

**IN SEARCH OF  
THAI BUDDHISM**

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## Preface

*In Search of Thai Buddhism* is one of many publications initiated by the World Buddhist University (WBU) as means of propagation of Buddhism to the entire world. This book is published by the Office of National Buddhism and is intended to be distributed in the Seminar in Buddhist Studies which is an international seminar to be held from May 2, B.E. 2553/2010 to May4, B.E. 2553/2010 at the Center for Japanese Studies, Thammasat University (Rangsit Campus), Pathum Thani.

Since Thai Buddhism is not quite well known in non-Theravada countries and in the Western world, *In Search of Thai Buddhism* can be a proper manual to show all readers a clear picture of Thai Buddhism in different facets, i.e., normative, popular, intellectual, and socially engaged. Moreover, it can be read both for gaining more knowledge of Buddhism and for exclusively academic purposes. The content provides a basic understanding of Thai Buddhist history and culture to all readers. Its conclusion suggests the unity in diversity of Thai Buddhism. Though Thai Buddhism is not a monolithic religion, Thai Buddhists can share their religious lives peacefully with one another.

On behalf of the World Buddhist University, I would like to thank the Office of National Buddhism for publishing this book for the good of the Buddhist world and the benefits of all readers. I also appreciate the generosity of the author, Associate Professor Dr. Pataraporn Sirikanchana, who allows us to publish her manuscript. Thanks are due to the World Buddhsit University staff in the WBU Centre who work together for the success of the publication of the book and the fulfillment of the Buddhist goal.

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## **Introduction**

Many foreigners, who come to Thailand for the first time, find that the phenomena of Thai Buddhism are something quite different from what they have known from Buddhist writings. While a Buddhist scholar or a learned monk explains that Buddhists are taught to depend on themselves in order to attain the Final Liberation (Nibbana), a considerable number of Buddhists still engage themselves in propitiating the spirits through sacrifices and offerings, mystical activities, blind faith and heresy. Frequently, one can find Buddhists who pay respect to trees, rivers and hills as gods while asserting that they are still good Buddhists. The phenomena of Thai Buddhism perhaps render outsiders some confusion and needs more clarification.

In order to have a clearer picture of Thai Buddhism, one needs to understand it in all its aspects. It is misleading and pointless to portray it only according to the Buddhist doctrine and the Buddhist norm. In fact, it should be viewed in different dimensions, i.e., as Normative, Popular, Intellectual and Socially Engaged Buddhism. If all these dimensions are well scrutinized, one will be able to understand the characteristics of Thai Buddhism and assert its harmony and accept its being multifaceted.

This book is an attempt to give an overall picture of Thai Buddhism, its unity in diversity, its essence as the root of Thai life and its social value in the Buddhist world. The contents of the book thus point to different types of Buddhist beliefs and practices in Thailand in sociological and phenomenological contexts. The differences are caused by levels of textual understanding, local traditions, social necessities and monastic reformation. Nevertheless, the differences may be considered as superficial phenomena. The root of being a Thai Buddhist rests in his/her religious spirit and faith in the Triple Gem and in the attempt to overcome sufferings through the Buddhist teachings.

Thai Buddhism belongs to the Theravada tradition. It is composed of orthodox and unorthodox Buddhists which altogether make 95% of the Thai population. Generally, Normative Buddhism is mentioned as the representative of Thai Buddhism. In fact, Thai Buddhism includes Popular Buddhism, Intellectual Buddhism, Socially Engaged Buddhism and the Santi Asoka which is unorthodox Buddhism. Yet, Normative Buddhism is the mainstream Buddhism in Thailand.

The publication of this book is under the guidance of the Rector of the World Buddhist University (WBU), Associate Professor Noranit Setabutr, and the best support of the Office of National Buddhism of Thailand. The merits of the book can be found in its orientation of Thai Buddhism to Thai Buddhists and its propagation of Thai Buddhism to the Buddhists and non Buddhists around the world.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Essential Facets of Thai Buddhism**

Thai Buddhism is not a monolithic religion. It can be understood to belong to Theravada denomination. Nevertheless, it can be classified into different types of beliefs and practices within the umbrella of Theravada Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism holds strictly to the Tipitaka<sup>1</sup> (The Buddhist Scriptures) as transmitted from the First Buddhist Council by the Elders (500 holy monks who were the Buddha's disciples and had been ordained no less than 10 years) to all Buddhists. The First Buddhist Council took place 3 months after the passing away (parinibbāna) of the Buddha<sup>2</sup>. Thus, all beliefs and practices which follow the Buddha's teachings and the Great Disciples' words are called Theravada (Theravada comes from a Pali word "theravāda" which means "the Teachings of the Elders").

#### **1. General Beliefs and Practices of Theravada Buddhism**

1) Beliefs in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha as spiritual refuges of all Buddhists.

2) Practices according to the Five Buddhist Precepts which are required for being good Buddhists.

The Five Buddhist Precepts are as follows :-

- a) To abstain from killing
- b) To abstain from stealing
- c) To abstain from committing adultery
- d) To abstain from false speech
- e) To abstain from indulging oneself in spirits which leads to heedlessness<sup>3</sup>

3) Nibbana is the Theravada Buddhist ideal. A Theravada Buddhist who attains Nibbana is called an Arahant (a Buddhist saint). Nibbana can be attained through the clear understanding of the Four Noble Truth<sup>4</sup> and the Three Characteristics<sup>5</sup> of all phenomena.

4) Theravada Buddhism uses Pali as its sacred language for chanting and recording scriptures.

5) Monks and novices are considered superior to laypeople in social status and have to fulfill their duties in the study of the Buddha's teachings and the propagation of Buddhism.

6) Monks and laypeople are differentiated from one another in their duties. A monk is expected by the Buddhist community to purify himself in order to attain Nibbana. A layperson basically supports monks and novices with all necessities of life (food, shelter, medicine and clothing).

7) Theravada Buddhism acknowledges monks and novices as "the ordained." It considers nuns (mae chee) as laywomen. Formally and officially, there are no female monks (bhikkhunis) in Thailand. It is believed they became extinct in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century B.E. (the 11<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.) in Sri Lanka before the expansion of Buddhism to Southeast Asia.

8) Theravada Buddhism holds to the Law of Kamma (the Law of Nature or the Law of Cause and Effect), i.e. doing good yields good in return, and vice versa. Generally, the Law of Kamma is understood concretely and literally.

9) A Theravada Buddhist monk lives a celibate life according to the Buddhist Discipline (vinaya) and normally stays in his temple during the Buddhist Lent (Rainy Season from July to October).

10) Theravada Buddhists follow Buddhist beliefs and practices in the Tipitaka<sup>6</sup> and Commentaries as guidelines for their moral cultivation and religious ceremonies.

## **2. Buddhism in Thailand Throughout History**

Buddhism first entered Thailand in Nakhon Pathom Province in Central Thailand before the Fifth Century B.E. (the First Century C.E.) from India. Some archaeological evidence is seen in the Wheel of the Law (the Dhammacakka) with Pali inscription and the Stupa.<sup>7</sup>

In the 13th Century B.E. (the 17th Century C.E.), the King of Sri Vijaya Kingdom who ruled Sumatra (an Island in Indonesia at present) spread Mahayana Buddhism to Southern Thailand. The evidence is the Bronze Statue of a Bodhisattva found in Surat Thani Province in Southern Thailand and now shown at the National Museum, Bangkok.<sup>8</sup>

In the 14th Century B.E. (the 8th Century C.E.), Queen Camadevi who had formerly lived in Lopburi moved to Northern Thailand to rule the City of Haripunjaya (Lamphun) and established Theravada Buddhism in Haripunjaya.<sup>9</sup>

In the 16th Century B.E. (the 10th Century C.E.), King Surya-varaman I of Cambodia expanded his power to Central Thailand and established the City of Lopburi (Lavo) as the Center of his Kingdom. He had a Mahayana temple built in Lopburi called Prang Sam Yod (Triple Sanctuary Tower).<sup>10</sup>

In the 19th Century B.E. (the 13th Century C.E.), King Ramkhamhaeng the Great of the Sukhothai Kingdom invited monks from Nakhon Si Thammarat who had been ordained in Sri Lanka to preach the Buddha-dhamma (the Buddha's Doctrine) in Sukhothai.

The Sri Lankan monks belonged to Theravada Buddhism. They were forest-dwellers. When they came to Sukhothai, they stayed in a temple not so far from the city. They used the Buddhist Scriptures and Commentaries in Pali. Thai Buddhism was thus influenced by Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition. After the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Sukhothai, other Buddhist denominations began to fade away from Thailand.<sup>11</sup>

In the Period of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (the 20<sup>th</sup> Century B.E. or the 14th Century C.E.), Brahmanism and Animism flourished and co-existed with Buddhism, besides beliefs in the Divine King and his supernatural power, the making of Buddha Images in Royal Attire, the construction of Buddhist monasteries and so on.<sup>12</sup>

In the 22th Century B.E. (the 16th Century C.E.), Northern Thailand was under the domination of Anuruddha, the famous Burmese king. Theravada Buddhist art and architecture thus followed the Burmese style.<sup>13</sup>

In the Bangkok Period, Prince Mongkut who had been ordained as a monk established the Dhammayutika Sect in B.E. 2379 (C.E. 1836) in order to be the model of Normative Buddhism. Monks outside the Dhammayutika Sect belonged to Mahanikaya Sect. In the reign of King Rama V, many Chinese people came to live in Thailand and established Mahayana Chinese Buddhism.<sup>14</sup>

Before the advent of Buddhism in Thailand, Thai people had believed in Hinduism and Animism. When they turned to follow Buddhism, they assimilated other beliefs in it. Thai Buddhism is thus a unified religion of the Buddhists in Thailand who make 95% of the entire population. Besides, sociologically and

phenomenologically, it can be differentiated into Normative Buddhism, Popular Buddhism, (Socially) Engaged Buddhism and Intellectual Buddhism.

### **3. Normative Buddhism in Thailand**

Normative Buddhism is the mainstream Buddhism in Thailand. It is supported by the State and Sinhalese Buddhism (Buddhism of Sri Lanka).

In the Reign of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great (the 19<sup>th</sup> Century B.E. or the 13<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.), monks who came from Nakhon Si Thammarat in Southern Thailand preached to the people in his Kingdom in the Buddhist Sabbath Day. Many people in this Sukhothai Kingdom (located in Northern Thailand), both men and women, strongly believed in the Buddhist teachings. Some wanted to be ordained. Though men could be ordained, women cannot. According to the monastic rules, a woman should be ordained by groups of monks (bhikkhus) and female monks (bhikkhunis). Since female monks at that time could not be found in Sri Lanka and Thailand which were Theravada countries, female ordination was not possible.<sup>15</sup> Women who wore white robes and shaved their heads were called “mae chee” or upasika. Yet, they were not officially called the ordained.

Thai men since the time of the Sukhothai Period can be ordained as monks by their preceptors in the consecrated assembly hall (Uposatha Hall) when they reach the age of 20. Monks wear yellow robes and take 227 precepts. They abide by the Buddhist Disciplines (the Vinaya). Monks stay in a temple or a monastery. Some stay in a hermitage. They have a duty to go for an alms-round early in the morning. Being on an alms-round, monks give people a chance to make merit when the people offer food to them.

Young men under 20 years old may be ordained as novices. A novice takes 10 precepts: 1) To abstain from killing 2) To abstain from stealing 3) To abstain from committing adultery 4) To abstain from false speech 5) To abstain from indulging oneself in spirits leading to heedlessness 6) To abstain from untimely eating 7) To abstain from dancing, singing, playing musical instruments and watching shows 8) To abstain from decorating oneself with ornaments, flowers and from rubbing scented substance on one's body 9) To abstain from using high and luxurious bed and 10) To abstain from touching money and gold in order to have them for oneself.<sup>16</sup>

The transgression of the precepts leads to a penalty. The most serious penalty is being expelled from the monastery and monastic institution.

There are 2 types of monastic dwellers: the forest dwellers and the village dwellers. The forest dwellers are monks who primarily work on meditation practice. The village dwellers, on the other hand, pay more attention to scriptural studying.

During the Sukhothai period (from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century B.E. or the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.), most monks were forest-dwellers. Theravada Buddhism flourished especially in the Reigns of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great and his grandson, King Lithai. King Lithai wrote a great Buddhist text called *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* (Three Worlds of King Ruang) in order to promote the Buddhist norms and virtues to his people. This Buddhist text portrays the Buddhist cosmology illustrating the universe which is comprised of three worlds (realms): 1) Kama-bhumi (the World of the Desired) which is differentiated into the realms of denizens of hell, hungry ghosts, demons, animals, human beings and deities 2) Rupa-bhumi (the World of Form Beings) where higher type of beings who possess form and bodies exist 3) Arupa-bhumi (the World of Formless Beings) where formless beings exist.<sup>17</sup>

Human beings suffer in the Cycle of Death and Rebirth according to their kamma (volitional actions or deeds). If they do good, they will receive good in return, e.g. giving things to the needy will yield wealth in the future in return. The Cycle of Death and Rebirth will be destroyed when one attains Nibbana.

*Trai Phum Phra Ruang* has been the ground of Buddhist morality in Thai society since the Reign of King Lithai. It initiates beliefs and practices of Normative Buddhism in Thailand as follows :-

### **1) Beliefs and Practices according to the Law of Kamma**

In *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, the Law of Kamma is depicted concretely, e.g. offering food to monks will result in rebirth as a rich person on earth or a deity in heaven.

### **2) Buddhist Education Based on the Tipitaka and Buddhaghosa's Commentaries**

Buddhaghosa was born a Brahmin in Southern India in approximately the early 11th Century B.E. (the 5th Century C.E.). He later studied the Tipitaka and became so knowledgeable in the Buddhist doctrine that he was named Buddhaghosa meaning the voice of the Buddha. During his time, Buddhism declined in India but flourished in Sri Lanka. Buddhaghosa thus journeyed to Sri Lanka in order to search for the orthodox teaching of the Buddha. After arriving in Sri Lanka, he stayed with the Sinhalese monks who allowed him to use their Sinhalese collection of the Buddhist texts. Buddhaghosa then composed Buddhist Commentaries on the Tipitaka in Pali and his famous book called *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification). The *Visuddhimagga* is considered by Thai scholars as a veritable encyclopedia of Theravada Buddhism because it contains all the important Buddhist concepts and teachings found in the Tipitaka.<sup>18</sup>

When King Lithai composed *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, he used the Tipitaka and Buddhaghosa's work as his references. *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* is used directly and indirectly in Thailand to promote national morality and Buddhist culture, e.g. a high respect for monks and a strong belief in the Law of Kamma.

The general characteristics of Normative Buddhism can be described as follows :-

1) The monastic institution is under a hierarchic system headed by the Supreme Patriarch who is appointed by the King. The Supreme Patriarch has the Sangha Supreme Council as his Advisory Board. He exercises his ruling power consecutively over the Ecclesiastical Governor General, Ecclesiastical Regional Governor, Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor, Ecclesiastical District Officer, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Head, Abbot, monks and novices.<sup>19</sup>

The King is the Supporter of the Sangha and the Upholder of Buddhism. For example, King Rama V (B.E. 2411 - B.E. 2453 or C.E. 1868 - C.E. 1910) established the two Buddhist universities: Mahamakuta and Mahachulalongkorn. In addition, King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great is the Patron of the Buddhist Association of Thailand and the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

The Sangha supports the sovereignty and charismatic leadership of the King. In return, the King presents an ecclesiastical rank to a member of the Sangha. There is no conflict between the Monarch and the Sangha throughout the Thai history.

All Theravada monks are under rules and orders of the Sangha. Monks of other denominations, i.e. Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism are under the monastic law of the Office of Religious Affairs.

2) The Pali language is considered the sacred language of Buddhism. Pali is used for recording the Buddhist Scriptures and for chanting. In all Buddhist ceremonies in Thailand, Pali is used for reciting and chanting. Pali first appeared in Thailand in the Inscription at the wheel of the Law, the symbol of Buddhist propagation, found in Nakhon Pathom around the 5th Century B.E. (the 1st Century C.E.).<sup>20</sup>

3) The Tipitaka and Buddhist Commentaries are taken strictly and literally, e.g. the Law of Karma is the Law of Reward and Punishment for a person who volitionally does good or evil rather than for a whole community. The study of the Buddhist Scriptures was strongly recommended in the Reign of King Rama V. Monks who had passed a certain level of Pali Knowledge were eligible to gain certain monastic ranks. If they quitted the monastery, they could find a good job, e.g. being a civil servant, which is considered by all Thais good earnings and highly respected. Since Normative Buddhism highly recommends knowledge of the Buddhist Scriptures, it is also called Doctrinal Buddhism.

4) Nibbana is the final goal of all Buddhists, especially of monks. Nibbana is freedom from suffering and can be obtained through the elimination of all defilements, i.e. greed, hatred and delusion, which are causes of all sufferings on earth. Nibbana is not easy to attain. It needs a proper knowledge and a hard work in order to overcome one's own self. The attainment of Nibbana is a monk's highest duty.<sup>21</sup> The Buddhist Training toward Nibbana is through morality (sīla), meditation (samadhi) and wisdom (paññā).<sup>22</sup> The knowledge toward Nibbana is through the understanding of the Fourfold Noble Truth (ariya-sacca) consisting of the true understanding of Suffering (dukkha), of Causes of Suffering (Samudaya), of the Cessation of Suffering (nirodha) and of the Path toward the Cessation of Suffering (magga).<sup>23</sup>

5) Monks and novices are in superior status to laypeople. Parents thus encourage their son to be ordained when he reaches 20 years of age. Having a son ordained is considered a way to gain a great merit.

6) Buddhist tradition and culture based on the Buddhist teachings in the Tipitaka and the Commentaries are closely followed by Normative Buddhists, e.g. the respect to elderly people and the use of the lotus flower in Buddhist ceremonies.

#### **4. Popular Buddhism in Thailand**

Popular Buddhism is also called Folk Buddhism. It is the dominant stream of Buddhism followed by most Thai people but not advocated by neither the State nor the Sangha. It refers to the tradition as commonly practiced by Thai people especially in rural areas.<sup>24</sup> It is the consequence of human attempts to survive in the often confusing and conflicting world of everyday problems and to struggle to attain happiness at present or in the near future. For example, when a Thai villager is desperately in need of some money, s/he may pay homage to a Buddha image and ask for it.

Popular Buddhism embraces Animism in its beliefs and practices. In *The Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber (C.E. 1864- 1920), a famous German sociologist, defined "animism" as the belief in spirits or souls dwelling continuously and exclusively near or within a concrete object or process. These spirits may possess and

dominate events, things, categories, and behaviors, and any temporarily incorporate themselves into things, plants, animals, or people.<sup>25</sup> In general, Animism is the belief in spirits and sacred powers in either natural or man-made objects.

Many popular practices of Thai Buddhists are animistic, such as the Ceremony of Invoking the Rice Spirit (tham khwan khao). In this ceremony, farmers carry rice to the threshing ground and gather the scattered fallen rice in the field. While they are gathering the rice, they chant:

O Rice Goddess, come you up into the  
rice barn. Do not go astray in the meadows and  
fields for mice to bite you and birds to take you  
in their beaks. Go you to the happy place, to  
rear your children and grand children in prosperity.  
Come you!<sup>26</sup>

Through such an informal ritual, the farmers hope to guarantee protection by the Rice Spirit.

In Popular Buddhism, all ceremonies are believed to provide magical power. For example, monks' chanting is considered the utterance of sacred words in Pali which are thought to have the power of protection from all harm and to grant benefits such as long life, success and happiness to the participants of the ceremonies. Monks' chanting conveys no meaning of the Buddha's teachings to Popular Buddhists but rather magical and supernatural power. Monks who master meditation technique are believed to have strong magical power and can effectively invoke power in amulets and certain objects in their chanting ceremony.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, merit making is transferable and sometimes collective, for example, as part of a public ritual or ceremony. Besides, in a cremation ceremony, Buddhists dedicate their merits to the death so that s/he may be reborn in a good place.

Generally, Popular Buddhism can be clarified as follows:

1) It is a combination of Buddhism, Brahmanism/Hinduism and Animism. Though Buddhists believe that the Buddha is the founder of Buddhism, they also faithfully believe in Hindu deities, spirits in nature, amulets, phallic stones and consecrated Buddha images.

2) It gives more support to the belief in Divine Predestination of God Brahma than to that to the Law of Kamma. Popular Buddhists do not deny the dominant power of God Brahma and all deities. Though they accept the Buddha's teaching of the Law of Kamma, they are faithful to gods. They believe that their lives are subject to the Signs revealed through Stars by the Absolute God Brahma. Some Popular Buddhist monks thus work as astrologers for the people.

3) Popular Buddhism encourages beliefs and practices of supernatural power. Even the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha are endowed with supernatural power. The Buddha is believed as being a super-human being. When he was alive, he had extra-ordinary markings and qualities.<sup>28</sup> After his death, his relics and his consecrated images have a magical power.

The Buddha's Dhamma in Pali, for Popular Buddhists, consists of sacred words with magical power in healing, blessing and protecting all participants when uttered during a Buddhist ceremony. For example, an amulet or water in a bowl becomes sacred and has a protective power after sacred words of the Pali Dhamma have been transferred into it during an invocation ceremony.

The Sangha or monks are not only the followers of the Buddha and the propagators of Buddhism but also sacred persons with magical power. There are legends of Thai Buddhist monks who had gained magical power after their long years of meditation retreat. For example, Venerable Luang Poh Tuad who had lived in the 22nd Century B.E. (the 16th Century C.E.) in the Period of Ayudhya was believed to have a miraculous birth. He was born in a poor family. When he was a baby, he was called "Poo" (which means a crab in Thai) and had a sacred crystal ball from a serpent (Naga). When he grew up as a boy, his father took him to a monastery to be ordained as a novice. Later, when he was 20 years old, he was ordained as a monk. One day he was invited to pay homage to the Buddha's Relics in Nakhon Si Thammarat in Southern Thailand. On the way back to Ayudhya in Central Thailand after he had sailed in the sea for several days because of a storm and found no water to drink, the captain put him in a small boat to sail to the shore with some crew. Venerable Luang Poh tuad then put his foot in the sea and turned the salty sea into drinking water. Everyone was saved from dying of thirst. Venerable Luang Poh Tuad is still respected highly throughout Thailand. His image has been made into many kinds of sacred objects of worship.<sup>29</sup>

Another example is the worship of a deity called Catu gama-rama-deva which was originated in Southern Thailand and has been very popular throughout Thailand since the last decade. According to an ancient legend called *Catugama-sastra*, Queen Candra who was King Suriyadeva's wife had united all regions in the Suwannaphum (the Golden Peninsula) in the 7th Century B.E. (the First Century C.E.). She was Prince Ramadeva's mother. Prince Ramadeva had studied Mahayana Buddhist doctrine and faithfully believed in Mahayana Buddhism. He intended to accumulate merits in order to be a Bodhisattva and to propagate Buddhism throughout Suwannaphum. He was named Catugamara ma-deva because he once studied *Catugama - sastra* from his mother. At the end of the 8th Century B.E. (the 2nd Century C.E.), he became a Bodhisattva. He could utter sacred words and possessed a miraculous powers like the Sun and the Moon. He thus could destroy his enemies through his verbal utterance. He was venerated by the people who made a sacred image in his likeness in order to worship him as a deity. People believed that his image possessed a supernatural power to protect Buddhism and their kingdom.<sup>30</sup> The earliest image of Catugama-rama-deva can now be seen at the entrance of the Buddha's Relic Stupa in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

4) Popular beliefs and practices are based on folk tales and local tradition rather than on the Buddhist Scriptures. For example, the *Tale of Khun Borom* which depicts the story of the creation asserts that Than, the creator god, made the human world and ruled things on earth. Than has serpents as his servants. If he orders the serpents to play with water in the sky, the rain will fall on earth. If drought prevails, Northeastern people will perform a sacrificial ceremony for Than who, being satisfied with it, will let the rain fall. This ceremony is traditionally performed in February before the ploughing season so that villagers can have enough rain in their rice fields. If Than does not hear their asking, they would shoot ceremonial rockets to the sky in order to call for his attention.

5) Popular Buddhists prefer the attainment of the World of Metteyya Buddha, the future Buddha, to the attainment of Nibbana. They consider Nibbana too far to reach. Apart from the World of Metteyya Buddha, they want to be reborn in either a rich family or in heaven. They believe that Nibbana is exclusively the ideal for monks. In the Tipitaka, the story of Metteyya is mentioned briefly that he would come

to purify the Buddhist doctrine and bring it back to its original form. During the time of the Buddha Metteyya, the whole world will be filled with happiness and prosperity. Popular Buddhists consider Nibbana inaccessible and undesirable because it is beyond reach and is irrelevant to the present life.<sup>31</sup>

The belief in the realm of Metteyya is similar to that of Christian Millennialism (or Millenarianism) which is the Kingdom of God on earth. According to *Revelation 20*, in *the New Testament*, Christ will return to this world within 1,000 years before the Judgment Day. After the Judgment of God, the Kingdom of God on earth will be established and all beings will live together in happiness.<sup>32</sup>

As Popular Buddhism can solve immediate problems of Buddhists and render hope and consolation to them, the majority of Thai Buddhists willingly follow this type of Buddhism.

## **5. Socially Engaged Buddhism in Thailand**

Some Westerners misunderstand that Theravada Buddhism teaches the way of escapists because it promotes an individual search for Nibbana rather than an altruistic ideal of life. In fact, Theravada Buddhism teaches Buddhists to primarily work for their attainment of Nibbana. Each individual is told to depend on him/herself and to struggle by him/herself toward his/her final goal. Theravada Buddhism does not deny the merit of altruism but emphasizes on primarily helping oneself before helping others.

Formerly, Mahayana Buddhists also considered Theravada Buddhists narrow-minded because of their individual search for Nibbana instead of helping others to attain the Buddhist final goal along with them. Accordingly, Mahayana Buddhists called Theravada Buddhists the Hinayanists and the small denomination, Hinayana Buddhism. The word “Hinayana” means a small and narrow vehicle which can carry only the person who practices it to the final goal. On the contrary, the word “Mahayana” means a large vehicle which can carry many people to the final goal together.<sup>33</sup> In Mahayana Buddhism, a follower does not struggle alone for the Highest Bliss. There are Buddha(s) and Bodhisattva(s) who are always ready to help him through his practice. Since the word “Hinayana” denotes inferiority and contempt, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, an international organization of Buddhists, agreed in its first Meeting in Sri Lanka in B.E. 2493 (C.E. 1950) that the word “Theravada” should be used instead of “Hinayana.”<sup>34</sup> Since then, all text-books and formal documents have used the word “Theravada” instead of “Hinayana.” In Thailand today, many Theravada monks and laypeople are Socially Engaged Buddhists. For example, Phra Khamkhian Suwanno, the former abbot of the Sukhato Forest Hermitage in Chayaphum Province, had helped poor villagers overcome their difficulties through his many projects, e.g. a nursery school for children and a trade union of villagers.

When Phra Khamkhian first came to Tha Mafai Wan Village in Chayaphum Province in B.E. 2520 (C.E. 1977), he preached the Buddhist doctrine to villagers. He expected to dissuade villagers from being drunkards and thieves. He advised them to raise animals, to establish fish farm and so on. He asserted that mental development through the Buddhist moral teachings and meditation practice is necessary as foundation of good thought and good action.

At present, Phra Pisal Visalo, the abbot of the Sukhato Forest Hermitage, is Phra Khamkhian’s efficient successor who works for the best of the people. He is the author of many books such as *the Position and Fate of Human Being in the Computer*

*Age* (in Thai) and *Making Merit with Wisdom* (in Thai). He is an organizer of the Religious Group for Society and works with Sulak Sivalaksa, a famous thinker and social activist of Thailand today. Phra Pisal promotes the roles of monks and laypeople in working for human right, social equality and political justice. He criticizes the monastic preceptors for their inefficiency of being good teachers and their failure to train novices. Moreover, he encourages the establishment of the Bhikkhuni (female monks) Order in Thailand which is against the Rule of the Thai Sangha.<sup>35</sup>

While most Thai Buddhists make merits through financial donation and giving things to others, Phra Pisal suggests making merits without money but working for social benefits instead, e.g. feeding orphans in a nursery, visiting old people in an Old People's Home and being volunteers in a temple.<sup>36</sup>

Another example of a Socially Engaged Buddhist monk is Phra Boonrod Adhipuñño in Saithong Village, Kalasin Province, Thailand. Phra Boonrod works in order to turn the community into the Drinking-Free Village. He preaches the evil of drinking and being alcoholic. He offers jobs in his Temple for those who can quit drinking. He teaches children to understand Buddhist morality and practise accordingly. He also initiates many projects which effectively free villagers from their poor lives, e.g. weaving silk cloth and farming.<sup>37</sup>

Phra Kroo Pipattanachot, the abbot of Don Temple, Songkhla Province, in Southern Thailand also works to help villagers overcome their own poverty. He is the founder of the Bank of Life aiming to free the Community of Hua Kwai (Buffalo's Head) Village from all debts. The Bank of Life is a form of banking of which the objectives are rather for helping its customers than sharing benefits. A villager should deposit 30 bahts (about one dollar) in the Bank every month. Those who want to take out a loan should sign the agreement one month ahead. They cannot take out a loan more than a double amount of their deposit and should pay the interest of one percent per month. All benefits from this banking system go to hospital welfare for all villagers and educational funds for children in the village.<sup>38</sup>

Cooperation of monks and laypeople in order to protect and develop their community can be also seen in the role of Phra Kroo Pitak-nantakun, the leader of "Love the Nan City" Foundation who restores the villagers' conscience and the forest to its former richness through the strategy of "ordaining the forest" in Nan, a province in Northern Thailand. He and the villagers tie yellow cloths around many big trees in the forest in order to make them ordained. They hope that when choppers see trees with yellow cloths, they may feel guilty to chop down the ordained trees.<sup>39</sup>

Cooperation of monks and laity to save their community is a characteristic of a civil religion. A civil religion aims at stimulating a public mind and conscience for the sake of one's community and one's personal right in one's religious activities. Thai Buddhism as a civil religion plays an important role in Thailand.

In Thailand, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great is the greatest socially engaged Buddhist. He has done many projects for the benefits of his people. His projects are based on Buddhist teachings. For example, his "New Theory for the Solution of Drought for Farmers" and "the Theory of Sufficient Economy" is based on the Buddhist teaching of self reliance and a moderate life. According to this Theory, each farmer who averagely owns the land of 6 acres per family should make the best benefit of the land by dividing it into 4 parts. The first part about 30% of the land is used for water storage by digging a pond where fish are kept and water is used

in the dry season. The second part, 30% of the land, is used for growing rice which yields food to the family during the whole year. The third part, 30% of the land, is used for growing vegetable and fruit plants for eating and selling. The fourth part which is 10% of the land is used for building a house, raising animals and growing small plants.<sup>40</sup> Through this management of land, farmers will be able to live sufficiently and overcome all difficulties throughout their lives.

Though His Majesty the King's work affirms his being a Socially Engaged Buddhist, he is basically and primarily representing mainstream Normative Buddhism. His role as a Socially Engaged Buddhist is the outcome of his loving kindness and compassion toward his people. Nevertheless, he needs to strictly preserve and follow the norm of the country.

The Theory of Sufficient Economy was first introduced by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand to his people in order to deal with problems of poverty, morality and environments in Thailand. He first presented his Theory to the students of Kasetsart University on July 18, B.E. 2517/C.E. 1974 as a means to solve economic problems of the country. A part of his lecture on this Theory is as follows:

The Development of the country should follow a step-by-step plan. It should first provide the people with self-sufficiency by means of an economical way of life and proper management. Then it can proceed to a higher step of economic success and social prosperity.<sup>41</sup>

Sufficient economy promotes self-reliance of a person. A person who is economically secure can survive and help others. The practical dimension of the sufficient economy aims at economic sustainability of one's community through living in moderation. It is not to be mistaken as a form of localism which is the antagonistic view to modern capitalism. In fact, sufficient economy can be applied to all levels of life, e.g. lives of local, town, lower class and middle class people. In other words, sufficient economy is a philosophy that stresses the Middle Path<sup>42</sup> as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. It is a holistic concept of moderation and contentment which can be applied to all conducts in family, community and nation.

The Middle Path is the Buddha's teaching as recorded in the Tipitaka and the principle of the Buddhist practices. The Renunciation of Prince Siddhattha can illustrate the meaning of the Middle Path which is the avoidance of the two extremities, i.e. the luxurious life in the three palaces and self-mortification of an ascetic during the Search of Truth.

His Majesty the King gives his exposition of sufficient economy as follows:

Sufficient economy is an economy which can help those who practice it attain self-sufficiency and live without trouble. It promotes primarily the establishment of one's economic foundation or self-sufficiency. Those who are able to stand firmly on their self-sufficient bases can proceed to a higher level of their economic progress.<sup>43</sup>

Self-sufficiency enables self-reliance. It strengthens economic stability of an individual and his/her community and supports them to live harmoniously with their natural environment.

In the Tipitaka, one can find the Buddhist teaching which promotes self-sufficiency, i.e. the virtues leading to Temporal Welfare, as follows:

**1) Endowment of Industry**

One should be energetic and apply oneself to one's duty and honest living.

**2) Endowment of Protection**

One should know how to protect the fruitfulness of one's labor which is gained through one's honest efforts.

**3) Association with Good Friends**

One should not associate with those who lead one downward. One should associate with people who are learned, worthy, capable and endowed with qualities helpful to one's livelihood.

**4) Sufficient Livelihood (Living Moderately)**

One should keep track of one's income and expense and live accordingly so that one can be secured financially.<sup>44</sup>

The Tipitaka also suggests the Buddhists to divide their income into 4 parts. One part is for supporting themselves, their dependants and for good causes. Two parts are for investment. The last part is for saving for future needs.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, the sufficient economy asserts the right method for managing one's own property, i.e. the acquisition of wealth through intelligent and moral acts and the protection of wealth for one's own development and security. Especially, it encourages all human beings to attain sustainable happiness.

Sustainable happiness worth pursuing according to the Tipitaka can be described as follows:

- 1) Happiness of possessing one's property which is the outcome of one's own effort and moral conduct.
- 2) Happiness of spending one's property for the sake of one's own self, one's own family, the needy and the public welfare.
- 3) Happiness of freedom from debt
- 4) Happiness of blameless conduct<sup>46</sup>

Sufficient economy values happiness of the people more than economic growth and wealth of the country. Evidently, the Kingdom of Bhutan closely follows the Theory of Sufficient Economy. The King of Bhutan is knowledgeable about western civilization and development. Yet, he does not allow his country to be westernized. In addition, the people of Bhutan are devout Buddhists. They live moderate and sufficient lives and strictly observe Buddhist precepts and ceremonies. They prefer living with nature and in natural environment to living in materialism and modern technology. The Bhutanese aim to attain the ideology of GNH (Gross National Happiness). Though Bhutan is considered a poor country with low income and simple life style, the people are content with their ways of lives.

His Majesty the King of Thailand presented the Theory of Sufficient Economy to Thai people when the country suffered from economic deterioration. Primarily, he expected to save all in lower social status, e.g. farmers and labourers, from economic poverty. At present, he loves to have his Theory followed by all Thais who want to attain sustainable happiness. His Theory was recommended by the United Nations (UN) which honoured him with the Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in May 26, B.E. 2549 (C.E. 2006). In the UN Lecture in honor of him, the Theory of Sufficient Economy was praised as a worthy theory for Thailand and all nations. In addition, the UN encourages its 166 nation members to apply this Theory to their sustainable development.

In summary, the characteristics of Socially Engaged Buddhism can be presented as follows:

1) It puts more emphasis on the solution of immediate problems than on the preservation of the Buddhist discipline and tradition. For example, a monk can touch a woman if he intends to save her life or to cure her from her illness.

2) Pali language and Pali Scriptures are not considered crucial for a Buddhist life. Buddhist teachings and practices which serve immediate needs of the community are particularly emphasized, e.g. Buddhist teachings of herbal medicine, environmental protection and the Present Benefits of Life which consist of the fulfillment of hard-working, the protection of one's own property, the association of good people and the economical living.<sup>47</sup>

3) It supports a civil society and encourages a cultivation of a public mind. It values the ideology of altruism and social responsibility. Monks live in a village or near a lay community. They work for the sake of others rather than for their own final liberation.

4) It supports all movements for the social development. For example, unlike Normative Buddhism, it approves the ordination of female monks (bhikkhunis). In Socially Engaged Buddhism, monks and laypeople work together to promote human right, freedom and the benefits of all beings.

## **6. Intellectual Buddhism in Thailand**

Intellectual Buddhism asserts the understanding of profound meaning of the Buddha's teachings through wisdom and intellectual capacities. It firmly states that wisdom is the only means to the end of suffering or Nibbana. In Normative Buddhism, Buddhists are encouraged to practice the Threefold Training (Ti-sikkhā)<sup>48</sup> respectively in order to attain Nibbana. Intellectual Buddhism, on the contrary, emphasizes only the use of wisdom. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, an Intellectual Buddhist monk, explains the significance of wisdom or insight as follows:

The Buddha summed up this principle very briefly by saying: "Insight is the means by which we can purify ourselves." He did not specify morality or concentration as the means by which we could purify ourselves, but insight, which enables us to escape, which liberates us from things. Not freed from things, one is impure, tainted, infatuated, passionate. Once free, one is pure, spotless, enlightened, tranquil. This is the fruit of insight, the condition that results,

when insight has done its job completely.<sup>49</sup>

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (B.E. 2449-2536/ C.E. 1906-1993) was the former abbot and the founder of Suan Mokkha, a famous hermitage in Southern Thailand. He was honoured by the UNESCO as one of the World Great Personalities in B.E. 2549 (C.E. 2006). Moreover, he was a Great thinker and influential preacher for scholars in Buddhism both in Thailand and abroad. His writings were translated into many languages, e.g. English, German and Japanese.

In the time of Buddhadasa, superstition, materialism, deterioration of morality and blind faith prevailed in Thai society. Wisdom or insight was the only rescuer of all people. Buddhadasa thus proposed methods for activating wisdom of Thai Buddhists as follows:

### **1) The Use of Dhamma Language**

According to Buddhadasa, language as means of human communication can be classified into dhamma language and everyday language. Everyday language is worldly language, i.e. language of those who do not know the profound meaning of the Buddha's teachings. Everyday language is based on sensory things and experiences accessible to common people. Being based on the physical rather than the spiritual, it serves only for discussion of worldly matters and tangible things perceived under ordinary circumstances. For example, "hell," in everyday language, is a region under the earth. It is ruled over by the God of Death who carries off the souls of the dead and subjects them to all sorts of punishments. It is a place where the bad must go after death.<sup>50</sup>

On the contrary, dhamma language is the language spoken by people who have gained a deep insight into the truth of the Buddha's teachings (the Dhamma). Dhamma language concerns the mind, the intangible and the nonphysical world. For example, "hell," in dhamma language, is the anxiety that burns us just like a fire and causes suffering to us.<sup>51</sup>

### **2) The Use of Symbolic Pictures**

In the Spiritual Theatre established by Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkha Hermitage in Surat Thani Province, Thailand, one can find Buddhadasa's symbolic pictures. Buddhadasa had these pictures painted and drawn in order to initiate one's insight and moral consciousness. For example, the picture "Hatred, Enemy of Peace" shows a man holding a guitar which he plays so violently that all the strings are broken. The picture symbolizes mental condition of human beings when dominated by hatred. It suggests us that we should free ourselves from the power of anger and hatred.<sup>52</sup>

### **3) The Use of Poems**

Buddhadasa is certainly a brilliant poet. He has composed many poems expressing Buddhist philosophy, e.g. "Me and Mine," "Looking only at the Good Side," and "The World is Saved by Gratitude". His poems are influential and attractive. They challenge our intellectual capacities to penetrate the truth of their meanings.

### **4) The Use of a Straightforward Statement**

In some cases, Buddhadasa puts it bluntly. He prefers monarchy to democracy and seems to support dictatorship. We can find some passages to illustrate the point as follows:

Asoka was not a tyrant, however. He was a gentle person who acted for the good of the whole society. He constructed wells and assembly halls, and had various kinds of fruit trees planted for the benefit of all. He was “dictatorial” in the sense that if his subjects did not do these public works as commanded, they were punished.<sup>53</sup>

and

An illusory democracy cannot survive. Liberal democracy has too many flaws. Socialism is preferable, but it must be a socialism based on dhamma. Such dhammic socialism is by its very nature “dictatorial” in the sense I have been discussing today<sup>54</sup>

In the light of Buddhadasa, dictatorship is better than democracy because it keeps people in line.

Besides, Buddhadasa criticizes some popular traditions of Thai villagers which are results of their selfishness. For example, during a funeral rite in a village, Thai men always drink alcoholic beverage and eat food at the house of the dead’s family. Instead of bringing some food to the house, they expect to consume everything at the expense of others. Buddhadasa thus straightforwardly criticizes the bad habit as follows:

When someone dies in a house, the family has to prepare liquor for those Buddhist guests to drink. The family has to kill an ox, a buffalo or a pig for them. Those greedy men come to devour all food in the house of the miserable. What is this sort of loving kindness! How can we love others this way?<sup>55</sup>

### **5) The Use of Metaphor**

Buddhadasa criticizes education in Thailand that it emphasizes only academic knowledge and overlooks the cultivation of morality. Thus, he compares the educational system in Thailand to a “tail-less” dog.<sup>56</sup> He suggests that we should “recover a dog’s tail.” He explains that education without morality is like a dog whose tail is cut off and tries to deceive others that a dog without a tail is more beautiful than the one with it. He tries to correct this misunderstanding by pointing out that a dog must have a tail, that, similarly, education must include moral lessons, and that education without morality is useless and even harmful to a society.

Buddhadasa asserts that it is crucial to consider all phenomena through wisdom or insight. Buddhadasa’s work aims at elevating our intellectual capacities toward the end of suffering. By means of the clarification of everyday language and

dhamma language, he demythologizes the Buddhist texts. He does not intend to deny the truth of the text but rather to reveal its true meaning. To “de-mythologize” means to “recover the deeper meaning behind the mythological conception.”<sup>57</sup> This term is first used by Rudolf Bultmann in his analysis of Jesus’ teachings and his interpretation of the New Testament.<sup>58</sup> Bultmann asserts his point as follows:

We can understand the problem best when we remember that de-mythologizing is a hermeneutic method, that is, a method of interpretation, of exegesis.<sup>59</sup>

For Bultmann, “de-mythologizing” is a very important means to penetrate the true meaning of the Scriptures. In the beginning of **Jesus Christ and Mythology**, he proposes the following passage:

This method of interpretation of the New Testament which tries to recover the deeper meaning behind the mythological conceptions I call de-mythologizing --- an unsatisfactory word, to be sure. Its aim is not to eliminate the mythological statements but to interpret them. It is a method of hermeneutics. The meaning of this method will be best understood when we make clear the meaning of mythology in general.<sup>60</sup>

Like Bultmann, Buddhadasa tries to de-mythologize the Tipitaka. He believes that Buddhists will understand the true meaning of the Buddha’s teaching if they do not take mythology of the Tipitaka literally, but consider it analytically and philosophically instead. For example, the story of gods mentioned in the Tipitaka should be taken as the symbol of a certain kind of human beings who live in luxury, happiness, and wealth, not as the story of extra-terrestrial beings outside human world.

The general characteristics of Intellectual Buddhism can be summed up as follows:

1) It emphasizes the role of wisdom in all Buddhist beliefs and practices and asserts that wisdom is essential for being a good Buddhist. In the light of Buddhadasa, wisdom brings about insight which reveals the truth of all phenomena.<sup>61</sup> Those who penetrate the truth of all phenomena understand that all is subject to transience (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and nonselfhood (anattā) and thus is not worth clinging to.

2) It rejects all supernatural beliefs and practices. Intellectual Buddhism accepts the Law of Nature or the Law of Cause and Effect.

3) It considers selfishness, consumerism and materialism as the causes of human defilements and suffering. Selfishness is the root of all evils. For Buddhadasa, those who work for money, food, desire, fame and honor are selfish, consumerists and materialists, but those who do their duty for duty’s sake are followers of dhamma.<sup>62</sup>

4) It rejects literal meanings of the Buddhist Scriptures. It accepts the meaning of the Buddha’s teachings in dhamma language. Besides, it disregards Buddhaghosa’s

Commentaries and the Abhidhamma. According to Buddhadasa, the essential teachings of the Buddha are *dhamma* and *vinaya* (the monastic discipline). Abhidhamma and dhamma are not essentially different from each other. The Abhidhamma, however, is an excessive and unnecessary teaching of the Buddha of which the content has already been presented in the dhamma.<sup>63</sup>

5) It asserts “Nibbana here and now.” This assertion encourages Buddhists to seek Nibbana in their present lives. In Buddhadasa’s exposition, Nibbana which most Thai Buddhists believe to exist beyond the Cycle of Birth and Death is only in our worldly experiences and can be understood as the state achieved through the eradication of desire and attachment.<sup>64</sup>

Though Buddhism in Thailand can be classified sociologically and phenomenologically into Normative Buddhism, Popular Buddhism, Socially Engaged Buddhism and Intellectual Buddhism, Thai Buddhists do not clearly belong to any particular type of Buddhism. For example, a Thai Buddhist who claims that s/he is Buddhadasa’s follower may devote him/herself working to help poor people in a community instead of trying to attain Nibbana through wisdom. Besides, Buddhadasa himself can be taken as both an Intellectual Buddhist monk and a Socially Engaged Buddhist monk because of his teaching of the crucial role of wisdom and his establishment of the Spiritual Theatre and the International Hermitage for Foreigners in Suan Mokkha.

The classification of Buddhist beliefs and practices into four types is aimed primarily to provide more understanding to Thai Buddhists’ ways of life which always depend on their situations and circumstances. Thai Buddhists take Buddhism as a part of their social lives and not a transcendental religion. Though they have no knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings as recorded in the Tipitaka, they try their best to be good Buddhists. Their being Buddhists is expressed through their Buddhist culture and ceremonies as well as their loving kindness and compassion towards others. If we understand the whole picture of Thai Buddhists as expressed in their multifarious and multifaceted beliefs and practices, we may not blame a Thai Buddhist for being a wayward follower of the Buddha.

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- <sup>1</sup> “Tipitaka” comes from “tipiṭaka” which is a Pali word. As Theravada Buddhism uses Pali words, all technical terms here thus use Pali instead of Sanskrit (which is used in the texts of Mahayana Buddhism).
- <sup>2</sup> P.A. Payutto, *The Pali Canon, What a Buddhist Must Know* (Bangkok: S.R. Printing Mass Products, Co. Ltd., 2002), p. 17.
- <sup>3</sup> P.A. Payutto, *A Constitution for Living, The Pali canon: What a Buddhist Must Know* (Bangkok: Printing House of Thammasat University, B.E. 2551/2008), p. 21.
- <sup>4</sup> The Four Noble Truth (*ariyasacca* is composed of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering).
- <sup>5</sup> The Three Characteristics (*Tilakkhaṇa* is composed of impermanence, the state of being oppressed and not-self)
- <sup>6</sup> The Tipitaka is divided into the Sutta, the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma. The Sutta is the Buddhist teachings for monks and laypeople. The Vinaya is the Buddhist Discipline for monks and novices and female monks. The Abhidhamma is the Buddhist metaphysics in subtle and sophisticated version.
- <sup>7</sup> Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, *Monuments of the Buddha in Siam*, Translated by Sulak Sivaraksa and A.B. Griswold (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1973), pp. 9-11.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-23.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
- <sup>15</sup> Samer Boonma, “Bhikshuni in Buddhism,” *Journal of the National Research Council of Thailand*, 1981, 13 (1): 56-57. (In Thai).
- <sup>16</sup> P.A. Payutto, *Dictionary of Buddhism*, 16th Edition (Bangkok: S.R. Printing, B.E. 2551/2008), pp. 176-177.
- <sup>17</sup> King, Lithai, *Trai Phum Phra Ruang (Three Worlds of King Ruang)* (Bangkok: Klang-vidaya, B.E. 2515/1972), p. 314. (In Thai).
- <sup>18</sup> *Buddhaghos’-uppatti*, ed. and trans. J. Gray (London: Luzac & Co., 1892), p. 31.
- <sup>19</sup> Vajirañāṇa - varorasa, *Karn Khana Song (Monastic Organization)* (Bangkok: Mahamakuta Press, 1971), pp. 3-4. (In Thai).
- <sup>20</sup> Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, *Monuments of the Buddha in Siam*, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> *Anguttara-nikaya.v.23-25, The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, trans. F.L. Woodward, Vol. V (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 17-19.
- <sup>22</sup> Vajirañāṇa - varorasa, “Hua Chai Traisikkha (The Essence of the Tisikkha),” *Dhamma - gati (Story of the dhamma)* (Bangkok: Mahamakuta Press, 1971), p. 175. (In Thai).
- <sup>23</sup> P.A. Payutto, *Dictionary of Buddhism*, 16th Edition, p. 155.
- <sup>24</sup> John E. de Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), p. 145.
- <sup>25</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup> Phya Anuman Rajadhon, “The Life of the Farmer,” *Life and Ritual in Old Siam*, trans. and ed., William J. Gedney (New Haven: Hraf Press, 1961), p. 38. There are many versions of rice chanting. Please see Iam Thongdee, *The Rice Culture* (Bangkok: Sahadharmic Printing, B.E. 2537/C.E. 1994), pp. 123-124. (In Thai).
- <sup>27</sup> John E. de Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand*, p. 145.
- <sup>28</sup> S.J. Tambiah, “The Sociology of Merit and Social Correlates of Buddhism in a Thai Village,” in B.R. Leach ed., *Dialectic in Practical Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 43.
- <sup>29</sup> Choosak Nararatwong, *History in the Time of Luang Poo Tuad* (Bangkok: J.P. Graphic Design and Printing, B.E. 2545/2002), pp. 57-59. (In Thai).
- <sup>30</sup> Suriyan Siddhichai-bhutikul, *Catugama-rama-deva* (Bangkok: Bhabpim, B.E. 2550/2007), pp. 101-104. (In Thai).
- <sup>31</sup> Charles E. Keyes, “Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (February 1977), p. 288.
- <sup>32</sup> *The New Testament* (Bangkok: The Gideons International in Thailand, no date), pp. 1022-1031.
- <sup>33</sup> Ashvaghosa, *The Awakening of Faith (Sraddhotpada-Sastra)*, trans, Timothy Richard (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1907), p. 1.

- <sup>34</sup> Sunao Miyabara, *A History of the World Fellowship of Buddhist 2493 B.E. (1950) to 2533 B.E. (1990)* (Bangkok: Darnsutha Press Co., Ltd., 2537/1994), pp. 2-3.
- <sup>35</sup> Phra Pisal Visalo, *Thai Buddhism in the Future: A Tendency and an Exit from Crisis* (Bangkok: The Sodsri-Saritwong Foundation, B.E. 2546/2003), p. 364. (In Thai).
- <sup>36</sup> Phra Chai Worathammo and Phra Pisal Visalo, *Making Merits Cleverly: A Collection of Things Worth Knowing and Manual for Making Merits Properly* (Bangkok: Medsai Printing, B.E. 2544/2001), pp. 50-53). (In Thai).
- <sup>37</sup> Theera Vacharaprance and Anan Manpayak, *Drinking-Free Village* (Bangkok: Champathong Printing, B.E. 2550/C.E. 2007), pp. 17-27. (In Thai).
- <sup>38</sup> Somkiat Meethan, "Phra Kroo Pipattanachot and the Bank of Life," in *Sekhiyadharma* Vol. 10 No. 43 (January - March, B.E. 2543/C.E. 2000): 136- 139.
- <sup>39</sup> Banchit Sairawkam and Thanat Baiya, *Hak Muang Nan (Love Nan City)* (Chiangmai: Nontagarn Graphic Printing, B.E. 2549/2006), p. 51. (In Thai).
- <sup>40</sup> Pragas Wacharaporn, *Phra Raja Panithan Nailuang (His Majesty the King's Resolution)* (Bangkok: Prapansarn Printing, B.E. 2542/1999), pp. 205-207. (In Thai).
- <sup>41</sup> The Message of His Majesty the King delivered on the Occasion of the Commencement of Kasetsart University Students.
- <sup>42</sup> The Middle Path is the Path between the two extremities and the way toward the end of suffering as enlightened by the Buddha. It is composed of Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. Here, His Majesty the King expects to mean it only "sufficiency" or "the middle of the two extremities.
- <sup>43</sup> The Message of His Majesty the King delivered on the occasion of His Birthday Anniversary Celebration on December 4, B.E. 2541/1998.
- <sup>44</sup> P.A. Payutto, A Constitution for Living, The Pali Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know, p. 41.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39
- <sup>48</sup> The Threefold Training (Ti-sikkhā) is composed of morality (sīla), concentration (samadhi) and wisdom (pañña).
- <sup>49</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Handbook for Mankind* (Bangkok: Thammasapa Press, B.E. 2548/C.E. 2005), p. 75.
- <sup>50</sup> Buddhadasa, *Toward the Truth*, edited by Donald K. Swearer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 71.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Dhammic Pictures in the Spiritual Theatre at Suan Mokkha*, Chaiya (Bangkok: Somchai Printing, no date), pp. 18-20.
- <sup>53</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Dhammic Socialism*, trans. Donald K. Swearer (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, B.E. 2529/1986), p. 92.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
- <sup>55</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Chat Mankhong Dai Duay Sasana (Securing the Nation Through Religion)* (Bangkok: Somchai Press, 1981), pp. 20-21. (In Thai).
- <sup>56</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Aseeti-Sangwachara-yusamanusorn* (Bangkok: Karnpim Phranakorn, B.E. 2531/C.E. 1988), p. 139, (In Thai).
- <sup>57</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 18.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>61</sup> Buddhadasa, *Toward the Truth*, edited by Donald K. Swearer, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>62</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Dhamma Nai Thana Srang Tua* (Dhamma As a mean to Build Oneself) (Bangkok: Suvijan Press, 1968), p. 36. (In Thai).
- <sup>63</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Abhidhamma Khu Arai (What is the Abhidhamma)* (Bangkok: Dhamma-puja Press, B.E. 2521/1978), p. 43. (In Thai).
- <sup>64</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Toward the Truth*, edited by Donald K. Swearer, pp 84-85.

## Chapter 2

### The Monastic Order and Lay Attendants

Thai Buddhism nowadays is divided into two denominations: the Dhammayutikanikāya and the Mahānikāya. Dissension is caused by problems of monastic discipline. Kirsch has observed that, unlike Christianity in which religious disputes come from the questions of doctrine and beliefs which then lead to the problem of heresy and its resolution, disputes in Theravāda Buddhism, i.e., Thai Buddhism, rarely involve doctrine but rather are more concerned with monastic rules.<sup>1</sup> The Dhammayuta monks, who are required to adhere to more strict monastic rules are usually regarded by the laity as more respectable. However, for the Dhammayuta monks themselves, these standards are rather too high for their personal qualities to attain. Thus, there are only few men who opt to enter the Dhammayuta monastery, and many men are forced to enter the Mahānikāya order or to remain in the secular world.

In fact, a Buddhist denomination does not truly justify the good discipline of a Thai monk. For example, Venerable Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), a famous and respected Thai monk, who is an accomplished Thai Buddhist scholar and recipient of the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, is a Mahānikāya monk.

Mahānikāya and Dhammayuta monks can be classified according to the age of the monk at ordination. Monks, or **banphachit** (Pali: **pabbajita**, the one who ordains) are divided into two groups: the **bhikkhu** who observes 227 precepts known as the **patimokkha**, and **sāmaṇera** or **ṇera** who are in a preparatory stage to **bhikkhu** and hold only to 10 precepts. **Sāmaṇera** are normally young men who enter the monastery when they are under 20 years of age. Nevertheless, there are some monks who have ordained before the age of twenty and, after having attained the prescribed age of being **bhikkhu**, do not take the vow of 227 precepts.

The monastic order is called **khana song**. It is a dependent group which gives up its own economic activities and depends on others for support. After the enactment of the Buddhist Order Administration Act in B.E. 2449/1906, the Buddhist orders have been overseen by Thai Government administration. According to this Act, every **bhikkhu** and **sāmaṇera** must be enlisted in a monastery. Each monk is obliged to belong to a particular monastery and is no longer permitted to live as an independent religionist. This legal requirement effectively brought the Thai Buddhist religious world under the secular supervision of the State.

In addition to political interference, monastic life also suffers social demands and values. Prof. Craig Reynolds has noted that monks always surround prospective patrons and seek their guidance. The situation is similar to that in the secular world when “a Siamese man, once had passed through the ceremony of ordination, remained Siamese, and Siamese; men in the **Sangha** grouped themselves according to patronage, client ship, and discipleship, just as their peers did in the lay world.”<sup>2</sup>

Monks are also classified by their monastic ‘teacher/disciple’ relationship, the teacher (Pali, *acārya*) and the disciple (Pali: *sisṣa*). This relationship is signified by the term **samnak** (abode). The meaning of **samnak** here indicates a group of monks under the influence of a teacher, e.g., Prince Monkut’s **samnak** at Wat Mahathat was later broken up when he moved to Wat Bowonnivet.<sup>3</sup>

Ideally, the monastic relation is based on equality. Nevertheless, when the monastic organization was brought under state control, some particular elements which did not exist in the time of the Buddha arose, e.g. the formation of **khana song** or group of monks in the monastery and its hierarchic administration. These extra

elements distort the fundamental monastic concepts in the **Vinaya Pitaka** and obstruct the practice of equality among the monastic members.

The **Vinaya** required a specific number of monks for various monastic rites, but the complexity of the **khana** groupings in nineteenth century Siam exceeded the **Vinaya's** prescriptions, suggesting that the facts of Siamese social organization also played a part in breaking up the community of equals<sup>4</sup>.

The head of the monastic kingdom in Thailand is the **Sangharāja** (the Supreme Patriarch). Next to the Supreme Patriarch are those monks holding Phra Rachakhana titles. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the monastic hierarchy system in Thailand paralleled that of the absolute monarchy. The Supreme Patriarch was the highest monastic ruler. He appointed the heads of the **khana** which was divided into the northern, the central, and the southern section. The head of the northern **khana** was called Phra Phutthakhosachan, the head of the central **khana** Phra Phutthachan, and the head of the southern **khana** Phra Wannarat. The monks of the northern and the southern **khana** are town dwellers. The monks of the central **khana** are forest dwellers. The Supreme Patriarch is directly appointed by the king and remains in his position as long as he is in monastic life. Thus, apart from age and **sammak**, monks are differentiated by administrative rank. According to Reynolds' observation, rank has priority over function, e.g. a monk of a high Phra Rachakhana rank who administers a small monastery is considered to have more status than a lesser ranking monk who administers a provincial **khana**.<sup>5</sup>

In B.E. 2484 /1941, the Premier Phibun tried to introduce democratic system into the Buddhist order. He introduced the Buddhist Order Act which encouraged the division of administrative power. According to this Act, the Supreme Patriarch appointed the **sanghasabha** (the Ecclesiastical Assembly), the **khana sangkhamontri** (the Ecclesiastical Cabinet), and the **khana winaiton** (the Ecclesiastical Court). Each region, province, or district was controlled by an ecclesiastical committee headed by a **chao khana**(chairman). Each **wat** (temple) was controlled by a **chao awat** (abbot). In the time of Prime Minister Sarit, his enactment of the Buddhist Order Act of 1963 had denied the idea of democracy. This Act established a centralized system which rendered strong authority to a Supreme Patriarch. It was supposed to abolish the obstacle of effective administration of the Supreme Patriarch so that he could command the order through the **mahatherasamakhom** (Council of Elders) of which he himself was the president.<sup>6</sup>

The organizational goal of the Sangha is primarily to facilitate the individual attainment of **Nibbana** through disciplined, secluded life, and meditation. However, in practice, the **Sangha** organization may deviate from the original purpose of the monastic life and cause inequality among its members.

The motives for ordination also cause different types of monk. Male laity becomes monks for various reasons. Among these, the reason of attaining **Nibbana** is very rare. A person may become a monk because of a personal obligation. He may be encouraged or even forced by his own parents who strongly desire to see his yellow robe before their death. To have a son ordained as a monk is a great merit for the parents. Thus, the son may unwillingly become monk and can hardly conduct himself well during his monastic period. Second, a person may be forced by social obligation. Living under the rules of discipline in the Buddhist order and under the moral guidance of the elder bhikkhus is viewed by the villagers as the minimum training

necessary for maturity and thus for being considered of social value to the community. This is also a social imperative before marriage. Third, ordination may be considered by some people as a means of acquiring greater merit. These people do not want to attain **Nibbana** but may want to be reborn in a better life, e.g. in a rich family, in heaven, and so on. Fourth, some people may ordain because they want to gain religious knowledge. This kind of knowledge will probably help them as a psychological comfort. Fifth, attaining ordination is a sign of maturity. A Thai male who becomes monk is considered a knowledgeable, mature person by his community. Sixth, some Thai males enter the monastery in order to gain more opportunity for a better education. Some monks can continue their education abroad and then return to a lay life.<sup>7</sup>

Terwiel also observes that the motives for ordination vary as follows:

- 1) A misunderstanding caused by an attractive impression of monastic life.
- 2) Social pressure.
- 3) Encouragement by one's parents.
- 4) Demand of maturity and social acceptance.
- 5) Fulfillment of a promise to gods.
- 6) Escape from poverty.
- 7) Fleeing from a wife.
- 8) Saving money.
- 9) Opportunity of taking a better food than at home.
- 10) Joining some friends in the monastery.

These motives differentiate temporary monks from permanent or career monks. According to many scholars, permanent monks are those who remain in the monastery more than one Lenten period and are committed to search for a religious goal, whereas temporary monks are those who ordain because of any of those motives and stay in the monastery only for a short period. Terwiel does not use the terms “temporary monks” and “permanent monks” but instead “inexperienced” and “experienced” monks. Nevertheless, the Thai monks, no matter of what type they are, take important roles in encouraging economic and social change towards modernization.

Monks and the laity have been in a close relationship with each other since the time of the Buddha. According to the **Vinaya pitaka**, it is necessary for monks and laity to support each other. During the Buddha's lifetime, the Buddha had many lay attendants or supporters whom he called **upatthaka**<sup>8</sup>. In those days, the relationship between monks and laity probably took only a few forms; for example, monks were religious preachers to laity and the laity were supporters of the monks' physical needs. Monks were highly esteemed as holy people and were more restricted within their religious boundary than are today's monks. As times passed, monks had to participate more and more in worldly affairs because of social and political demands from the secular world. Today, the relationship between monks and the laity. This results in a close interdependence, and can be seen in various forms.

The forms and occasions of monk-laity relationships in modern Thailand can be described as follows:

- 1) Monks and laity contact each other in every religious ceremony. Every **wan pra** (the weekly Buddhist holyday), Buddhists usually go to the temple to listen to the **dhamma** (the Buddhist teachings) and to perform religious deeds. It is an occasion in which Buddhists can get together, take a break from their routine works,

and purify themselves through the monks preaching. In the village, **wan pra** is a day of rest for all villagers and farm work is done on **wan pra** only if it cannot possibly be postponed. Not all Buddhists, however, participate in Buddhist ceremonies with religious intentions. It can be noticed that sociability and atmosphere of festivity still permeate every Buddhist ceremony, e.g. gossiping, chewing betel, smoking, and so on, during the service. It seems that, through the social aspect of religious service, many Buddhists can satisfy their social and recreational needs<sup>9</sup>.

2) Monks-laity relationships are based on religious obligations. Though some lay people may not go to the temple, they can come in daily contact with the monks since it is a duty of the monk to make an alms-round for his daily food. The Buddhist doctrine of meritorious accumulation also encourages lay people to acquire **bun** (merit) by sending some additional food to the temple for the monks midday meal. They know that food collected on the alms-rounds only may not be enough for the monks.

According to the Buddha's teachings, monks withdraw from the world and from the responsibilities of householders in order to follow the way of the Buddha and to study the **Tipitaka** (the Buddhist scriptures). Their services to society are teaching **dhamma**, exemplifying renunciation, and enabling meritorious deeds of laity by means of knowledge and practice of the doctrine and participation of religious rites.<sup>10</sup>

3) Monks and laity contact each other by means of social needs. Monks depend on laity's physical offerings. Laity, on the other hand, need spiritual and moral support from monks in return. Enduring sufferings from daily problems, lay people go to consult monks. Thus, monks, apart from teaching dhamma, become fortune-tellers, social advisers, conciliators, psychiatrists, and so on, to the laity, both in village and in town.<sup>11</sup> Since monks are considered as those who inherit the Buddha's teachings and who possess a profound knowledge of human life, they are highly respected.

4) Monks and laity can contact each other by means of social and political situations. Today, some monks deviate from being holy people to being magicians.

Traditionally, monks do not work. They study dhamma and preach. Their physical needs for survival, such as food, medicaments, and so on, are provided by laity. Because of social situation, monks in modern Thailand, especially the village monks also work side by side with laity:

In the northeastern villages, the bhikkhus and novices can be seen helping in the construction of a village well, the building of a bridge or a small dam, the laying of a new village road, or the erection of a village meeting hall or school.<sup>12</sup>

Besides, in a village or in a suburb, the temple also serves as the social welfare center. Orphans or some young lay boys can always be found living here as monks attendants. Monks, in return, teach them basic knowledge in Buddhism and in academic education. Klausner explains as follows :

The villagers do not view their merit offerings to the bhikkhus in solely religious terms. They feel, though this feeling is not overtly expressed, that they help the bhikkhus in giving them food, so it is only right that the bhikkhus should give them in return.<sup>13</sup>

According to the contemporary situation in Thailand, government and monastic leaders are presently encouraging monks to train for teaching not only in temple schools but also in non-temple schools.<sup>14</sup> Close relationships with the lay community will help cultivating some ideas, by means of religious doctrine, among lay people. Monks sometimes play the role of political supporters and mediators between the government and the people. Lester points out that the project of the **Dhammajarik** (Dhamma traveler), Buddhist mission to the non Buddhist hill tribes of Thailand, was initiated in B.E. 2506/1963 in order to bring Buddhism to the hill-tribe people and assimilate these hill tribes into Thai culture. This is social, economical, and political policies to bring them into the Thai national social system and Thai monks take on this crucial role for the Thai government. Many of the leading monks of Thailand are obviously pro-government and anti-communist for the sake of both their own survival and governmental stability.<sup>15</sup>

5) Monks are the lay community's guardians and leaders. In almost all cases, monks, especially the village monks, are the wise-men of the lay community. Community projects usually have monks' sanction whether they are to have a chance of success or not. This foreman role is always shared with other lay leaders of the community. Nevertheless, monks' presence and words during the work are still important as moral supports to the villagers. Apart from being wise-men for the lay community, monks are also physicians. They may give free medical diagnosis and treatment. Some elder monks or the abbot himself may be bankers. If the villagers have any large sums of money, they may seek to place their funds in the care of the abbot for safekeeping. Klausner writes that this relationship is rather prevailing in the village community.

The villagers in time of emergency may also borrow cash from the bhikkhus, as the abbot or elder bhikkhus may well have accumulated a good sum of money through "merit" contributions. No interest is figured. Both the depositing of money and borrowing from the bhikkhus are not publicized, but the villagers consider such activity to be a part of the village bhikkhus' functions in the community.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between monks and laity in village and in town is generally identical but specifically different from one another. Monks in villages maintain closer contact with the laity than do monks in town. Village life requires unity from all of its members. Whereas modern facilities and government aid cannot reach distant villages, monks cannot play only the role of non-working receivers. In town, monks need not be well-diggers, social laborers, bankers, physicians, and so on, for modern technology and facilities can provide all that. Town people who are scientifically trained and well-educated prefer professional doctors to monk physicians. The town monks then more distantly relate to laity than do the village monks to their villagers. The town monks may spend their time resting in the afternoon, reading scriptures and some other books, fortune-telling, participating in some religious ceremonies, and so on, without working hard in return for the lay people.

Though monks and laity are sometimes in close contact, they are still quite apart. For example, monks have no physical contact and only limited social contact with women, have to reserve their expression both in sorrow and in joy, and are

always regarded respectable and being in higher status than that of laity. When laymen talk with monks, they have to use a special vocabulary of honorific terms for addressing monks.<sup>17</sup> Monks usually stay in their monastery whereas the laity go to visit them. In **Wat Phran Muan**, a temple in Northeast Thailand, according to Leach's observation, monks do not socialize with villagers and enter a home only to conduct rites.<sup>18</sup>

Traditionally, monks, as renunciants, are trained to keep away from secular involvement but, as members of social community and a part of secular world, monks cannot avoid socializing with lay people and keep themselves as exclusively holy people.

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### **Chapter 3**

#### **Buddhism and the Middle Class' Dhammic Practice in Thailand**

The middle class' dhammic practice in Thailand is an outcome of various motives and methods. Those who practice the dharma assert their compliance with the Tipitaka. The Thai middle class tend to practice the dhamma in a school hermitage rather than in their daily lives. Their dhammic practice does not necessarily mean the Dhammic Training of Sīla, Samādhi, and Paññā (Morality, Mentality and Wisdom). Their practice is only a rest in a place for an escapist who needs a break in his/her life. Thus, it becomes an endless activity to be done occasionally throughout one's life. It is noted that most of the middle-class dhammic followers are women with low income and academic handicap as well as those who are required to attend the dhammic practice program as a part of their jobs. These phenomena signify a religious flaw which calls for a Buddhist innovation so that the dhammic practice can render most benefits to all practitioners and provide them with successful results.

The term "middle class" used in Thailand today is different from that in the West. "Middle class" in the West was originally synonymous with the term "bourgeoisie" meaning the free residents of European towns during the Middle Ages (approximately C.E. 1000-C.E. 1500). The first use of the word "bourgeoisie" was to mean those who lived in medieval towns of France and occupied a social position between the peasants and the landowning nobility. The meaning was soon extended to be "the middle class" of other nations who were merchants, trades people, artisans, bankers and entrepreneurs.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the feudal society was transformed into early capitalist society of Europe in which the bourgeoisie were the leaders of social change. By the 17th century, the bourgeoisie or the middle class supported principles of natural rights and constitutional government against the theories of divine right and the privilege of the rulers. It should be noted that the bourgeoisie were leaders of the 17th century English revolution and the American and French revolutions of the late 18th century.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution led by the bourgeoisie brought about the development of mechanical power, the factory system and the growth of urban centers. The bourgeoisie then became the bourgeoisie class and expanded greatly. The original bourgeoisie (the capitalists) are then different distinctively from the petty bourgeoisie (the shopkeepers, the technical workers and the clerical workers). The capitalists became the owners and managers of industries and associated themselves with the upper classes.

During the time of Karl Marx (C.E. 1818-1883), the theory of the class struggle had been developed. Marx considered the bourgeoisie, or the capitalists who were employers, the class which held back the advancement of the proletariat or working class. At present, the term "bourgeoisie" is rarely used except by economic historians. It is generally interchangeable with the term "middle class" which is composed of professionals, white-collar workers, farmers and the like, all far removed from the capitalist class of Marxist theory<sup>1</sup>

In Thailand, the definition of the middle class is rather obscure. Nevertheless, the middle class has existed in Thailand since the Period of Ayutthaya (C.E. 1350-C.E. 1767) and was understood as a class between the upper class (the noblemen) and the lower class (the commoners)<sup>2</sup>.

The concept of the middle class in Thailand has no connection with that of the capitalists in Marxism. It has gradually been developed within the Thai history.

In the Bangkok Period (or the Ratanakosin Period, C.E. 1782-the present), Thailand welcomed foreign visitors from afar. A considerable number of Chinese came to live permanently in Thailand and became Thai citizens. After the Abolition of Slavery in Thailand in C.E. 1905, the free Thais and the Thais with Chinese blood have formed a new social class, the middle class. They are merchants, civil servants, professors, teachers, white-collar workers, soldiers, policemen and so on. One outstanding characteristic of the middle class is their freedom. They love to be freelancers and enjoy freedom of thought. The middle class are different from the upper class and the lower class as to their free spirit. The upper class tend to attach themselves to Thai culture and tradition. The lower class are subject to social oppression and financial constraint. Only the middle class can work to upgrade themselves and to provide the society with innovated ideas and creativity.

Though it is difficult to specify the characteristic of the middle class, we can roughly understand that the middle class love materialistic lives, social respect and freedom to lead their own lives. Their materialistic attitudes are expressed even in their religious context. For example, they believe that their well-being in this life is the outcome of their previously meritorious deeds; thus, they try to do good materially, such as donating some money to the poor and so on, in order to sustain their good lives at present and to have more gain in the future.

According to the Master's Thesis of Ms. Pratibha Pabhasrawong, most of the middle class who came to join the dhammic practice at Wat Pah Nanachat (the International Forest Hermitage) did not expect to attain Nirvana as their Buddhist goal. They only wanted to stay in a place where they could find peace of mind, good surroundings and foreign monks with whom they could have a dhammic talk<sup>3</sup>.

It should be noted that only few members of the middle class practice "the dharma" in order to liberate themselves from suffering. Most of them do it traditionally and materially, i.e. expecting a wealthy life in return. Their practice does not relate to the Buddhist "dhammic practice" because its goal is not the emancipation from suffering.

The meaning of the dhammic practice can be considered as follows:.,

1. The dhammic practice is all beings' duty. This "doing duty" is doing according to the Law of Nature. All beings have to follow the Law of Nature in order to survive. Similarly, human beings can survive if they follow the Law of Nature, i.e., they practice the dharma in order to be able to cope with their suffering. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (B.E. 2449/1906-B.E. 2536/1993), an eminent Buddhist monk who was honored by the UNESCO last year as one of the World's Great Personalities, explained that dhammic practice could be done at all times in our daily lives, e.g., working in the field, trading and so on. Whenever we worked or lived with our sense of duty, "duty for duty's sake," we practiced the dhamma. We needed not go to the temple in order to fulfill our dhammic practice.<sup>4</sup>

According to Buddhadasa, our dhammic practice can be fulfilled through our right thought which is the origin of our sense of duty. If we realize the value of our own duty, we will do it willingly and happily. For example, if we are medical doctors, we should realize that our duty is to save our patients and not to seek wealth and fortune through our profession. A medical doctor can fulfill his/her dhammic practice through his/her devotion for the sake of his/her patients. The dhammic practice can

thus be done for the best of other beings in a society. It is not a personal activity performed in an isolated place.

2. The dhammic practice is the Buddhist practice according to the Threefold Training (Ti-Sikkhā) which is composed of morality (Sīla), mental discipline (Samādhi) and wisdom (Paññā). The normative Buddhists believe that the dhammic practice should proceed from the training of morality to the training of mental discipline and finally to that of wisdom. The fulfillment of wisdom is the enlightenment leading to the end of suffering.

The dhammic practice of laypeople in the time of the Buddha was primarily based on faith, e.g., faith in the Buddha, faith in good manners of the Buddha's monk disciples and faith in the Buddha-dhamma. The Buddhist faith motivated them to listen to the teachings and to practice the dhamma. It is noticeable that the teachings of the Buddha and his monk disciples for laypeople at that time were not aimed at the insight development (vipassanā-kammatthāna) which was a high level of meditation leading to the end of suffering. The teachings, however, merely focused on principal dharma leading to the enlightenment such as the Progressive Sermon<sup>5</sup> the Fourfold Noble Truth (ariyasacca) and the Three Characteristics (ti-lakkhana). According to the Buddhist Scriptures (Tipitaka), there were no laypeople, in the time of the Buddha, who attained the Arahantship (the final stage of holiness). Those who were asserted in the Tipitaka to be the Arahant (the Buddhist saint, the enlightened one) were the ordained. Especially, the sutta (sutra, one of the three Buddhist scriptures) concerning the higher meditative practice or the insight development (vipassanā-kammatthāna) aiming at self-detachment and final liberation (nibbāna), e.g., Maha satipatthāna sutta, Anapanassati sutta, Cula-suññata-sutta and Mahā- suññata-sutta, were preached by the Buddha to the ordained disciples, both male and female. The teachings for laypeople are suitable for their complicated daily lives so that they can solve their worldly problems and feel relieved. On the contrary, the teaching for the ordained are suitable for their peacefully religious lives aiming at the Buddhist ideal, the end of suffering.

Generally, most dhammic practice hermitages in Thailand do not differentiate training methods for monks from those for laypeople. While laypeople in the time of the Buddha, e.g., Anathapindika and Visakha, practised the dhamma by means of donation to the poor and attained the first stage of holiness (sotapana) through listening to the Buddha's teachings. Laypeople nowadays are trained, in a hermitage or in a temple, with the mindfulness on breathing (anapanasati) and the four foundations of mindfulness (satipatthana) which are higher methods of meditation taught by the Buddha only to the ordained (bhikkhu), bhikkhuni and a Buddhist novice. If we compare laypeople who practised the dharma in the Buddha's time to the middle class who practiced the dharma nowadays, we can notice some interesting factors in the two groups.

Firstly, the Masters of the dharma practitioners in the Buddha's time and in our days do not share the same spirit and understanding of their training methods. In the time of the Buddha, the Buddha and his disciples paid close attention to each of the dhammic practitioners and select training methods suitable for each person. Thus, each practitioner took a different method suitable for his/her attitudes and capacity which yielded more possibility to achieve his/her dhammic goal. At present, on the contrary, the Masters of meditation train their followers in a group. They have neither time nor energy to pay enough attention to each individual and do not expect that all dhammic practitioners will finally attain the end of suffering

Secondly, the dhammic practitioners nowadays have different incentives to practice the dharma from those in the Buddha's time. Buddhist laypeople in those days practised the dharma because they had faith in the Buddha or in his monk disciples. The dhammic practice of the middle class today, however, is initiated by some external causes, e.g., persuasion by friends, rumor about the supernatural power of a meditation Master, and some personal problems in their daily lives. The practice is not initiated by their interest in the dharma which is the means of their enlightenment.

Thirdly, some dhammic practitioners today are under a project requirement. Many governmental offices, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations demand that their employees or their students should fulfill a course of dhammic practice in a selected temple/hermitage. Since their dhammic practice arises from neither their faith nor their willingness, it makes no progress over time. Consequently, we cannot differentiate the dhammic practitioners from others by their spiritual achievements.

Fourthly, the dhammic practice at the level of donation<sup>6</sup> does not mean the same for the practitioners today and those in the Buddha's time. Lay attendants in the time of the Buddha donated some money to the poor in order to train their mind to realize the value of giving and to prepare themselves for higher levels of dhammic practice, i.e., the practices of morality, meditation and wisdom. On the other hand, the practice of giving nowadays is not always aimed at the fulfillment of merit-making. It may be only a means for some physical/worldly gain, e.g., a rebirth in heaven or a wealthy life in the future.

Fifthly, the dhammic practice of the middle class today depends on the belief of the Master's supernatural power. If the Master of the owner of the hermitage is popular in his so-called superhuman qualities, he will gain more disciples and devotees of dhammic practice in his place. On the contrary, the dhammic practitioners in the Buddha's time were taught by the Buddha to pay more attention to the Teaching than to the Teacher. They were thus capable of attaining the final goal of their dhammic practice.

From B.E. 2545/2002 to B.E. 2546/2003, I had done a research in several temples and hermitages in all four parts of Thailand where 1,000 sets of questionnaire papers were distributed to dhammic practitioners.

In Bangkok, the selected places for the distribution of questionnaire papers are Wat Pak Nam (Monastery/Temple at the Mount of the River), Wat Maha That (Temple of the Great Element) and Sathian Thamma Sathan (Sathian Dhammic Place). The dhammic practice at Wat Pak Nam uses the technique of concentration on a point inside the body in the center of the abdomen which is 2 inches above the navel. This point is said to be the place where consciousness has its seat and the words "Samma Araham" can be repeated mentally to aid initial development of concentration. In Wat Maha That, the meditation techniques are based on Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipatthana) described in the Maha Satipatthana Sutta. Concentration is developed on the rise and fall of the abdomen, then awareness is directed to physical and mental sensations. Sathian Thamma Sathan may be quite a special place for female dhammic practitioners because the owner and the dhammic leader is a famous nun in Thai society today, the Nun Sansanee Sathiarasut. The nun is an engaged Buddhist and a dhammic practice leader. As to the dhammic practice or meditation, she uses the technique of mindfulness on breathing (anapanasati).

In Central Thailand, apart from Bangkok, the selected places are Wat Cholpratharn Rangsarit (temple under the Support of the Irrigation Bureau),

Thammasathan Suan Buddha dharma (The Garden of Buddha – Dharma Hermitage), and Suan Kaew Meditation Center. Wat Cholpratharn – rangsarit and Thammasathan Suan Buddha – dharma use the meditation technique of mindfulness on breathing. Suan Kaew Meditation Center, however, uses the same technique as Wat Pak Nam.

In Northern Thailand, only one meditation center is selected because of its convenience for the research procedure.

The selected place is Wat Ram Poeng (Monastery in Memory) which uses the meditation technique of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The selected meditation centers in the Northeastern part of Thailand are Wat Nong Pah Pong and Suan Weluwan (Bamboo Garden). Wat Nong Pah Pong uses the meditation techniques of Mindfulness on Breathing. Suan Weluwan, on the other hand uses the technique of Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

In Eastern Thailand, the questionnaire papers were distributed to the dhammic practitioners at Vivek – asrom Vipassana Meditation Centre where the dhammic practice was based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Finally, Suan Mokkhabalarama (Garden of the Power of Liberation) is the chosen place to represent the meditation center in Southern Thailand. This place is internationally famous because it was once the hermitage of Buddhadasa – bhikkhu. The meditation technique used here is the Mindfulness on Breathing.

The outcome of the research shows that all of the dhammic practitioners are the middle class. Most of them are Bangkokians (51.40%). They participate in the dhammic practice both in Bangkok and in other meditation centers in all parts of the country. This phenomenon indicates that the Bangkokians have a good financial status and enough money to go off to some other places. Most of them are traders and freelancers. They have enough time to spend for themselves. It is interesting to know that most of the dhammic practitioners in all meditation centers are female (80%). They may have more time and feel more psychologically insecure than male. Most of them practice the dharma in a center at their convenience (63%). Thus, their dhammic practice cannot progress well. In addition, nobody wants to practise the dharma in order to attain nibbananirvana. They just want to escape from their boring lives at home and relax in a more peaceful place.

As long as the middle class do not take the dhammic practice seriously, their activities in meditation centers are still a waste of time. The dhammic practitioners should prepare themselves with some basic knowledge of the Buddhist teachings, e.g., the teachings of suffering and the cause of suffering, before going to join the meditation practice in a temple or in a hermitage. The owners of the meditation centers and the Masters of meditation should equip the dhammic practitioners with basic Buddhist teachings according to the Buddhist Scriptures in order to prepare them for a practical meditation. The Masters should be aware that practitioners should not be all expected to attain the highest goal of meditation as stated in the Buddhist Scriptures. They thus should set proper methods and procedure of training for their followers. Though a dhammic practitioner cannot attain the Buddhist highest goal, he/she can apply the dhammic expertise for his/her best and the society.

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- <sup>1</sup> Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, 1st ed., S.V. "Bourgeoisie," by Robert S. Phillips.
- <sup>2</sup> Sangkeet Chantapoti, *Roi Sak Sian (The Siam Tattoo)* (Bangkok: Sang Dao Printing Press, B.E. 2541/1998), p. 85. (in Thai).
- <sup>3</sup> Pratibha Pabhasrawong, "Foreign Buddhist Monks under the lineage of Phra Ajarn Chah: A Case Study of Wat Pah Nanachat, Ubon Rathchathani," (Master's Thesis, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, 2002), p. 99.
- <sup>4</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Kwam Sook Thae Mee yoo Thae Nai Ngarn* (True Happiness exists only in Work) (Bangkok: Somchai Printing Press, B.E. 2527/1984), pp. 13-14. (in Thai)
- <sup>5</sup> The Progressive Sermon (Anupubbikatha) is the sermon for gradual understanding of The Paths Toward Nirvana/Nibbana. It is composed of dāna-kathā (talk on charity), sīla-katha (talk on morality), sagga-kathā (talk on heavenly pleasure), kamadīnava-katha (talk on bad effects of sensual pleasure) and nekkhammānisanisa-kāthā (talk on benefits of renouncing sensual pleasure)
- <sup>6</sup> In *Āgga - nikaya* of the Tipitaka, the Buddha's teaching of Grounds for Accomplishing Merit (Punnakiriya - vatthu) presents different levels of merit - making as giving or donation, moral deeds, mental development, gentleness, service, sharing, sympathetic joy, acquiring knowledge (dhamma), spreading knowledge (dhamma), and securing the right view. Shortly speaking, the merit - making can be fulfilled through donation, moral deeds, mental development or meditation, and wisdom.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Democracy in the Light of Buddhadasa\***

Many people always take it for granted that democracy is the best political system today. Moreover, it is believed to be suitable for all societies and to promote human dignity. The credibility of democracy is due to many causes as follows:-

1. Democracy is a product of the so-called civilized Western World which is so ideologically and technologically prosperous that it becomes the symbol of universal development.
2. Democracy is believed to provide us with boundless right and freedom of the people who are owners of a country since democracy means the sovereignty of the people.
3. Amid the rivalry between democracy and some other political systems such as tyranny, absolute monarchy, and socialism, democracy is viewed as a hero who exists to save the world. The delusion of democracy encourages us to sacrifice our lives for it throughout the world history.

As time passes by, we may ponder the real value of democracy. Buddhadasa-bhikkhu (B.E. 2449/1906-2536/1993), an eminent Thai monk and one of the World Great Personalities made an interesting criticism of it as follows:

Nowadays, we make use of only the political system which yields benefits. It can be called the sovereignty of benefits. However, we feel ashamed to admit that we prefer all gains. We, therefore, call such political system democracy which we also define as anything of the people, by the people, and for the people. The problem of democracy exists in the ideology of the people. If the people are materialists, their benefits will be material. If they are dhammists (virtuous), their benefits will then be dhammic.<sup>1</sup>

The essence of democracy depends on the qualities of the people. If the people are righteous and learned, they will creatively use their ruling power and be able to establish their own peaceful community. On the other hand, if they are selfish materialists and consumerists, their society will turn chaotic.

Generally, education is believed to be the primary factor of democracy. This is only half truth. Formal education as managed in schools and universities in Thailand today does not provide moral training for students. It emphasizes especially rote learning and self-centredness. Buddhadasa calls this type of education the “tail-less” education.

Buddhadasa uses the metaphor “to recover a dog’s tail, or to reconnect a dog’s tail” as a reference to the Thai formal education nowadays in which moral lessons are neglected and dismissed from the curriculum. He explains that education without morality is like a dog whose tail is cut off and tries to deceive others that a dog without a tail is more beautiful than the one with it. Buddhadasa tries to correct this misunderstanding by pointing out that a dog must have a tail, that, similarly,

education must include moral lessons, and that education without morality is useless or even harmful to a society.<sup>2</sup>

Real education should lessen one's selfishness. Without real education, Thai democracy thus encourages politicians' selfishness. Political parties and members in the Parliament mainly work for their own benefits, not for the benefits of the people. The fight between some political parties is commented by Buddhadasa as follows:

The opposing party always tries to  
destroy the governmental party so that it will  
be able to become the government itself.  
Both parties keep fighting with each other  
because of their own selfishness. We thus can  
never find the "divine" party in the Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

Here, the "divine" political party is the one without selfishness and which is willing to sacrifice itself for others' well-being. In other words, the "divine" political party is the one with the ideology of the Bodhisattva, e.g., loving kindness and compassion toward others.

Since selfishness is inherent in all human nature, democracy which is the "sovereignty of the people" is certainly not the ideal political system for us; Buddhadasa then suggests a better type of political system as follows:

According to the Pali scriptures, it became  
necessary to extend natural socialism to the  
political foundations of the community when  
oppression in the community became intolerable.  
People saw fit to invest a particularly capable,  
just leader with their trust and power. This  
leader or *raja* would govern in such a way that  
no one could oppress anyone else and the  
community would thus enjoy contentment.  
Indeed, the word *raja* actually means content-  
ment. Socialism as a political system, then,  
is truly socialistic in so far as its leaders secure  
the contentment of the entire community.<sup>4</sup>

Buddhadasa praises the political system which promotes working according to one's duty as assigned by the Dhamma (the Law of Nature). Speaking of the Caste System in Hinduism which governs Hindu society on the basis of its members' duties, Buddhadasa thus asserts that the kings or those in the Kshatriya Caste are appropriate to be rulers. While all democratic supporters condemn the Caste System for destroying the right and freedom of the people, Buddhadasa advocates it for encouraging all social members to fulfill their own duties.<sup>5</sup>

Buddhadasa prefers monarchy to democracy. He explains that it is easier to find a righteous king than a group of righteous people. He adds that a righteous king who is a dictator is better than a liberal democrat.

There were edicts about Asoka's work  
which reveal a socialist system of government

of an exclusively dictatorial type. He purified the *sangha* by wiping out the heretics, and he insisted on right behavior on the part of all classes of people. Asoka was not a tyrant, however. He was a gentle person who acted for the good of the whole society. He constructed wells and assembly halls, and had various kinds of fruit trees planted for the benefit of all. He was “dictatorial” in the sense that if his subjects did not do these public works as commanded, they were punished.<sup>6</sup>

Buddhadasa suggests us to reconsider the word “dictator” since it is not bad in itself. Even the Buddha, in a sense, is a dictator, as Buddhadasa maintains in the following passage:

The Buddha developed a socialist system with a “dictatorial” method. Unlike liberal democracy’s inability to act in an expeditious and timely manner, this dhammic dictatorial socialism is able to act immediately to accomplish what needs to be done. This approach is illustrated by the many rules in the *vinaya* against procrastination, postponement and evasion. Similarly, the ancient legal system was socialistic. There was no way that someone could take advantage of another, and its method was “dictatorial” in the sense that it cut through confusion and got things done.<sup>7</sup>

The good part of dictatorship is its restraining and forcing people to be in line. While ordinary people are filled with defilements, dictatorship of a ruler helps keep them in good order. However, dictatorship can render most benefits to the world when it becomes dictatorial dhammic socialism. In other words, according to Buddhadasa, the best political system in the world is the system which allows people to work for the best of their society under the dictatorship of the dhamma (morality or righteousness).

The last point I want to make and one especially important for the future is that small countries like our own should adhere to a system of “dictatorial dhammic socialism” or otherwise it will be difficult to survive. An illusory democracy cannot survive. Liberal democracy has too many flaws. socialism is preferable, but it must be a socialism based on *dhamma*. Such dhammic socialism is by its very nature “dictatorial” in the sense I have been discussing today. In particular, small

countries like Thailand should have democracy  
in the form of a dictatorial dhammic socialism.<sup>8</sup>

Thailand today is a democratic country. Most of Thai people who are Buddhists need to examine their own political system. In the light of Buddhadasa, democracy is the worst system because “it encourages people to live only for their own sake through their defilements and their freedom. Other systems tend to be restricted by certain ruling power. Democracy, on the other hand, is totally free.”<sup>9</sup>

The flaws of democracy can be removed through moral cultivation of all people. Each social member should learn to be less selfish and be more altruistic. Especially, democracy will become a successful political system of the entire world whenever the government and the politicians work with the hearts of Bodhisattva as well as the people who accomplish their duty for duty’s sake.

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- \* Buddhadasa (B.E. 2449/1906-2536/1993) was the former abbot and the founder of Suan Mokkha, a famous hermitage in Southern Thailand. He was honoured by UNESCO as one of the World Great Personalities in B.E. 2549/2006.
- <sup>1</sup> Buddhadasa-bhikkhu, *The Ultimate Dhamma* (Parama dhamma) (Bangkok: Songrung Printing Press, B.E. 2526/1983), p. 104. (in Thai)
- <sup>2</sup> Buddhadasa-bhikkhu, “Khoo Cheevit (Mate of life)”, *Thamma-banyai Toh Hang Sunak* (The dhammic lecture to recover a dog’s tail) (Bangkok: Dhamma-dana Press, 1982), pp. 36-37. (in Thai)
- <sup>3</sup> Buddhadasa-bhikkhu, *Dhamma and Politics* (Bangkok: Dhamma-dana Press, B.E. 2522/1979), p. 226. (in Thai).
- <sup>4</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Dhammic Socialism*, trans. Donald K. Swearer (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, B.E. 2529/1986), p. 89.
- <sup>5</sup> Buddhadasa-bhikkhu, *the Ultimate Dhamma*, p. 110
- <sup>6</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Dhammic Socialism*, p. 92
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
- <sup>9</sup> Buddhadasa-bhikkhu, *Dhamma and Politics*, p. 289.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Poverty Reduction in the Buddhist Perspective**

Poverty is a shortcoming in human life. It makes one less than others in dignity, success, happiness, opportunity, and so on. A Society in which poverty prevails will soon be weakened and shattered. It is noted that crimes and conflicts are common occurrences in a poor community. Whether it is true or not, there should be a solution to the matter.

#### **1. The Meaning of Poverty**

Poverty is the situation of lacking all necessities of life. It can be classified into absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is experienced by someone who has less than she needs in order to be in good health and in normal condition. In Buddhism, absolute poverty is the lack of the Four Necessities of Life which are clothing, food, medicine, and shelter.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, relative poverty is a scarcity of the means of subsistence when compared to others or when it is below the standard of living in a society. Some thinkers suggest that poverty in any given nation should be defined as the economic condition of a family having an income less than one-half of the median family income for the nation.<sup>2</sup> Especially, the way of life which prevails among the very poor has common features such as low education, unemployment, superstition, present-time orientation and hopelessness, regardless of the particular time and society involved in any given case.<sup>3</sup> In Thailand, severe cases of poverty exist in the Northwest, the Northeast, and the farthest South of Thailand<sup>4</sup>

#### **2. Causes of Poverty**

Causes of poverty can be differentiated into internal and external. Internal cause of poverty rests in knowledge, habit, way of life, point of view, and discipline of a person. For example, indulgence in alcohol can lead one to poverty. Though to be heedlessly intoxicated is a demeritorious deed, Thai lay Buddhists do not strictly abstain from intoxicants:

Alcoholic beverages are sold openly, under government monopoly. They can be consumed in all public cafés and restaurants and drunken people are no rare sight<sup>5</sup>

Drinking is a popular practice of most Thai men. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993), a Thai Buddhist monk and a great thinker who was honored by the UNESCO as one of the World Great Personalities in C.E. 2006, commented that drinking became a part of Thai life and tradition:

During the funeral site, the host has to prepare liquor and alcoholic drinks, kill an ox, buffalo, or pig, in order to cook food for Buddhist guests who come to devour it in the house of the family of the deceased.<sup>6</sup>

Not only drinking but also gambling, association with bad people, and prodigality are sources of poverty relating to a person's attitudes and way of life.

External cause of poverty can be found in a person's surrounding and socio-political situation. In a capitalist society, a person is lured to overspend, live luxuriously and, finally, run into debt. Having been bankrupted, s/he becomes poor and victim of her/his society. Besides, in some cases, a person can be oppressed and exploited by a capitalist, e.g., a labourer is unfairly taken advantage of by the employer.

The Buddhist Scriptures (The Tipitaka) assert 6 causes of poverty in the teaching of Apayamukha ways of ruin.

- 1) Addiction to intoxicants leading to actual loss of wealth, quarrels, liability to disease, disgrace, shamelessness and weakened intelligence.
- 2) Roaming the streets at unseemly hours leading to carelessness of self-protection, carelessness of one's wife and children, carelessness of one's property, being a suspected criminal, being a victim of rumours and being subjected to trouble.
- 3) Frequently enjoy watching shows, e.g., singing, dancing, and musical entertainment.
- 4) Indulgence in gambling leading to trouble such as being hated by losers, losing money when being a loser and being untrustworthy.
- 5) Association with bad companions leading to be gamblers, seducers, drunkards, forgers, swindlers and bullies.
- 6) Laziness<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Buddhist Teachings for Poverty Reduction

Poverty is not only a personal problem but also a social failure. It is not marked by less or more income but rather by moral values of social members. Poverty cannot be solved by increasing all necessary resources for the poor. The solution of poverty, however, depends on the rich's conscience and responsibility for other social members. The rich should learn to give than to get in order to help the poor out and to cooperate with the poor to overcome poverty in their society. The problem of poverty arises because the poor are unjustly treated in their society, incapable of earning their living properly, and without any objective of moral development of their lives.

Poverty reduction can be managed through the Buddhist teachings as suggested by Arnold Kotler as follows:

The **Cakkavatti-sihanada Sutta** clearly states that poverty is the cause of immorality and crimes such as theft, falsehood, violence, and cruelty. **The Kutadanta Sutta** explains how futile it is to try to suppress crime through harsh punishment. The Buddha suggests that in order to eradicate crime, economic conditions should be improved.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, all social problems and crimes caused by poverty can be eradicated through a proper income of the people and sufficient necessities of life for the people

provided by the State. **The Cakkavatti sihanada Sutta** describes duties of a universal king as follows:

- 1) A universal king should uphold righteousness.
- 2) A universal king should protect his family and dependants.
- 3) A universal king should protect his soldiers.
- 4) A universal king should protect his colonial leaders.
- 5) A universal king should protect his civil servants.
- 6) A universal king should protect and support Brahmins and householders.
- 7) A universal king should protect and support town and country dwellers.
- 8) A universal king should protect all the ordained.
- 9) A universal king should protect all endangered species.
- 10) A universal king should not allow all wrong doings in the Kingdom.
- 11) A universal king should give alms to the poor in order to eliminate poverty in the kingdom.
- 12) A universal king should regularly visit religious authorities and the learned in order to develop his moral virtues.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, in **the Kutadanta Sutta**, the Buddha preached the right method of sacrifice in order to obtain utility and happiness. The **Sutta** narrated Kutadanta Brahmin's advice to king Maha-vijita that all thieves in the kingdom should be eradicated by means of economic improvement, e.g., giving them and the people food seeds to grow in the field, providing all diligent merchants with some investments, and supporting all civil servants with food and wages. Having done these, the royal property would increase, thieves and rebels would disappear from the country, and all people would feel secure and live happily at home. Kutadanta Brahmin emphasized that the king should neither kill nor imprison his opponents because the rest who could flee would return to take revenge on him later.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the roles of rulers or the State in poverty reduction, the Buddhist teachings also encourage the poor to overcome their misfortune. In fact, the Buddhist teachings prepare one to secure oneself financially and live in sustainable happiness. If one happens to be poor, one needs to follow the Buddhist teachings to free oneself from poverty as well. The Buddhist teaching which guides one to be able to manage with one's own income in order to be financially secured is the teaching of Bhogavibhaga (the fourfold division of money). According to this teaching, one had better divide one's income into 4 parts : 1) One part is for one's own living, taking care of one's dependants, and public services. 2) Two parts are for investing in one's business. 3) One parts is for saving.<sup>11</sup>

After having managed one's income properly, one needs to make the best use of one's own income following the Buddhist teachings as follows : 1) Spending for happiness and comfort of oneself and one's dependants. 2) Spending for the good of one's friends and colleagues. 3) Spending for the protection of oneself against all misfortunes. 4) Spending for relatives, guests, religious offering, dedication of merit to the dead, and taxes.<sup>12</sup> In order to secure one's financial status and happiness, the Buddhist teachings assert virtuous practices leading to temporal welfare as follows : 1) One needs to work hard, be well trained in one's profession, and be diligent. 2) One needs to take a good care of one's own possessions. 3) One needs to associate with good people. 4) One needs to live economically.<sup>13</sup>

The Buddhist teachings in the **Tripitaka** (the Buddhist Scriptures) emphasize moderation in one's living as the best method for overcoming poverty. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, The King of Thailand promotes the Theory of Sufficient Economy in order to help Thai people out of their poverty. The Theory of Sufficient Economy advocates the Buddhist teaching of moderation.

The word "sufficiency" means more than "self-reliance." "Sufficiency" denotes being less greedy. Whenever one is less greedy, one will take less advantage of others. Living sufficiently means living moderately, honestly, and less greedily. People in any country who live sufficiently will be peacefully happy.<sup>14</sup>

If one lives moderately and avoids being too extravagant, one will be able to have enough for oneself, be free from debts, and be able to live happily. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu also suggests that the rich should be responsible for the poor in their society and act according to the rich in the time of the Buddha:

Whenever peacemakers have more than they need, they donate the rest to others. This was the way of life of the person of means (sresthi) in the time of the Buddha. Sresthi literally means "the Noblest." Today, we have only selfish capitalists who oppress and take advantage of the poor. We cannot find sresthi who are philanthropic and righteous. Sresthi in the time of the Buddha treated their servants and all others with respect. They worked together, ate the same kind of food, observed the Buddhist Sabbath together, and so on. In particular, the sresthi built alms-houses to serve the poor, ascetics and all in need. A peacemaker should adopt the spirit and practices of the sresthi in the Buddha's time so that all members of society can live happily and peacefully together.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4. Buddhist Work for the Poor in Thai Society**

Practical ways for solving problems of poverty should be initiated within a community in which its members learn to cope with their own difficulties. The leader of a community always plays important roles and should have governmental support in order to effectively fulfill all needs of the community.

In Thai Buddhist communities outside Bangkok in which most people are poor and hopeless, leaders who introduce them to new lives are normally monks. For example, Phra Khamkhian Suwanno, the abbot of the Sukhato Forest Hermitage, continuously helps poor villagers overcome their difficulties through his many projects. He began with his Buddhist preaching to villagers when he first came to stay in Tha Mafai Wan Village in Chaiyaphum Province, Thailand, where most people were lawless and undisciplined. He expected to clean villagers from being drunkards

and thieves. He also advised villagers to raise animals, establish fish farms and so on. He asserted that mental development through the Buddhist moral teachings and meditation is necessary as the foundation of right view and good practices.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Phra Boonrod Adhipunno came to Saithong Village in Kalasin Province, Thailand, and helped villagers turn the community into the Drinking Free Village. First, he preached the evil of drinking, and being alcoholic. Then he offered jobs in his temple for those who could quit drinking. Moreover, he taught children to understand Buddhist morality and practices accordingly. He also initiated many projects which effectively freed villagers from their poor lives.<sup>17</sup>

Another attempt to fight against poverty of villagers can be seen in the roles of Phra Kroo Pipattanachot, the abbot of Don Temple in Songkhla Province in Southern Thailand. He is the founder of the Bank of Life aiming at freeing the community of the Hua Kwai (Buffalo's Head) Village from all debts. The Bank of Life is a form of banking of which the objectives are rather for helping its customers than sharing the benefits. A villager should deposit 30 bahts (about one dollar) in the Bank every month. Those who want to take out a loan should sign the agreement one month ahead. They cannot take out a loan more than a double amount of their deposit and should pay the interest of one percent per month. All benefits from this banking system go to hospital welfare for all villagers and educational funds for children in the village.

There are also many organizations working for the poor in Thailand. Nevertheless, poverty is rather a complicate problem. One needs to fight against poverty from within and to have supports from outside. Poverty is a matter of one's own attitudes, way of life, and behavior as well as external oppressions. How to overcome poverty is thus not a personal matter but a social responsibility to seek cooperation of all members.

## **5. Mutual Understanding and Cooperation of Different Faiths for Social Development**

Each country is composed of people of different faiths who need to live together, relate to one another, and find peaceful happiness side by side throughout their lives. If one looks into the essence of all religious teachings, one will see that all religions encourage humankind to get rid of their selfishness and extend love and compassion to others. The teaching of compassion is a guiding light leading Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and other religious members to free themselves and others from misfortunes, e.g., poverty, injustice, and wars.

Buddhism, both Theravada and Mahayana denominations, propagates the concept and practice of compassion and loving kindness towards all beings. The **Mahavastu** depicts the ideal of the Buddha-to-be (Bodhisattva) who embodies compassion and morally inspires the Buddhists as follows:

They are Bodhisattvas who live on from life to life in the possession of manifold good qualities. They are Bodhisattva who have won the mastery over karma, and made their deeds renowned through their accumulation of merit... They are devoted to the highest good. They win converts by the means of sympathetic appeal... They are skilled in bringing solace to those in

trouble and misfortune. They do not hesitate to render all kinds of service. In all matters they are untiring in their purpose.<sup>18</sup>

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva is the exemplar of a compassionate person who releases all beings from misfortune. In other words, any social member and organization who act as the Bodhisattva will be able to save the poor from difficulties.

Theravada Buddhism also promotes compassion and loving kindness. In **Metta Sutta**, the Buddha preaches the boundless loving kindness:

Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world, above below and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.<sup>19</sup>

Loving kindness leads a person to compassion and charity. When a person, with the spirit of loving kindness, meets the poor, s/he will be internally urged to give. In giving, a person does not perform charity as a physical act, but with his or her heart. There is joy in every act of giving. It is an act of generosity based on compassion when a person realises that someone else is in need of help and s/he is in the position to offer the help.

In Islam, there are duties which Muslims are expected to perform as part of their obligations toward God. For example, all Muslims who have income and are fairly well-off are urged to pay **zakat**. **Zakat** is alms paid for the sake of the needy, and calculated on the basis of a percentage of certain specific kinds of property which Muslims own. Besides, the fast during the month of Ramadan is obligatory upon every adult Muslim of sound health with exceptions made for travelers, the sick and infirm, pregnant women, and so on. Fasting begins at daybreak and lasts for the entire day until sunset. During this period, all food, drink, and smoking are forbidden. This practice brings the rich and the poor together. The rich may learn to understand more how the poor suffer from lacking all necessities of life.

The Sermon on the Mount delivered by Jesus clearly expresses love for the poor:

How blest are those who know that  
they are poor;  
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

How blest are the sorrowful;  
They shall find consolation.

How blest are those of a gentle spirit;  
They shall have the earth for their possession.

How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail;  
They shall be satisfied.

How blest are those who show mercy;  
Mercy shall be shown to them.  
How blest are those whose hearts are pure;  
They shall see God.<sup>20</sup>

Religions of the world today need to be socially engaged. All religious organizations can work through their own religious teachings and cooperate with one another to help other unfortunate social members. In Thailand, many projects and activities can be set up and run by all religious members in order to solve the problem of poverty such as:

### **1) Educational Project**

Different faith-based organizations provide informal schools, intensive courses, and regular lectures on languages, morality, and ways to earn one's living for the poor free of charge.

### **2) Workshop Project**

Workshop projects can be set up for poor people in their community on the topics of religious beliefs and practices, social problem orientation, and community development.

### **3) Training Project**

Poor people should be trained to make a better living in every way they need under the sponsorship of religious organization.

### **4) Volunteer Project**

Religious members who are knowledgeable and willing to serve a poor community can be volunteers to repair bridges, houses, to teach children, and so on.

### **5) Financial Support Project**

Faith-based organizations may provide financial support to poor people to fight against their poverty and injustice, e.g., scholarship, funds, and so on.

The amount of poor people in any country is the indication of weakness of that country. Though it may be impossible to completely eradicate poverty from the world, it is necessary to set a limit to its growth. Faith-based organizations may join together and make the best of the mission since they can work for the development of human minds through religious teachings as well as on external support.

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- <sup>1</sup> Vin. I. 58 (The Tipitaka).
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas Ford Hoult, *Dicionary of Modern Sociology* (Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1977), p. 245.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://service.nso.go.th/nso/povertymap/poverty.html>
- <sup>5</sup> B.J. Terwiel, *Monks and Magic* (Bangkok: Carftman Press Co., Ltd., 1975), p. 194.
- <sup>6</sup> Buddhadasa-bhikkhu, *Chat Mankong Dai Duay Sasana* (securing the nation through religion) (Bangkok: Somchai Press, 1981), p. 20. (In Thai).
- <sup>7</sup> D. III. 182-184 in Phra Tepvethee (Prayudh Payutto), *Dictionary of Buddhism*, 6th ed. (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn-rajabidyalaya, B.E. 2532/1989), pp. 176-178.
- <sup>8</sup> Arnold Kotler, "Buddhism Must Be Engaged," in *Radical Conservatism: Buddhism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Sulak Sivaraksa (Bangkok: The Sathira koses-Naga pradipa Foundation, 1990), p. 135.
- <sup>9</sup> D. III. 61. (The Tipitaka).
- <sup>10</sup> Digha-nikaya, Silakhandhavagga, Kutadanta Sutta (The Tipitaka).
- <sup>11</sup> D. III. 188. (The Tipitaka).
- <sup>12</sup> A. III. 45. (The Tipitaka).
- <sup>13</sup> A. IV. 281. (The Tipitaka).
- <sup>14</sup> His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Speech in The National Research Council of Thailand, Section of Economic, *His Majesty the King's Sufficient Economy and the Economists' Analysis of Meaning* (Bangkok: Kasetra Blue Print, B.E. 2546/2003), p. 19. (In Thai)
- <sup>15</sup> Buddhadasa, "Till the World Is With Peace," trans. Pataraporn Sirikanchana, in *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, ed. Donald K. Swearer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 205.
- <sup>16</sup> Pataraporn Sirikanchana, *Monks' Duties according to the Buddhist Discipline: Thought and Roles of Phra Khamkhian Suwanno in Community Development* (Bangkok: The Printing House of Thammasat University, B.E. 2536/1993), pp. 46-47. (In Thai).
- <sup>17</sup> Theera Vacharapranee et al., *The Drinking-Free Village* (no city: Champathong Printing Press, B.E. 2550/2007), pp. 24-27. (In Thai).
- <sup>18</sup> The Mahavastu quoted in Ninian Smart and Richard D. Hecht, ed., *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 272-273.
- <sup>19</sup> The *Metta Sutta* quoted in K. Sri Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1998), p. 168.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Sermon on the Mount* quoted in Ninian Smart and Richard D. Hecht, ed., *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology*, p. 119.

## Chapter 6

### The Case of the Santi Asoka

Santi Asoka is an unorthodox Buddhist movement in Thailand. It was founded by Bodhirak, then a Buddhist monk, in B.E. 2516/1973. It reacts against Normative Buddhism in Thailand and follows beliefs and practices of its own. Especially, it rejects the ruling power of the Thai Sangha. The Santi Asokans claim that their religious movement is primarily a reaction against some wayward practices of Thai Buddhist monks and laypeople, e.g. an indulgence in animism and supernaturalism. In addition, they assert that their religious way of life is an attempt to preserve the Thai tradition and authentic Buddhist practices in which vegetarianism is strongly promoted. In other words, they believe that the Santi Asoka is the only ideal Buddhist community in the country.

Bodhirak, formerly Rak Rakpong, was a television entertainer and songwriter with some interest in magic and supernaturalism. After his ordination as a Dhammayut monk in Wat Asokaram in B.E. 2513/1970, he abandoned his supernaturalistic beliefs and practices and received the ordained name of Phra Bodhirak (the Preserver of Enlightenment). His strict observance of the Buddha's doctrine attracted a considerable number of faithful Buddhists who gathered more and more in Wat Asokaram, his monastic residence. There, he formed a religious group called the Asoka. Since the group was composed of both Dhammayut and Mahanikaya Buddhists, it was not allowed by the abbot to stay permanently in the monastery. Bodhirak then had to move to wat Nongkratum, a Mahanikaya monastery in order to ordain as a Mahanikaya monk in B.E. 2516/1973. Because of their controversial, unorthodox beliefs and practices, their religious propagation was obstructed by the established Thai Buddhist Sangha and self-styled orthodox Buddhists. Bodhirak then declared his resignation from the authoritative power of the Sangha administration on August 8, B.E. 2518 /1975. Bodhirak's challenge to the Sangha led to his disrobing and the end of his monastic status in B.E. 2532 /1989.<sup>1</sup>

The Santi Asokan Buddhists faithfully adhere to the Buddhist precepts and discipline as (they believe were) originally taught by the Buddha. They live in a small cottage and follow celibate lives. They reject materialism and strictly follow the way of sufficient economy and sustainable development. They prefer a communal living style in which each member owns no personal belongings. They are taught to work hard and sleep only few hours a day in order to gain merit. When they enter the Asokan life, many of them change their names into the spiritual names, e.g. Fak Fah (the Sky), Sam Din (Soil Addition) and Din Dee (Good Soil). Their simple living in the Asokan commune facilitates, as they believe, their practice toward Nibbana.

The Asokans are differentiated into ascetics (ordained people) and lay attendants. The ascetics are composed of the male ordained ("monks" or, after Bodhirak's disrobing, "samaṇa"), the female ordained ("female monks" or after Bodhirak's disrobing, "sikkhamatu") and novices ("samanuddesa"). The process of ordination is more difficult to follow and to pass than that of other Thai monastic lineages. Generally, the Asokan ascetics take 9 precepts as follows"

1. To abstain from eating meat. (to be a strict vegetarians).
2. To take only one meal a day.
3. To abstain from smoking.

4. To abstain from chewing betel leaves and areca nuts.
5. To abstain from snuff.
6. To abstain from sleeping between 5.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. (Except for sick people).
7. To abstain from wearing shoes and sandals
8. To abstain from using a bag and an umbrella which are not commonly used in the community.
9. To abstain from money and ornaments improper for the ascetics<sup>2</sup>.

The non-ordained Asokans are trained to live for chastity, poverty and spiritual purification. They are all vegetarians who abstain from sexual activities. Their minimal requirement is to adhere to The Buddhist Five Precepts and to work hard in their self-reliant commune. They are socially engaged Buddhists who promote the implementation of sufficient economy and the realization of sustainable happiness.

The Asokan economic system is called “meritism”. They work for merit and not for money. For the Asokans, “meritism” is the reaction against capitalism and materialism.<sup>3</sup> In order to gain merit, one needs to work in order to serve others and not themselves. “Meritism” is a means to altruism and the cultivation of one’s mind. Following “meritism”, the Asokans do their trade through their principles as follows: 1) giving products free of charge. 2) selling products at cost. 3) selling products below cost. 4) selling products below market price. The products made by the Asokans for sale are, for example, soap, shampoo, herbal medicine and vegetarian food.

The Asokans live according to nature. They are conservationists. They work in the field without using any chemical products. They respect nature so much that they celebrate “the Asokan Day of Nature” on December 10 every year.

At the beginning of their community, the Asokans rejected the worship of the Buddha image and supernaturalism. At present, however, they cast their own Buddha image in order to be the center of their Buddhist faith. Moreover, Bodhirak has a big stupa built in order to house the Buddha’s relics to which the Asokans pay homage and celebrate at Buddhist festivals.

Nowadays, Bodhirak and his Asokan followers obviously participate in Thai politics. They are main supporters of the political movements of the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in order to overthrow the Thai Government from B.E. 2549/2006 to B.E. 2551/2008. Besides, they found their own political party called “For Heaven and Earth Party.” The Asokan community is in the sole hands of Bodhirak. A statement of membership is still unknown. Its Headquarters is in Bangkok. There are 8 additional branches in other provinces but no center abroad. Though Thai Buddhists in general admire the Asokans for their hard-working and sufficient living, they find the community dubious in Buddhist thought and practices.

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- <sup>1</sup> Kobchai Wejpanij et al., Sacca Hang Cheewit khong Phra Bodhirak (The Truth of Phra Bodhirak's Life) (Bangkok : Dhammasanti Foundation, B.E. 2532), pp. 39-48. (In Thai)
  - <sup>2</sup> Dhammasanti Foundation, Kot Ra-biab Khong chao Asoka (The Asokan Rules) (Bangkok : Dhammasanti Foundation, B.E. 2529), p.10 (In Thai).
  - <sup>3</sup> Sarn Asoka vol. 18 (21) No. 3-4 (October –November B.E. 2540) : 90-91

## **Conclusion**

Although Thai Buddhism is not a monolithic religion and is composed of different methods of belief and practice, its essence implies a unity in diversity. This is a special characteristic of Buddhism in Thailand where people of different origins can live together peacefully.

Thai Buddhists are not individualistic. They love to join others and live peacefully with others. They do not exclude themselves from others. Thus, a popular Buddhist may happily join an activity of a normative Buddhist group. An unorthodox Buddhist may be a close friend of an intellectual Buddhist. The differentiation of Thai Buddhism into many types only signifies its sociological phenomena. Some essential factors render unity in diversity of Thai Buddhism as follows:

### **1. The Acceptance of Normative Foundation**

Norms are standards of behavior that are accepted in a society. Thai Buddhists of all sociological types accept the same norms, e.g. the use of lotus – flowers in all Buddhist ceremonies, high respect for monks and listening to the sermons at times. Even unorthodox Buddhists, like the Asokans, also pay homage to the Buddha image and use lotus-flowers in their Buddhist ceremonies.

### **2. The Altruistic Spirit**

Normative Buddhism, Popular Buddhism, Intellectual Buddhism and Socially Engaged Buddhism promote the altruistic spirit toward others. They uphold ethical values which save the world from disasters and encourage human beings to attain spiritual prosperity. It seems that socially engaged Buddhism takes a prominent role in promoting the altruistic spirit. Other types of Thai Buddhism, however, take the same stand. Normative Buddhists follow the Buddha's teachings that monks should propagate the Buddha's doctrine to the people so that they can overcome their sufferings. Similarly, lay Buddhists should follow the Buddha's teachings of duty in the Sutta so that they can do the best for others.

### **3. The Veneration of the Buddha and the Practice according to His teachings.**

Thai Buddhism of all types venerates the Buddha as the Great Teacher of all beings and tries to promote the practice according to his teachings. Normative Buddhists follow the Buddha's teachings as recorded in the Tipitaka while Popular Buddhists learn the Buddha's words through folk-tales and their village monks.

### **4. The Establishment of an Ethical Society**

Thai Buddhism, no matter of what type it is, supports the establishment of an ethical society. If all social members cultivate themselves to be morally good, they will live together happily. Intellectual Buddhists are taught to do duty for the sake of duty (in order to be a just and unselfish person) while socially Engaged Buddhists are trained to help others with loving kindness and compassion.

### **5. The Attempt to Attain Nibbana**

All types of Thai Buddhism encourage their followers to attain Nibbana as the final goal. Normative Buddhism puts Nibbana above all cosmological levels. Here, Nibbana is attained through a complete eradication of all defilements which is hardly

accomplished in this life. On the other hand, Intellectual Buddhism encourages the attainment of Nibbana “here and now” in this life. Nevertheless, Nibbana is the end of suffering and the final goal which no Buddhist can deny.

The understanding of all types of Thai Buddhism is important for the unity of all Thai Buddhists. It lessens the prejudice that one type is “real” Buddhism and the other is a fake. If Thai Buddhists accept the truth that Buddhism in Thai society is multifaceted and multifarious, then they can live together peacefully and work for the best of Thai society.

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