growing religious movement in Thailand today. The Movement has expanded its influence and attracted people all over the country. In general it has a broad-based urban middle strata constituency. Although the Thammakai's teachings and practice are simplistic, the utilization of sophisticated, highly developed publications, and costly media campaigns make it successful in propagating its messages to the general public. One of the most important activities of the movement is the Student Ordination Program (Dhammadhayad) to train selected university students in summer vacation.¹¹¹ The program began in 1979 with 24 students and increased rapidly. In 1986, 1056 students from eighteen universities were ordained. The ideology of the movement is integrated with an intensive meditation experience. The total number of students trained within a period of seven years (1979-1986) reached 3354.¹¹² The Dhammadhayad program has become a functional substitute for the traditional three-month rainy season ordination. With a leadership educated in the secular university system and a considerable fund from the movement which continually supports the Student Buddhist Associations's activities on almost all Bangkok university campuses, these Student Buddhist Associations have become an integral part of the Thammakai organization. They are directed at propagating the thought and activities of Thammakai movement.

Movement, Organization, and Leadership

Wat Phra Thammakai stands as the center of meditation practice and major Buddhist

111 The Dhammadhayad Program is offered only for males between the ages 18-35. It is a two-months training: a one month intensive course in meditation and physical toughening, followed by a second month ordained as monks residing at the temple. Since it is a temporary ordination, therefore in most cases students return to college and university (Zhner: 1990, p. 410).

The Thammakai selected only university students for the Dhammadhayad program, and only those students who are regarded as having attained a high degree of proficiency in the Thammakai meditation system are ultimately accepted for ordination. Dhammadhayad (Dhamma-heir) practice is rigorous. Its major elements are strict observance of the eight precepts, living under the shade of an umbrella protected only mosquito net as practiced by thudong monks (forest monks), listening to sermons, and practicing meditation (Jackson: 1989, 212).

112 Matichon: No 321, June 1986, p. 13.

celebrations such as Visakha and Makha Puja (Buddha and Dhamma Days). Every Sunday thousands of devotees (3000-5000) in white dresses participate in religious rituals and sit in meditation in neat rows. The movement, capitalize on an increasingly popular form of Buddhist practice, often identified with the tradition of forest monk.¹¹³ Thammakai is the first Thai temple to use white as the uniform of all its lay participants -men, women, children.¹¹⁴ Prawet Wasi suggested that discipline, cleanliness, and orderliness are involved in the way of life of the middle class and the movement responds to such needs.¹¹⁵

The popularity of the Thammakai movement in the capital partly reflects a conservatism among a section of the urban middle class. It seems that the Thammakai movement attempts to restore the traditional ideals of Thai Buddhist identity. It has less in common with the religious reforms associated with King Mongkut and Wachirayan than with Buddhist-nationalist directions.

Thammakai movement is characterized by a strong authoritarian leadership centered around the two charismatic co-founders, Dhammajayo and Dattajivo who are the driving forces behind the rapid growth of the movement. The organization and activities of the movement are centralized, emphasizing obedience and discipline. Wat Phra Thammakai is a unique religious center of the movement with a network connected to over 50 provincial lay centers throughout the country, including control over 30 post-secondary institutions and University Buddhist Associations.

Thammakai Foundation is the center of the movement's administration and organization which are carried on by well-educated young devotees. Lay administrators receive a low salary. A monthly magazine, *Kanlayanamit* (Good Friend) was issued with 10,000 subscribers in 1985. Subsequently, a Thammakai newspaper was published which reported on the movement activities, Sangha news, and teaching articles. Thammakai's

113 Swearer D.K., *Fundamentalist Movement in Theravada Buddhism*, (draft).

114 Zehner:1990, p. 417.

115 Prawese Wasi, *Suan Mokkh, Thammakai, Santi-Asoka* (Bangkok: Mor Chao Ban Press, 1987), p. 36.

posters, Dhamma tapes and books, leaflets, Thammakai bags, umbrellas, and saving boxes, notebooks and pencils, clothing for male and female meditators were sold and widely distributed.¹¹⁶ Lay administered offices set time schedules to visit the provincial lay centers, dispensing information, organizing trips to Wat Phra Thammakai, and collecting funds.

According to the deputy abbot, Dattajivo, the Thammakai monastery needs considerable funds, at least fifteen million Baht (US\$ 600,000) a month to maintain its overheads and most of income comes from donations.¹¹⁷ The abbot, Dhammajayo compared his religion as goods, when they need selling, good management and marketery is needed. It is clearly evident that the well-to-do in the urban middle strata is the target group of the movement.

The movement also set out with the undisguised goal of making money and has invested in such ventures as pharmaceuticals, milk-powder, publishing and printing, hotel, land, tourism, and oil. It has been estimated that the total assets of the Thammakai temple complex, together with its related real estate businesses, amount to well over one billion baht (US\$ 40 million).¹¹⁸ The abbot, Dhammajayo has a number of luxury motor-vehicles for his personal use including a Rolls Royce.

Thammakai movement is criticized by many Buddhist scholars, namely Prawet Wasi, Satiensong Wannaphok, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, and Phra Thepwethi. They argue that Thammakai meditation practice is not the way of Buddhism and there is no canonical basis. Its message is essentially a "narrow Dhamma". The Thammakai is actually in the business of selling "religious pleasure", excessive affluence, and an emphasis on the grand, luxurious, and extravagant rites which totally deviate from the Buddhist tradition.¹¹⁹

116 Satha-anan: 1990, p. 401.

117 Interview with Thammakai's monks and its members, Chiang Mai, 1988.
Taylor, J.L., "New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: An Individualistic Revolution, Reform and Practical Dissonance" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol.XXI, No.1 March 1990, p. 141.

118 Satha-anan: 1990, p. 402.

119 Ibid.,

Santi Asoka Movement

The Santi Asoka movement can be seen as the exact opposite of Wat Phra Thammakai. While the Thammakai movement is high-tech, high-capital and enjoys a considerable support from the Sangha, the Santi Asoka Buddhist group advocates a radically simple way of life and has declared itself independent of the national Sangha hierarchy. Santi Asoka receive donations only from "believers".¹²⁰ The monastic centres of Santi Asoka are simple, austere places devoid of the grandeur and comfortable affluence of Wat Phra Thammakai. Whereas Thammakai emphasizes meditation practice, Santi Asoka denies any form of concentrated meditation because the everyday routine in daily life is the "dhamma practice" itself. Unlike Thammakai which has fashioned a fundamentalistic, "moral majority" type ethos for the Thai Buddhist mainstream, the Santi Asoka has designed a sectarianism for the few.¹²¹

Leadership, Teaching, and Practice

Phra Bodhirak, the founder of the Santi Asoka movement, was born in the Northeast province of Srisaket in 1935 into a merchant family. After finishing secondary school, he went to study fine arts in Bangkok, living in poverty and had to do odd jobs to support himself. He then worked as a television producer and song writer, making a great deal money and living luxuriously. At age 36, the peak of his career, he made an abrupt change: gave up everything and got himself ordained as a monk in Thammayutnikai at Wat Asokaram in Samut Prakarn, 20 kilometres south of Bangkok.

Phra Bodhirak engaged in heated discussions about the dhamma rather than spending time performing traditional monastic chants and Pali study. He gained followers both monks and laymen from his temple and other temples of Mahanikai, referring to his followers as "the

120 Outsiders who interested in merit making have to go to Santi Asoka monastic centre at least seven times before their donations are accepted (From the author's experience and interview with a follower of the movement at Buddhasathan Santi Asoka, Bangkok, 1988).

121 Swearer, *Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism* (draft).

Asoka group". They established a monastic centre called Dan Asoka (Asoka's Land) outside of Nakorn Phathom, 50 kilometres west of Bangkok, where monks and laymen, both Thammayutnikai and Mahanikai could stay and practice the dhamma together. The project did not meet with the approval of his Thammayut preceptor (Upatcha).

Phra Bodhirak was then reordained in Mahanikai in 1973. Two years later (1975), he was investigated for proclaiming himself "ariya" (Buddhist saint). Such a claim is a serious breach of the monastic discipline (vinaya). Bodhirak resigned from Mahanikai and has ever since remained "independent" from the Thai Sangha.

Santi Asoka monastic centre was established in Bangkok in 1976 and spread to four provinces: Nakhon Swan in the central region, Nakhon Pathom nearby Bangkok, Srisaket and Nakhon Ratchasima in the Northeast. As a sect, Santi Asoka emphasizes several minor differences in practice from the Buddhist mainstream. Their monasteries which are called Buddhasathana (Buddha place) have no chapel (boot), pavilion, Buddha image, no performance of any traditional rites and pali chanting even merit-making. It was built for the purpose of both a place of religious practice and a lay monastic residence. Santi Asoka also established its own ordination lineage. Legitimacy of the movement rest on its claim to strictly perform the monastic discipline (vinaya) compared with the majority of Thai monks.

Moreover, Santi Asoka's monks follow additional disciplinary rules such as ordination for life, not shaving eyebrows (following Sinhalese tradition), wear the brownish red robes, go barefoot, and not use umbrella which is associated with the forest monk tradition rather than town-dwelling monks. Women are accepted to be ordained as female novices. Those who would be ordained in the sect have to pass the strict phase of practice under the observation of the group at least two years for monkhood and novice, and three years for becoming a female novice. These are not ordinary Thai Buddhist practice.

The central feature of the movement is its adherence to a strict Buddhist precept (sila), particularly vegetarianism. Its message is simplistic, moralistic, and it is associated with broader social concerns, for instance, they teach that poverty, crime, and social injustice occur

because people have neglected strict observance of Buddhist moral code (5 and 8 precepts).¹²² Santi Asoka also stands against city habits such as dress, dancing, smoking, drinking, and seeks to return to rural life. Its message offers nothing new but it has extended beyond standards of personal and social behavior. Santi Asoka lay followers focus their devotion on the performance of the Buddhist precepts (5 or 8 sila) -as part of the preparation to mindfulness and wisdom. They, moreover, become vegetarians, give up all addictive substances and liquid consumption other than water, abstain from various pursuits of pleasure ranging from cinema to television, eat only once a day, wear blue Thai peasants shirts and pants, and wear short hair and go barefoot. Their goal is to lead an exemplary life in matters of personal piety and the efforts of the group are concentrated on bringing this way of life to the attention of other and helping them follow it.

The movement, moreover, emphasizes communal activities and joint decision-making which absorbs the individual in the group. They refer to themselves collectively as a "Dhamma Family" (yadthi-tham). But at the same time within the movement there are hierarchical structures or "leveling", measured by a distinctive moral training and spiritual seriousness.¹²³ Furthermore, becoming a follower of the movement is conditional upon passing tests set by the movement. It seems that the movement offers a new identity and a stable meaning for life as well as a set of simple answers to personal and social problems.

The Santi Asoka movement itself claims to seek a return to the pristine teaching and

122 Five and eight Buddhist precepts are: prohibition against killing, stealing or taking what is not given, adultery, telling lies, consumption of intoxicants, abstention from untimely eating (after midday), from entertainment, visiting unseemly shows and from adorning oneself with ornaments, from using high and luxurious couches or beds (Interview with Santi Asoka's members, Bangkok, 1988).

123 For example male and female lay followers may perform five and eight precepts, male and female novices follow 10 precept, and monk follow 227 rules (vinaya).

represent the central tenets of Buddhism. It strongly criticizes conventional Thai Buddhist practice for its superficiality, supernatural belief and metaphysical interpretation of Buddhist teaching. Buddhism, argues Bodhirak, has nothing to do with superstitions, magical rites, merit making, even Buddha image. The majority of Thai Buddhists both monk and layman practice their faith as something into which they are born or ordained by custom, they do not strive to realize the highest moral and spiritual ideals of Buddhism.

Bodhirak also rejects meditation practice, saying that it is not the right way; to be a Buddhist is to be one who acts in the world for the benefit of the world. Santi Asoka followers are encouraged to consistently apply "moral restraint" in everyday life. In some extent, Santi Asoka is inspired by Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism. However, it tends to support a less religious rationalism than those Buddhadasa. The movement regards traditional notion of rebirth in terms of reincarnation and the extraordinary ability of its leader is accepted. Bodhirak himself still maintain that he is an ariya (Buddhist saint); he emphasizes his spiritual attainment as being the basis of his religious authority to justify Buddhist teaching. He said that he had never studied the Tipitaka or any Buddhist scriptures; his knowledge in dhamma is acquired through revelatory experience which came from his spiritual ability in the previous life.¹²⁴

Movement and Politics

An interesting aspect of Santi Asoka's development is its Buddhist community which Sombat calls Buddhist utopia. At Nakhon Pathom 19 monks, 7 female novices, and about 70 lay families live together and lead a simple way of life.¹²⁵ They established a self-sufficient community, producing for consumption, and sharing labor; residents work in the rice fields, plant vegetables, fruit trees, and herb gardens; they mill their rice by hand, weave their cloth, built their own community, religious hall, houses, roads, and water system; no electricity is

124 Bodhirak, *Satja heng Chewit kong Pothirak* [The Life Truth of Bodhirak] (Bangkok: Teera-karnpim), 1983, p. 260.

125 For more details see Sombat Chantawong, *Chum-chon Pathom Asoka: Phutta-Utopia* [Pathom Asoka Community: A study of Buddhist Utopia] (Bangkok, Thammasanti Foundation, 1988).

allowed. Asokan community reflects the ideal Buddhist community, emphasizing simplicity and naturalness, simultaneously, challenging consumerism and the appropriation of Western capitalistic materialism.

Like Thammakai, the Santi Asoka movement is characterized by a strong centralization around its charismatic leader, Phra Bodhirak. Several organizations were established under the rubric of the movement. The Thammasanti Foundation (1977) handles the hundreds of the movement's publications. The Kongtapham Mulanithi (Army of Dhamma Foundation) was set up in 1981 to support the activities of the movement, the Chomlom Mangsawerat heng Prathetthai (Vegetarian Association of Thailand) and the Samakhom Phupatibattam (Dhamma Practitioners Association) with over 10,000 members was found in 1984. This number seems to be the core member of the movement. In 1988, the movement has 80 monks, 18 female novices and the number of those involved in the movement roughly estimated to be 100,000.¹²⁶ The financial sources of the movement mostly come from donations of the followers themselves.

The Santi Asoka movement grows at a moderate rate. It is rather small compared with the Thammakai movement, but the dedication of its followers is more significant. The followers of the movement are mainly from the lesser educated sections of the urban and provincial middle and lower class.¹²⁷ The movement, however, has a number of professional supporters, the most prominent of whom is the present governor of Bangkok and the leader of Palangtham (Dhamma Force) Party, General Chamlong Srimuang who has brought Santi Asoka to prominence since 1981 through his political activities.

Chamlong's ascetic Buddhist life-style and his strong moral political stance has attracted the middle class residents of Bangkok. He symbolizes not only personal discipline, integrity, and sincerity but also as a "clean" politician. Followers of Santi Asoka were advised to support Chamlong as religion and politics are considered by Bodhirak as indivisible. In 1985, he won the election for the position of governor of Bangkok with almost half a million

126 Interview with Phra Bodhirak at Buddhasathana Santi Asoka, Bangkok, 1988.

127 Ibid.

votes, double the vote of his nearest rival.

Chamlong insists the need for religious influence in politics, referring to Buddhadasa's book Dhamma and Politics (Thamma Kap Karnmuang) that "if politics do not consist of dhamma (morality) politics will become a means of destroying the world".¹²⁸ He also promotes the ideals of self sacrifice, dedication to duty, and concern for the poor. The link between the Palangtham Party and Santi Asoka movement is obvious. Most of the Party's executive committee and half of those who contested the poll up-country known followers of Santi Asoka. Moreover, the ideology of the Palangtham Party reflects the ideals of the Santi Asoka movement.

The Santi Asoka movement has been widely criticized by Buddhist scholars and many social critics, namely Phra Sophonkhanaporn (Thammayutnikai), Phra Thepwethi, Anan Sanakan, and the Parian Tham Samakhom (Pali Study Association). They criticized that Santi Asoka's teachings are subjective, too superficial, and lack an understanding of Pali or of the scriptures. Bodhirak claims to attain the highest spiritual state and to base his interpretations in these experience, a form of behavior rejected in the Pali Canon. Bodhirak's attack on the Thai Sangha and laity are too extreme which is not the way of Buddhist monks. Finally, some argue that Santi Asoka was illegal, and that Bodhirak violates the dhamma-vinaya (Buddhist teaching and the monastic discipline) and the Sangha Act for illegally ordaining his followers. Bodhirak resigned from the Thai Sangha while he maintains his status as a monk. Traditionally, nullification of membership of the Sangha means to disrobe.

Buddhadasa Movement

The Buddhadasa movement is one of the most prominent religious movements in contemporary Thailand. It was formed in 1932, the year in which the absolute monarchy was replaced by constitutional monarchy. The contral feature of the movement lies in the reinterpretation of Pali Canon by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa interprets the Theravada doctrine intellectually and critically. His interpretation attracted a large number of intellectual

sectors. It is held that Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism reflects not only the potential of traditional religious culture to accommodate to modern life but also impels Buddhism toward modernization. Buddhadasa's movement which forms the central focus of this thesis, will be discussed in detail on subsequent Chapter.

Buddhadasa was born into a local Thai-Chinese merchant family in 1906 in Chaiya, the southern Thai province of Surat Thani. At age of 20, he was ordained as a monk into Mahanikai Order in his home-town. Like other young monks he studied Nak tham (Dhamma study, a monastic educational system initiated by Prince Wachirayan) and spent a couple of years in Bangkok, studying for a Pali ecclesiastical degree. He was deeply disappointed with what he regarded as the lack of insight into the Buddha's teachings among Bangkok monks. He returned to Chaiya in 1932, spent the following two years alone in the forest, being his own "master", practiced meditation and studied the Tipitaka. His forest dwelling was given a name that became known until today as Suan Mokkh (the Garden of Liberation).

In 1934, Buddhadasa began to promote the dhamma. The Dhammadana Foundation was set up by his younger brother to support the activities of Suan Mokkh, the quarterly journal Buddhasasana was issued to disseminate Buddhadasa's reinterpretation of Theravada doctrine. For Buddhadasa, the crisis and confusion between Buddhism and popular belief is rooted in the problem of religious language. He has developed a distinctive and innovative approach to the interpretation of Buddhism which leads him to become antithetical to the normative symbol system of Theravada Buddhism.

Buddhadasa's interpretation of Buddhism is significant. It can be seen as an attempt to make Buddhist teaching relevant to a layman's life in this world. Buddhism is interpreted as a way of life rather than "teaching". The highest ideal of Buddhism, nibbana is the state that everyone can attain whenever his mind is free from selfishness. It is a part of understanding and practice of the Buddhist populace at large. Nibbana is the goal of human being, not just Buddhists or monks. Buddhadasa also strongly criticizes popular Thai Buddhist belief and practice among both monks and laymen. He contends that many of the later developments within Buddhism are extreme and sometime antithetical to the genuine teachings of

Buddha, even in the Pali Canon. His teachings won the support of urban middle class and intellectuals. Many groups and organizations invited him to give sermons. His lectures and sermons are recorded and published by his followers. Buddhadasa was the first monk in this country who came out of the temple to speak to the public in ordinary "language".¹²⁹ He has produced a number of books and articles more than any other Buddhist scholars in Thai history. Many Buddhadasa's books are translated into other languages.

Suan Mokkh, the forest monastic centre, was located on 150 acre of forest garden, five kilometers outside of Chaiya. It illustrates Buddhadasa's ideal of propagating Buddhism in a form integrating both early and modern forms. Unlike most of Thai monasteries, Suan Mokkh has no elaborately decorated temple. Individual dwelling places for over seventy monks set in the midst of a forest, their chapel is the top of a hill with trees as pillars and a canopy of leafy branches as a roof. Two main buildings have been constructed as a library and a "spiritual theater" for the teaching of Buddhism through the use of audio-visuals such as films, slides, and paintings which will engage the attention of people of all ages. Unlike the average Thai monk who does not engage in physical labor beyond the maintenance of his own quarters, the monks of Suan Mokkh spend part of everyday working: construction of new buildings, roads, producing the teaching media, numerous artistic projects of the centre, and teaching the dhamma.

The Buddhadasa movement generated and developed within the Thai Sangha. Though Buddhadasa criticizes popular Buddhism but has never rejected the authority of the Sangha as has Bodhirak, the founder of Santi Asoka. Though Buddhadasa's interpretation, remarks Swearer, is somewhat unorthodox, they are informed by a broadmindedness which contrasts with Santi Asoka's relatively simplistic and moralistic ideology.¹³⁰ The movement emphasizes attaining the teaching of Buddha rather than relying on superficial appearance and details of monastic discipline (vinaya). It also shows little interest in bringing about structural reform within the Sangha, neither in building up an effective organization nor a special system

129 Phongphit Seri, *Religion in a Changing Society* (Hong Kong: ARENA PRESS, 1988), p. 9.

130 Swearer, *Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism* (draft).

for itself. Suan Mokkh does not function as an administrative headquarters with branch offices. Buddhadasa plays the role of being inspirator rather than the charismatic leader. The movement is interested more in gaining listeners than in followers, and is content to inspire rather than govern. There are neither criteria nor a set of tests for distinguishing those who are acceptable for membership from those who are not. In these characteristics, Buddhadasa's movement differs from Mongkut's reform, including Thammakai and Santi Asoka movements.