

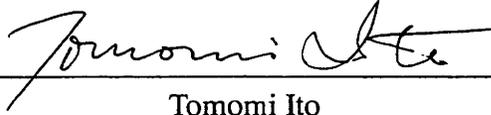
*Discussions in the Buddhist public sphere  
in twentieth-century Thailand:  
Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and his world*

by  
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of The Australian National University

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This thesis is entirely the result of my own work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tomomi Ito", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Tomomi Ito

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## *Abstract*

Studies on Thai Buddhism in Western languages have been focused on the ideological aspect of popular beliefs. Especially, Thai people's belief in merit-making and *kamma* has received attention, because of its function to support the monastic institution of the Sangha and the legitimacy of the monarchy. However, outside Thailand there has been much less concern about the doctrinal understandings of Thai Buddhists. When Thai Buddhist interpretations were examined, most studies were interested in modern characteristics, such as scientificness and rationality.

This study explores discussions on doctrinal issues by Buddhist intellectuals and people related to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in twentieth-century Thailand. I call the totality of plural fora in which discussions about Buddhism took place the Buddhist public sphere. Through the study of the Buddhist public sphere, this work aims to examine the century of intellectual challenges that Thai people experienced in the realm of Buddhism. It was not just Thai intellectuals' voluntary incorporation into the modernity that originated in the West.

In the twentieth century, Buddhism, both scriptural study and ascetic practice, became no longer concealed in monasteries. From the beginning of the century, the world of the Pali scriptures became available to the masses through the expansion of ecclesiastical education, Thai translation of Pali scriptures and foreign Buddhist journals, and the distribution of low priced booklets of monks' sermons. Based on the newly acquired knowledge, Buddhism, which had long been the religion of the Thais, developed into an intellectual interest for people to seek right understanding. In relation to the issues that Buddhadasa raised in the Buddhist public sphere, people not only discussed Buddhist concepts and theories, such as empty mind and the Abhidhamma, but they also examined them in dialogue with Marxism. During the Cold War period of ideological conflict, Buddhism in Thailand nurtured a social thought that can provide a critical perspective to the modern, capitalist society, even after the decline of Marxism.

## Introduction: Studies of Buddhism and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in twentieth-century Thailand

The life of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906 – 1993) spanned most of the twentieth century. Over these many decades Thai subjects also became Thai citizens. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868 – 1910), a system of public education was introduced in which meritocracy was a principle, and debt bondage and the corvée system came to an end. In the reign of his son, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910 – 1925), the poll tax was imposed not only on commoners but also on the members of royal family, on government officials, and on military commanders. But resentment of the continuing privileged position of the royal family, which went against the principle of meritocracy, laid the foundation for the 1932 Constitutional Revolution led by the People's Party, whose members came from the class of highly educated bureaucrats, a new group of privileged citizens. Socialist ideals also had an influence among new intellectuals in the People's Party, as well as among urban Chinese labourers whose citizenship was a sensitive issue for the Thai government.

The abolition of the absolute monarchy opened up opportunities for ordinary citizens outside the court to control the nation. However, the newly introduced democratic system did not follow an ideal model. The People's Party and bureaucrats monopolised the parliament and the cabinet, and, especially after Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram became the Prime Minister, military bureaucrats became dominant politically. General elections with multiparty competition only started in 1946 under the power of the former Regent, Pridi Phanomyong, but the ensuing events in Thai politics were repetitive coup d'états and military rule. The expulsion of the military dictators by the student uprising on 14 October 1973 demonstrated the people's demand for a fair social and political order, although the military returned to politics in 1976 because of the radicalising conflicts between communist armed struggle and counter-insurgencies. Toward the end of the century, democracy as a system of politics to reflect the opinions of each individual was becoming more respected in practice, however at the same time, people started to realise that what it reflected the most was the interests of influential business interests rather than those of ordinary citizens. A new direction indicated by public intellectuals in the last decade was to strengthen "civil society", which is the



realm of ordinary citizens who have their own opinions and interests.

There was a history of twentieth-century Thailand aside from parliamentary democracy. The 1932 Constitutional Revolution did not actualise an ideal democracy immediately, but there were critical expressions of public opinion about both the absolute monarchy and the People's Party's monopoly of power, both before and after the revolutionary event. The expectation of political opportunity to participate in state politics encouraged Thai citizens to think of their own choices, ideas, and activities in other realms than politics.

Discussions of Buddhism, which were one of the areas of the Thai people's intellectual concern, were also enlivened in the face of this political event. Coincidentally, it was the same year of the Constitutional Revolution when Buddhadasa established, in his hometown, his place of *dhamma* practice, Suan Mokkh, and the following year he started his journal, *Phutthasasana*. Through the print media, Buddhadasa established his own channel to participate in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand, his aim was broader intellectual communication with the masses. In fact, the controversial interpretations by which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu provoked his Thai contemporaries were a part of the discussions that occurred in the Thai Buddhist public sphere. What is more, their *to wathi*, or *to thiang kan*, "conflict in a public debate", was not only entertaining for the Thai populace, but can also introduce us to a significant aspect of the intellectual history of Thailand.

There were at least four characteristics I can trace in what I call the Buddhist public sphere in twentieth-century Thailand.

First, Buddhism did not have monolithic unity. Buddhism was not just statically transmitted generation by generation, but instead was an inspiring system of thought which people used to interpret the reality of their changing society. Even with a common understanding of doctrine, diverse opinions and interpretations always existed. Individuals, ordained or lay Buddhists, could freely express their opinions, and the Sangha could not totally control this diversity. Even though some opinions were political and polemical issues for the Sangha administration, a certain diversity of ideas could be tolerated in the public sphere as far as it was acceptable to the political authority and was demanded by the people. These diverse views were most significantly examined by other individuals who made up the Buddhist public sphere, and conflicting

arguments could only seek hegemony over the others by appealing to the public.

Second, the Buddhist public sphere was not represented by the Sangha administration, although of course some monks participated in it. Unlike the Sangha, which is an association that restricts its membership to monks and novices, the Buddhist public sphere was open to everybody, especially to lay Buddhists who were actively involved in it. The ordained status was respected, but it could not enforce total authority over lay people. Lay people did not refrain from their disagreements and critical arguments merely because certain ideas were expressed by monks. Some were just laity, but were acquainted with Buddhist doctrine because of their past experience as a monk with ecclesiastical education and/or they had practised meditation. In the case of women, whose ordination lineage was ceased to exist in Theravada Buddhism, they trained themselves as renunciates, even though they were officially regarded as part of the laity. Whatever the ordination status, higher spiritual attainment and more convincing arguments were respected in the Buddhist public sphere.

Third, exchanging ideas using mass communication techniques was an important dimension of the Buddhist public sphere. Those who had a common opinion established a group in order to share their ideas with the wider public. Those groups were often established on lay people's initiative and were under their management, they had certain monks or lay teachers as their advisors. As activities, they organised public lectures and discussions, published journals and booklets, and broadcast on radio and television in order to propagate their ideas. When a group conflicted with other groups, critical campaigns were often conducted in order to gain support from the public by discrediting the opponent.

Fourth, the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand was a public forum of discussion among Buddhist groups not only concerning interpretations of Buddhist doctrines and scriptures, but also for a way for Buddhism to meet and to be challenged by other systems of thought. For example, in twentieth-century Thailand, Marxism with its materialist ideology accused Buddhism of being an impractical idealism, especially with regard to social problems. Buddhist thinkers faced with Marxist ideologies needed to examine Buddhism for its relevance in contemporary society. Buddhism's inter-ideological dialogue was also a significant part of the Buddhist public sphere.

By introducing the concept of the Buddhist public sphere, this study intends to

examine discussions of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and his associates in the twentieth-century Thai context. In order to understand Buddhadasa, who has been highly respected as a Buddhist monastic intellectual in Thailand, but at the same time has been regarded as a controversial or even heretical figure, the predominant approaches toward Thai Buddhism seem to have considerable difficulty evaluating his role.

Compared with other Theravada Buddhist Asian scholars from such countries as Burma and Sri Lanka, there have been fewer Thai Buddhist scholars involved in Pali scholarship in the West, for example, with the Pali Text Society, perhaps because Thailand had no experience of European colonialism. Thailand and its Theravada Buddhism is seen by Western philologist scholars as the first place where they found Pali through a French missionary in the seventeenth century<sup>1</sup>, and where some of the oldest manuscripts were found<sup>2</sup>. In this situation, it is highly unlikely that Buddhadasa's Thai translations and interpretations of Pali texts have been consulted by European scholars of Pali, even though in Thailand he has long been regarded as one of the most knowledgeable scholars of Buddhism.

Instead, anthropologists and sociologists have more intensively studied Buddhism in Thailand. In lieu of any doctrinal study of Buddhism, they focused on the function of Buddhism, as the religious norm of the unordained, ordinary members of a community. In contrast with the former, which is called "philosophical religion" or "great tradition", the latter popular aspect of Buddhism is called "practical religion", "little tradition", or certain regional "vicissitudes"<sup>3</sup>. Popular beliefs in Buddhism, which

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<sup>1</sup> According to Norman, it has long been considered that Simon de La Loubère, an envoy of King Louis XIV, was the first Westerner to report the sacred language of Buddhist Siamese in his book published in France in 1691. However, Laneau, a French missionary, reported in 1680 that he studied Pali in 1672, and wrote a Grammar and a Dictionary of both Pali and Thai. In their works, Pali was first known by the West in Thai pronunciation, cited by the French as "Balie" or "Balye" (K. R. Norman, "The present state of Pali studies, and future tasks", *Collected papers volume VI* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society), pp. 68 – 69).

<sup>2</sup> K. R. Norman, "The present state of Pali studies, and future tasks", pp. 81 – 83; K. R. Norman, "Pali philology and the study of Buddhism", *Collected papers volume IV* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society), p. 85. Pali manuscripts are a major focus. See O. von Hinüber, "Pali manuscripts of canonical texts from North Thailand – a preliminary report", *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 71 (1983), pp. 75 – 88.

<sup>3</sup> "Philosophical religion" and "practical religion" are concepts of E. R. Leach (E. R. Leach, "Introduction", E. R. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in practical religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 1 – 6). The concepts of "great tradition" and "little tradition" are proposed by Robert Redfield (Robert Redfield, *Peasant society and culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956)). Melford Spiro called the religious system practised by Burmese Buddhists "Burmese vicissitude", as he did not fully agree with the dichotomy of "great tradition" and "little tradition",

intermingled animism and extra-canonical supernaturalism, have been excluded from doctrinal or canonical studies of Buddhism, but through the anthropological approach they have contributed to clarify the ideological foundation of the villagers' world. Concerning Thai people's practice of Buddhism, for example, S. J. Tambiah studied social structure by investigating religious rituals and the ideology of merit-making activities, which frame the reciprocal relationship between monks and lay people<sup>4</sup>. Because of the "ideology of merit", monks are supported by lay people who can accumulate merit by supporting monks economically. However, it is difficult to examine Buddhadasa in the framework of the study of "practical religion". Buddhadasa also belonged to the social context of Thai Buddhism, but he inquired into Pali scriptures, namely the realm of "philosophical religion". His search for a normative interpretation was an attempt to take a leap away from the conventional practices of Buddhism in Thai society.

Historical studies on Thai Buddhism by such scholars as Ishii and Tambiah contributed to outline a structural framework for pre-modern monarchical rule in Theravada Buddhist dynasties<sup>5</sup>. The study of the relationship between monks who abstain from economic production and lay people who have been their material supporters expanded to examine the relationship between the Sangha, the association of

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which were introduced in the comparative study of civilisation (Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and society: a great tradition and its Burmese vicissitude* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970, 1982), p. 5).

<sup>4</sup> S. J. Tambiah, "The ideology of merit and the social correlates of Buddhism in a Thai village", E. R. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in practical religion*, pp. 41 – 121; S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the spirit cults in North-East Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Apart from Tambiah, there are anthropological studies from a similar perspective, such as: Jane Bunnag, *Buddhist monk, Buddhist layman: a study of urban monastic organization in central Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and B. J. Terwiel, *Monks and magic: an analysis of religious ceremonies in Central Thailand* (London: Curzon Press, 1979). Yoneo Ishii integrated the perspective of practical religion in his historical study of social structure in Theravada Buddhist society (Yoneo Ishii, *Jozabu Bukkyo no seiji shakai gaku* (The political sociology of Theravada Buddhism) (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1975), which is translated by Peter Hawkes as: *Sangha, state, and society: Thai Buddhism in history* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986)).

<sup>5</sup> Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society*; S. J. Tambiah, *World conqueror and world renouncer: a study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Articles based on this perspective are collected in: Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and legitimation of power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA Books, 1978). For a study on the history of the Theravada Buddhist monarchy of Burma, see Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: the origins of modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985). With more focus on modernisation in Thailand there is: Somboon Suksamarn, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: the role of the Sangha in the modernization of Thailand* (London: G. Hurst, 1977).

monks, and kingship, the prime patron of the Sangha. A monarchy, which is considered to reign on the top of the hierarchy of merit accumulation in past lives, can be legitimated as a righteous rule by contributing to the prosperity of the religion, which is embodied by the Sangha. Also, studies of the ideology of millenarian movements revealed that the Buddhist *dhamma* or “righteous virtue”, which is supposed to be embodied in secular rulers, could legitimate their rule, while a lack of it became a reason for replacing them<sup>6</sup>.

This perspective of the political functions of Buddhist ideology was examined by Jackson in his study on the social and political situation in the 1980s<sup>7</sup>. He argued that the newly emerged urban middle class ideologically challenged the social establishment stratum by their new interpretation of Buddhism, which taught universally accessible *nibbāna* and had no requirement for past merit accumulations that legitimised the existing social hierarchy<sup>8</sup>. However, actual doctrinal conflicts and a survey of the socio-economic background of the followers of what he called reformist Buddhism, including Buddhadasa, P. A. Payutto Bhikkhu, Panyananta Bhikkhu, Santi Asoke, and Thammakai, are not supportive of his argument<sup>9</sup>. Class difference and political and

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<sup>6</sup> Yoneo Ishii, “A note on Buddhist millenarian revolts in Northeastern Siam”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 121 – 126; Charles Keyes, “Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai society”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (February 1977), pp. 238 – 302. Tanabe and Chatthip also discussed holy men rebellions in Thailand by looking at them as a force of social change rather than their religious aspect (Shigeharu Tanabe, “Ideological practice in peasant rebellions: Siam at the turn of the twentieth century”, Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe (eds.), *History and peasant consciousness in South East Asia* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1984), pp. 75 –110; Chatthip Nartsupha, “The ideology of holy men revolts in North East Thailand”, Turton and Tanabe (eds.), *History and peasant consciousness in South East Asia*, pp. 111 – 134). One of the most recent studies on holy men is: Constance M. Wilson, “The holy man in the history of Thailand and Laos”, *Journal of Southeast Asian studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (September 1997), pp. 345 – 364.

<sup>7</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict: the political functions of urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict*, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Suwanna pointed out that the Santi Asoke group was categorised together with P. A. Payutto, who severely criticised the group from a doctrinal point of view, and Grant Olson’s study has indicated a rather reactionary aspect of P. A. Payutto (Grant Allan Olson, “A person-centered ethnography of Thai Buddhism: the life of Phra Rajavaramuni (Prayudh Payutto)”, Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1989; Suwanna Satha-Anand, review of *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict: the political functions of urban Thai Buddhism*, by Peter A. Jackson, *Crossroads*, vol. 5 No. 1 (1990), pp. 105 – 108). Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn’s recent survey on the social, educational, and religious background of people in the Santi Asoke group examined and more clearly presented the components of the group’s followers. She concludes that the majority of the ordinary lay people came from rural low-educated origins, whereas the monks, who are the minority core of the group, were more divergently both from the educated lower middle class and from the urban high-educated upper middle class (Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn, *Buddhism with open eyes: belief and practice of*

religious preferences do not necessarily coincide with each other. I will present in this thesis biographies of both Buddhadasa's followers and opponents, they were basically from a middle class background, he has both supporters and opponents in the upper class, and their political attitude also varied. I rather argue the Buddhist public sphere as inclusive of people from any kind of class origin interested in free exchanges of opinions. I think that it is such opportunities that Thai people have been pursuing throughout the twentieth century.

Historians also pursued their studies in administrative and educational reforms in the Thai Sangha from the middle of the nineteenth century. Craig J. Reynolds studied the late nineteenth-century reform of the Sangha, which was underway since the 1782 restoration of the order, was accelerated by Prince Mongkut's rational movement called *Thammayut*, and was set up to control monasteries throughout the entire kingdom by Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot as a centralised and hierarchical national institution<sup>10</sup>. As a part of the late nineteenth-century reform of the Sangha, Zack and Ishii explored the ecclesiastical education curricula and examinations, which standardised the doctrinal understanding of Thai monks<sup>11</sup>. These reforms of Buddhism were considered as precursors of Buddhadasa's rational interpretations.

While, anthropologists explored not only the practice but also the history of forest monks, who from the late nineteenth century through to the twentieth century lived in a peripheral position of the Sangha apparatus. Tambiah's work placed forest monks in Thailand in broader perspectives, such as that of traditional Buddhist meditation procedures, traditions of forest monks in Theravada Southeast Asia, and their biographies in comparison with the Buddha's life<sup>12</sup>. Taylor discussed rather recent changes the forest monks have experienced, for instance in the ecology of their forest

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*Santi Asoke* (Bangkok: Fah apai, 1997), p. 208). Also, Samana Phothirak, who is the leader of the Santi Asoke Group, criticised Buddhadasa and his followers as privileged compared with his followers from lower social strata, although he respect Buddhadasa as his teacher. See, Satcha Wimuttinan (edited from a public lecture of Phra Phothirak), *Panha sangkhom thi kae mai dai phro kansuksa phutthasasana phit phlat* (Social problems that cannot be solved because of wrong education in Buddhism) (Bangkok: Rongphim mulanithi thamma santi, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Craig James Reynolds, "The Buddhist monkhood in nineteenth century Thailand", Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1973; Craig Reynolds (ed.), *Autobiography: the life of Prince-Patriarch Vajirañana of Siam, 1860 – 1921* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Stephan J. Zack, "Buddhist education under Prince Wachirayan Warorot", Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1977; Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society*, chapter 5.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *The Buddhist saints of the forest and the cult of amulets* (Cambridge:

and their incorporation into the nation-state<sup>13</sup>. Kamala's most recent study on this topic provided rich information about historical conditions and the practices of forest monks throughout the twentieth century up until the present<sup>14</sup>. Her work contributed to the study of Thai Buddhism by examining the biographies of forest monks, which have been abundantly distributed in Thailand by their followers, but which have not been utilised as historical and ethnographical sources.

Although Buddhadasa is also often called a forest monk by Thai people, because he stayed at Suan Mokkh, which is far from Bangkok, and located in a rural area in Chaiya, Southern Thailand, he should not be categorised together with the forest monks in Northeastern Thailand. In fact, Buddhadasa had no connection with Achan Man, the charismatic monk teacher of those forest monks in the Northeast, but he learnt a way of ascetic practice from the Pali scriptures, which purport to document the way of the Buddha. Buddhadasa rather started off as a town monk engaged in scriptural studies, and through his expertise in Pali and extensive knowledge gained from English materials on Buddhism, he was highly respected as an intellectual preacher. This was clearly a contrast with the forest monks in the Northeast, who had little formal or ecclesiastical education, who hardly expressed their religiosity in words, but their integral personal accomplishment through ascetic practice could teach people to follow the way they actualised.

Aside from the studies on forest monks, there were rather fewer studies on Thai Buddhism in the middle of the twentieth century, but more were done on the new phenomena after the 1980s. The legal and structural changes in the Thai Sangha after the 1932 Constitutional Revolution were examined by Ishii<sup>15</sup>, and the situation of Buddhism in the late 1970s, when Thailand experienced the polarised ideological conflict, were studied by Somboon and Keyes<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, the reformative

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Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> J. L. Taylor, *Forest monks and the nation-state: an anthropological study in Northeastern Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest recollections: wandering monks in twentieth-century Thailand* (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society*, chapter 6, 7; Yoneo Ishii, "Church and state in Thailand", *Asian survey*, Vol. VIII, No. 10 (1968), pp. 864 – 871.

<sup>16</sup> Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and politics in Thailand: a study of socio-political change and political activism of the Thai Sangha* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982); Charles F. Keyes, "Political crisis and militant Buddhism in contemporary Thailand", Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and legitimation of power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg, PA:

attempts in Thai Buddhism after the 1980s were examined for a variety of issues, such as community development<sup>17</sup>, forest conservation<sup>18</sup>, newly emerged groups, including Santi Asoke and Thammakai<sup>19</sup>, and as a religious phenomenon in the late capitalist era<sup>20</sup>. Influential teachers, such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and P. A. Payutto Bhikkhu, perhaps gained the attention of scholars when issues in the studies of Thai Buddhism came to light<sup>21</sup>.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has been studied by several scholars. Although Buddhadasa's works had been translated into English in Thailand by the end of the 1960s<sup>22</sup>, it seems that Buddhadasa became widely known in the West by being

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ANIMA Books, 1978), pp. 147 – 164. For a religious analysis on the 14 October uprising in 1973, see also: Frank E. Reynolds, "Legitimation and rebellion: Thailand's civic religion and the student uprising of October, 1973", Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and legitimation of power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, pp. 134 – 146.

<sup>17</sup> Seri Phongphit, *Religion in a changing society: Buddhism, reform and the role of monks in community development in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Arena, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Suchira Payulpitack, "Changing provinces of concern: a case-study of the social impact of the Buddhadasa movement", *Sojourn*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (February 1992), pp. 39 – 68; Jim Taylor, "Social activism and resistance on the Thai frontier: the case of Phra Prajak Khuttajitto", *Bulletin of concerned Asian scholars*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April – June 1993), pp. 3 – 16; Nicola Tannenbaum, "Protest, tree ordination, and the changing context of political ritual", *Ethnology*, vol. 39, No. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 109 – 127.

<sup>19</sup> Apart from Jackson's above-cited work in 1989, other examples are, Jim Taylor, "New Buddhist movements in Thailand: an individualistic revolution, reform and political dissonance", *Journal of Southeast Asian studies*, vol. 21 No. 1 (March 1990), pp. 135 – 154; Edwin Zehner, "Reform symbolism of a Thai middle-class sect: the growth and appeal of the Thammakai movement", *Journal of Southeast Asian studies*, Vol. 21 No. 2 (September 1990), pp. 402 – 426; Donald K. Swearer, "Fundamentalism in Theravada Buddhism", Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 628 – 690; Jim Taylor, "Buddhist revitalization, modernization, and social change in contemporary Thailand", *Sojourn*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (February 1993); Apinya Fuengfusakul, "Empire of crystal and utopian commune: two types of contemporary Theravada reform in Thailand", *Sojourn*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (February 1993), pp. 153 – 183; Richard A. O'Connor, "Interpreting Thai religious change: temples, Sangha reform and social change", *Journal of Southeast Asian studies*, Vol. 24 No. 2 (September 1993), pp. 330 – 339. Aside from Santi Asoke and Thammakai, the supernaturalist group of Suchart Kosonkittiwong was also studied by Peter A. Jackson, "The Hupphaasawan movement: millenarian Buddhism among the Thai political elite", *Sojourn*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1988), pp. 134 – 170.

<sup>20</sup> Peter A. Jackson, "The enchanting spirit of Thai capitalism: the cult of Laung Phor Khoon and the post-modernization of Thai Buddhism", *South East Asian research*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 5 – 60; Peter A. Jackson, "Royal spirits, Chinese gods, and magic monks: Thailand's boom time religious prosperity", *South East Asia research*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (November 1999), pp. 245 – 320.

<sup>21</sup> About Payutto, see Grant Olson, "A person-centered ethnography of Thai Buddhism". Olson also examined the understandings of holy water by Buddhadasa, Santi Asoke, and P. A. Payutto in: Grant A. Olson, "Cries over spilled holy water: 'complex' responses to a traditional Thai religious practice", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March 1991), pp. 75 – 85.

<sup>22</sup> According to the bibliography of Gabaude and a list of foreign language translations by Santikaro Bhikkhu, Buddhadasa's works had been distributed in English at least from 1963 (Louis Gabaude, "Oeuvres traduites en anglais", *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), pp. 581 – 585; Santikaro Bhikkhu, "Translations and publications of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in foreign languages" (last updated



introduced in Swearer's book, *Buddhism in transition*, which was published in 1970 in the United States<sup>23</sup>. In this book, Swearer introduced Buddhadasa as a monk who was called a "Stream-winner" (Pali: *sotāpanna*) in Thailand. He also summarised Buddhadasa's background and the main features of his thought, such as emptiness, his critical attitude toward Abhidhamma, his interpretations by making a distinction between "human language" (*phasa khon*) and "dhammic language" (*phasa tham*), and a comparison of Buddhism with Christianity. These points are also shared by later detailed studies on Buddhadasa. Swearer further published collections of his translations of Buddhadasa's works, which expanded opportunities for people outside Thailand to know of Buddhadasa<sup>24</sup>. In one of his recent articles, he examined Buddhadasa's interpretation of the Buddha in comparison with classical biographies of the Buddha and modern interpretations from the late nineteenth century proceeding forwards to Buddhadasa<sup>25</sup>. As a study of Buddhadasa's scholarship, it confirmed the modernist, demythologising character of Buddhadasa's thought, which excluded supernatural myth and legend in the classical stories, rather than attempting to reconcile the traditional myths and modern science, unlike his modern precursors.

In 1988, two large monographs on Buddhadasa came out, one in English and one in French. The English work by Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa: a Buddhist thinker for the modern world*, explored modern characteristics of Buddhadasa's thought, and its radical implication for the existing social order in Thailand<sup>26</sup>. Jackson argued that

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on 28 September 1997)). In the late 1960s several translations were done by Nagasena Bhikkhu and Ariyananda Bhikkhu (Roderick Bucknell), from the Sublime Life Mission, a group of Buddhadasa's lay supporters in Bangkok. Swearer also published an article on Buddhadasa in Thailand in 1968 (Donald K. Swearer, "Buddhism, Christianity and Bhikkhu Buddhadasa", *Visakha Puja 2511* (Bangkok: Buddhist Association, 1968), pp. 77 – 90, cited in Louis Gabaude, "Oeuvres relatives a Buddhadasa en anglais", *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande*, p. 630). Although Buddhadasa's name was not mentioned, in 1939 K. P. Landon spoke of a letter from "a friend in Chaiya who has founded a Buddhist missionary school called Buddhānigama", whom I assume was Buddhadasa's brother, Thammathat (K. P. Landon, *Thailand in transition: a brief survey of cultural trends in the five years since the Revolution of 1932* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 270 – 271). I thank Santikaro Bhikkhu for making his list of translations of Buddhadasa's works available.

<sup>23</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *Buddhism in transition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 105 – 114.

<sup>24</sup> For examples, Donald K. Swearer (trans. & ed.), *Toward the truth* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971); Donald K. Swearer (trans. & ed.), *Me and mine: selected essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Donald K. Swearer, "Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's interpretation of the Buddha", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. LXIV, No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 313 – 336.

<sup>26</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa: a Buddhist thinker for the modern world* (Bangkok: The Siam

Buddhadasa ideologically challenged the hierarchical order of society by his rational, demythologising interpretation of *kamma* and *nibbāna*, by the distinction of human language (a conventional understanding of a religious concept) and *dhammic* language (an interpretation of it). He supported this argument by citing Buddhadasa's interpretation of *kamma* as a psychological phenomenon instead of merit accumulation in past lives, and *nibbāna* as being universally accessible even for lay people here and now without depending on monks in the Sangha, which officially legitimates the state.

Jackson presumed a Protestant type of reformation in Buddhadasa's thought. Lay people's access to *nibbāna* can not only be ascertained in the Pali scriptures, but it had scarcely become an issue of unorthodox interpretation by Buddhadasa. Jackson examined Kukrit Pramoj's criticism of Buddhadasa, that he taught *lokuttara dhamma* (supra-mundane teaching for *nibbāna*) to lay people, but Kukrit did not represent either the traditional orthodoxy of the Sangha or of the social establishment<sup>27</sup>. Buddhadasa had most important intellectual exchange with and support from elite bureaucrats in the Ministry of Justice, whose salary and social status were at high levels, even King Bhumibol and his Queen Mother respected his teachings<sup>28</sup>. Also, Buddhadasa had few conflicts with the Sangha elders about his interpretations, but he enjoyed mutual respect and communication with academic monks of both the Thammayut and Mahanikai Orders<sup>29</sup>. These relationships of these high status individuals with Buddhadasa do not support Jackson's arguments.

In French, Louis Gabaude's large work, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*, studied Buddhadasa's thought as a system of hermeneutics<sup>30</sup>. Gabaude especially looked at Buddhadasa's unique explanations of religious concepts in his sermons. He identified three major resources for the young Buddhadasa to develop his hermeneutic theory: a Western-originated rational, critical approach to the Pali canon; Zen principles; and acceptance of all teachings,

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Society under Royal Patronage, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Jackson examined the discussion of Kukrit and Buddhadasa in Chapter 6 of his book, *Buddhadasa: a Buddhist thinker for the modern world*.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Chapter 1, pp. 59 – 65, and Chapter 3, footnote 51.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Chapter 1, pp. 55 – 59, and Chapter 4, p. 202.

<sup>30</sup> For assistance in reading Gabaude's academic French I am grateful for help from Dr. Royce Wiles.

including that of non-Buddhist Indian philosophers and of Christianity<sup>31</sup>. Through these influences, Gabaude argued that Buddhadasa interpreted an authentic meaning among the diverse meanings of a concept, and equated opposite concepts, such as good/evil and *nibbāna/saṃsāra*<sup>32</sup>. Compared with other studies on Buddhadasa, in which his thought is characterised as modern, scientific, and demythologising traditional religious beliefs, Gabaude did not solely emphasise Buddhadasa's rational interpretations, but also examined it in the broader context of the religious philosophies of Buddhism, Christianity and Theosophy. Especially, he indicated that Buddhadasa's characteristic teachings, such as the hermeneutical theory, criticism of the Abhidhamma, conditioned arising, and emptiness, remind one of the Mādhyamika school of Nāgārjuna in Mahāyāna Buddhism<sup>33</sup>. Gabaude's work also explored a lot of Thai materials, including both works by Buddhadasa and those related to him, but the orientation of his study suggests a Western-centred perspective<sup>34</sup>. In Gabaude's language-based study on Buddhadasa's hermeneutics, the Thai people's perceptions and the significance of his teaching in a historical context do not become of interest for him, with the exception of the keen Thai critics of Buddhadasa.

However, most Thai scholars' studies on Buddhadasa were also interested in

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<sup>31</sup> Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande*, pp. 51 – 53.

<sup>32</sup> Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande*, Chapter II.

<sup>33</sup> Gabaude wrote, “En fait le Mahāyāna auquel Buddhadasa s’est intéressé et qu’il reconnaît vouloir faire entendre, n’est pas celui de la Terre Pure par exemple, mais celui de Mādhyamika. A propos de la théorie herméneutique, de la critique de l’Abhidhamma, de la Production Conditionnée comme système de dépendance essentielle et non temporelle, de la mort avant la mort, de la vacuité des esprits, nous avons eu l’occasion d’attirer déjà l’attention sur la filiation de ces enseignements” (In fact the Mahāyāna in which Buddhadasa was interested and which he recognised that he wanted to spread, was for example not that of the Pure Land, but that of the Mādhyamika. With regard to the hermeneutical theory, with the criticism of the Abhidhamma, with conditioned arising as a system of essential dependence and not temporal, with death before death, with the emptiness of ghosts, we have had occasion to already call attention to the lineage of these teachings) (Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande*, p. 400). Although Gabaude did not assert that Buddhadasa was actually influenced either by a study of or a scholar on Madhyamika school, he quoted Buddhadasa's words, which said that he found a typical idea of the Madhyamika, “*nibbāna in saṃsāra*” in English and German books (Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Thalaengkan kiao kap 50 pi Suan Mok* (Announcement about fifty years of Suan Mokkh) (1982), p. 10, quoted in Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande*, p. 401).

<sup>34</sup> Gabaude often overemphasised western influence on Buddhadasa. For example, Gabaude wrote, “... il est sûr que l’activité du mouvement bouddhiste occidental, en particulier de certains bouddhistes occidentaux, a eu une influence déterminante, encore que généralement occultée, sur Buddhadasa (... it is certain that the activity of the western Buddhist movement, in particular of certain western Buddhists, has had a determining influence, generally somewhat hidden, on Buddhadasa) (Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande*, p. 47; italics added by Ito).

the philosophical content of his thought. Buddhadasa's interpretation of religious concepts and his method of inter-religious dialogue has been of interest to Thai Christian scholars, both Catholic and Protestant. Seri Phongphit, a former Catholic priest, wrote a Ph.D. dissertation entitled, "The problem of religious language: a study of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Ian Ramsey as models for a mutual understanding of Buddhism and Christianity"<sup>35</sup>. A Protestant theologian, Maen Pongudom, did a comparative study of Presbyterian missionaries sent to modern Thailand, early Church apologists in Greece, and Buddhadasa<sup>36</sup>. In terms of religious studies, which specialised in Buddhism, Pataraporn Sirikanchana compared the concept of *dhamma* of Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot, the late nineteenth-century Sangha reformer, and that of Buddhadasa<sup>37</sup>, and Suwanna Satha-Anand compared Buddhadasa's thought with Mahāyana philosophy<sup>38</sup>. In examining the relevance of religious teachings to socio-economic conditions, Tavivat Puntarigvivat studied Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism in comparison with Latin American liberation theology<sup>39</sup>, and Pricha Changkhwanyun examined Buddhadasa's thought in relation to politics<sup>40</sup>. Also in a study of education philosophy, Buddhadasa's proposal of *chit wang*, or the empty mind, was examined by Peerachat Saccavadit<sup>41</sup>. In all these studies scholars sought to examine either a particular aspect of Buddhadasa's thought or its application to a certain issue.

Suchira Payulpitack's doctoral dissertation is perhaps one of the few

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Seri Phongphit, "The problem of religious language: a study of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Ian Ramsey as models for a mutual understanding of Buddhism and Christianity", Inaugural-dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades an der Hochschule für Philosophie / Philosophische Fakultät SJ, München, 1978. I thank Dr. Louis Gabaude for kindly allowing me to access this thesis from his collections of Buddhadasa related works.

<sup>36</sup> Maen Pongudom, "Apologetic and missionary proclamation: exemplified by American Presbyterian missionaries to Thailand (1828 - 1978), early Church apologists: Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and the Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Thai Buddhist monk-apologist", Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 1979. I thank Dr. Louis Gabaude for kindly allowing me to access this thesis.

<sup>37</sup> Pataraporn Sirikanchana, "The concept of dhamma in Thai Buddhism: a study in the thought of Vajiranana and Buddhadasa", Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Pennsylvania, 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Suwanna Sathanan (Suwanna Satha-Anand), *Pratchaya phutthathat kap mahayan tham* (Buddhadasa's philosophy and Mahayana *dhamma*) (Bangkok: Khronkan phoei phrae phon ngan wichai Chulalongkon Mahawitthayalai, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Tavivat Puntarigvivat, "Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism in dialogue with Latin American liberation theology", Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> Pricha Changkhwanyun, *Khwamkhit thang kanmuang khong Than Phutthathat Phikkhu* (Buddhadasa's thought on politics) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Chulalongkon Mahawitthayalai, 1993).

<sup>41</sup> Peerachat Saccavadit, "Citwaang as an adequate aim of education", Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1979. I thank Dr. Louis Gabaude for kindly allowing me to access this thesis.

sociological studies on the extension of Buddhadasa's influence<sup>42</sup>. What Suchira called "Buddhadasa's movement" was not an organisation, which has an administrative headquarters and membership, but rather a "relatively loosely knit association"<sup>43</sup>. In order to understand the movement she conducted a survey in 1988 and 1989 concerning Buddhadasa's followers' social background and their experience with his teachings (Chapter six). She included a case study of the activities of one of Buddhadasa's disciple monks (Chapter seven). Her fifty interviewees, consisting of ten monks and forty lay people, led her to two main points. Many monk-followers of Buddhadasa came from peasant families and engaged in community development in their village. Through their activities, Suchira argued that Buddhadasa's teachings were being disseminated to the rural population in Thailand<sup>44</sup>. At the same time, more than half of the lay disciples of Buddhadasa she interviewed had had university level education, and nearly half of them were government officials. The sample included university lecturers, doctors, judges, and teachers, who are usually considered to be of high or middle level occupational status<sup>45</sup>.

Although Suchira's research included in depth interviews with visitors to Suan Mokkh and with important successors of Buddhadasa's thought, such as the present abbot of Suan Mokkh, as well as Prawase Wasi, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Chun Sirorot, the significance of their connection with Buddhadasa remains unclear, because readers are not well informed about their activities. Suchira chose the case of Phra Pongsak Techadhammo at Wat Pha-laad in Chiang Mai, as an example of the activities run by Buddhadasa's disciple monks, who engage in forest conservation and rural development based on Buddhist teachings<sup>46</sup>. However, Suchira only looked at it as a movement connected with Buddhadasa because of the abbot's time at Suan Mokkh, but she did not locate the actual significance of Buddhadasa in the wider movement of Buddhist social engagement, the case of Wat Pha-laad belonging to the ideological lineage of

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<sup>42</sup> Suchira Payulpitack, "Buddhadasa's movement: an analysis of its origins, development, and social impact", Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Sozialwissenschaften, Universität Bielefeld, 1991. I thank Dr. Louis Gabaude for kindly allowing me to access this thesis, and introducing me to Dr. Suchira.

<sup>43</sup> Suchira, "Buddhadasa's Movement", p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> Suchira, "Buddhadasa's Movement", pp. 182 – 183.

<sup>45</sup> Suchira, "Buddhadasa's Movement", pp. 188 – 190.

<sup>46</sup> Chapter seven of her thesis is published as: Suchira Payulpitack, "Changing provinces of concern" (cited above in footnote 18).

Buddhadasa is more meaningful in that context. I think that Buddhadasa has been significant in various areas of ideological movements and activities, but the connection of these movements with Buddhadasa's movement have to be comprehended as very loose. Therefore, Buddhadasa's significance should be examined in each ideological movement.

In contrast with the above-mentioned studies of Buddhadasa, I propose to study the significance of Buddhadasa for Thai people in other ways. I felt that there seems to be a discrepancy between the picture of Buddhadasa in "academic" or "objective" studies, which portrayed him as a modern, rational, but deviant, unorthodox monk, and his general image in Thailand as a highly respected, great thinker of Buddhism. As a foreigner with a different experience in and background of Buddhism, I thought that my understanding from reading his work might not coincide with that of many Thai people, who have absorbed Buddhadasa as part of their own intellectual foundation.

In order to approach the image of Buddhadasa as Thai people have, I have interviewed his Thai followers and opponents about his significance in their own lives, and I have read their writings and Buddhadasa's works in light of what they suggested. For my informants, I selected among Buddhadasa-related people those who had important roles either as successors of his *dhamma* propagation activities, or as his opponents, or as leaders of certain social or ideological movements in Thailand. By further tracing the details of their activities, and Buddhadasa's significance in them, I hoped that Buddhadasa's position in the cultural and intellectual history of twentieth-century Thailand would be clarified.

At the same time, through a study of Buddhadasa and intellectuals associated with him, their context will also be examined. This context is what I call "the Buddhist public sphere". I think that discussions in the Buddhist public sphere, which include both monks and lay people, can inform us about two aspects of history in Thailand. On the one hand, they will suggest contemporary Thai people's understandings of Buddhist thought, which have scarcely been examined by scholars of Buddhist scriptures, by anthropologists of popular Buddhist practices, or by historians of Thai Buddhism, who have focused on the role of the Sangha. Also, I hope that the intellectual Buddhist discussions explored in this study can provide more information for a history of Buddhism in the twentieth century. Many of the discussions dealt with took place during

the period of international ideological conflict known as the Cold War, and they took place in-between the Sangha modernisation reform in the early twentieth century and the new Buddhist movements after the 1980s. On the other hand, the intellectual activities in the Buddhist public sphere are a part of the intellectual history of Thailand. In this study, the dialogue between Buddhism and Marxism is of particular interest.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter I will introduce the situation of Buddhism in the early twentieth century, the family background of Buddhadasa, and the early development of his activities. Chapter II will trace the propagation of the *dhamma* by Buddhadasa and his followers. His interpretation of the *dhamma* was disseminated first by Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana* (Buddhism), and then by his followers for intellectuals in Bangkok, for people in Northern Thailand, who used to have a distinctive Buddhist tradition, and for the masses mainly through the distribution of *dhamma* booklets. Chapters III and IV will examine controversies that Buddhadasa provoked in the Buddhist public sphere in the 1960s. Chapter III will deal with Thai people's discussions about the concept of emptiness or the empty mind (*chit wang*), by which Buddhadasa was considered both innovative and unorthodox. Chapter IV will explore the debates between Buddhadasa and Abhidhamma groups about whether Abhidhamma, the traditional system of doctrines, was the word of the Buddha or not, as well as the position of Buddhadasa and the Abhidhamma groups in the history of Thai Buddhism. Chapters V and VI will discuss the ideological dialogues between Marxism and Buddhism in Thailand. Chapter V will focus on the post-World War II period when the Phibun government was relatively tolerant of Marxism, and when Buddhadasa and Marxist intellectuals exchanged ideas. Chapter VI will look at the development of social thought by Buddhist intellectuals from the beginning of and through to the end of the period of the severest ideological conflicts, especially Buddhadasa's proposal of "Dhammic Socialism", and attempts to apply it by so-called "engaged Buddhists". Lastly, the conclusion will overview the role of Buddhadasa and the Buddhist public sphere in twentieth-century Thailand.

## Chapter I Early development of Buddhadasa's thoughts and activities

Suan Mokkhabalaram, or Buddhadasa's place for *dhamma* practice, is located outside the town of Chaiya, approximately six hundred kilometres south from Thailand's capital, Bangkok. In order to reach there from Bangkok, it takes overnight, either by train or long distance bus, arriving in Chaiya in the early morning. Then, changing to *song thaeo*<sup>1</sup>, which goes along the highway towards Surat Thani, it takes about fifteen minutes to get to the main gate of Suan Mokkh. In the quiet forested premises, there are open gathering places surrounded by rocks and trees for listening to sermons, several buildings to communicate religious messages, and individual cabins for monks and lay visitors. Those monks who seclude themselves from the clamorous city and concentrate on religious practice in this type of temple are called forest monks, and Buddhadasa has often been categorised amongst them.

However, Buddhadasa talking about himself said, "I became a forest monk who worked on the *Tipitaka*. I assume that there are few such monks"<sup>2</sup>. Unlike the forest monks in North-eastern Thailand, Buddhadasa was never isolated from communications with the outside world. Buddhadasa was intellectually inspired by both domestic and international movements of Buddhism and expressed his ideas to the world. The development of his thought and activities was also a part of the change in Thai society. Coincidentally, the establishment of Suan Mokkh was only a month before the 1932 Constitutional Revolution, which abolished the absolute monarchy and opened a way for Thai politics to reflect the opinions of ordinary citizens. Buddhadasa's independent activity was an example of an individual Buddhist whose free exchange of opinions could create a new understanding of the religion. The beginning of Buddhadasa's activities may be seen as ushering in a period when both the general and Buddhist public spheres in Thailand developed rapidly.

In this chapter I will examine episodes and experiences influential for the early development of Buddhadasa's thought and activities. First, I will explore notable

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<sup>1</sup> *Song thaeo* is a small truck modified to carry passengers. It has two benches on each side of the load-carrying tray for passengers to sit on. They are used for public transport over short distances.

<sup>2</sup> Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya: atchiwaprawat khong than phutthathat* (Talking in the twilight years: an autobiography of Venerable Buddhadasa) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1988), p. 454.



Buddhist movements in the early twentieth century which prepared the way for Buddhadasa's intellectual concerns. Second, I will present his family background. Ethnic Chinese in origin, it had become integrated into Thai Buddhist culture and its members were pursuing progressive modern secular knowledge. Third, I will comparatively examine the experiences of Buddhadasa in his youth. He was to spend his life as an intellectual monk, while his younger brother, Thammathat, who had advanced secular education, was to support Buddhadasa as a layman in their mutual exploration of Buddhism. Fourth, I will depict the system of mutual support operating between monk-led Suan Mokkh and lay-led Khana Thammathan. Lastly, I will explore Buddhadasa's communications with urban intellectuals and elder monks in the Sangha, who inspired the development of his thought.

## 1. Buddhist movements in the early twentieth century

By the beginning of the twentieth century, changes in Thai Buddhism were being promoted by movements in three domains: the Sangha; lay Buddhist critics and associations; and those occurring within international Buddhist groupings. These trends of change within Buddhism in Thailand were influential at the time Buddhadasa was developing his thoughts and activities.

### Reforms in the Sangha

First, reform in Thai Buddhism was seriously attempted within the Sangha, the association of ordained monks, especially by those close to the monarchy. The monks' lax discipline and lack of knowledge about Buddhist doctrine had been a serious concern since the end of the reign of King Rama III (1824 – 51). The ecclesiastical Pali examinations, which were held only irregularly during the first three reigns of the Chakri dynasty, began to be promoted in order to advance expertise in Pali<sup>3</sup>. The reform was led by the prince-monk, Mongkut and the distinctive monastic order he established during the late 1830s, the Thammayut or the 'Order adhering to the Dhamma'.

The role of Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot, a son of King Mongkut, was

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Reynolds, "Buddhist monkhood in nineteenth-century Thailand", Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell

very significant in expanding the reform of ecclesiastical education. This reform unified all Buddhist monks within the boundaries of the state of Siam, and its impact went even beyond the border into Laos and Cambodia. In particular, Wachirayan's Pali grammar book greatly facilitated the improvement of doctrinal understanding. Before his textbook was written, monks in the Siamese and neighbouring regions used to study Pali using a traditional grammar, *munkatchai* (Pali: *Mūla Kaccāyana*). However, as Buddhadasa recalled, the old textbook was too difficult, and after five or ten years of study, many could still not understand anything, but became 'crazy' instead<sup>4</sup>. The new grammar book was also introduced as an epoch-making innovation in Laos by those monks who had studied in Bangkok<sup>5</sup>.

With the assistance of textbooks written by Wachirayan, the Mahamakut Royal Academy, which was established in 1893, became a centre of ecclesiastical education for monks and novices in the Thammayut Order. From this academic centre in Bangkok monastic education in Buddhist doctrine expanded to the provinces through the basic doctrinal textbooks and the journal, *Thammachaksu* (Eye of the *dhamma*). In 1894 this journal started to publish parts of the Pali scriptures translated into Thai, as well as Wachirayan's and other famous monks' sermons<sup>6</sup>. Through these textbooks and the journal, Thai Buddhists were able to acquire a sound scriptural basis in Buddhism, which until then had been vague in local daily practice.

Scriptural knowledge became more accessible for monks and novices in the provinces by the introduction of the *nak tham* ecclesiastical examination. The examination was originally established to provide an objective criteria to identify 'novices who know the *dhamma*', who were to be exempted from military conscription, (along with monks), as determined by the Royal Edict on Military Conscription in 1905<sup>7</sup>. With some amendments made by later Pali scholars to Wachirayan's textbooks,

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University, 1973, pp. 155 – 161.

<sup>4</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Rong Prathan Phong Samaloek, vice-president of the Laotian Fellowship of Buddhists; this position is equivalent to the vice-Supreme Patriarch in the Thai Sangha, and in Laos under the socialist regime the Laotian Fellowship of Buddhists is equivalent to the Sangha in Thailand, interview, Vientiane, 29 April 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Zack, "Buddhist education under Prince Wachirayan Warorot", Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1977, p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society: Thai Buddhism in history* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 88 –91; Zack, "Buddhist Education...", p. 169.

which provided the syllabus, the *nak tham* examinations developed into the third, second and first grades, in 1912, 1917, and 1921 respectively<sup>8</sup>. The examination became far more popular than was envisaged in its original purpose, not only among monks and novices, but also among lay Buddhists who wanted to learn the *dhamma*, the contents of which had been unfamiliar to them but which had always been respected as sacred. In 1929 a similar ecclesiastical examination for lay Buddhists was introduced. It was called *thammasuksa* and replaced the questions on the *bhikkhu*'s 227 *vinaya* rules with questions on the eight lay precepts. This also became very popular. In order to promote Buddhist education for monks and novices, the Mahamakut Royal Academy spent an annual budget of ten thousand baht to provide local teacher monks who taught *nak tham* with *nithayaphat*, or monastic salary for monks with official titles and duties<sup>9</sup>.

As a result, candidates for the *nak tham* examinations grew from 44,167 in 1931, to 50,922 in 1932, and 54,397 in 1933<sup>10</sup>; and those for the *thammasuksa* increased to 3,512 in 1931, 4,779 in 1932, and 6,525 in 1933. The applicants expanded into every province in Siam as well as to Phnom Penh in Cambodia. Since the *nak tham* examinations began, the number of applicants increased in number every year for twenty years ranging from an increase of a few hundred to an increase of several thousand. Phra Maha Thongsup Charuwanno, who provided these statistics and who was then the director of the textbook bureau at the Mahamakut Royal Academy, observed that these numbers included a few novices who were attempting to escape from military service, but that most of the applicants genuinely wanted to study the *dhamma*<sup>11</sup>. Sanya Dhammasakdi, who was ordained in 1927, was deeply impressed by *Nawakowat* (one of the textbooks written by Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot for the third grade *nak tham*), and called it *pramuan chiwit* (a compendium, or guidelines,

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<sup>8</sup> Phra Maha Thongsup, "Pathakatha ruang nak tham" (A public lecture on *nak tham*), *Thammachaksu*, vol. 20 No. 3 (December 1934), pp. 259 – 274. This article was originally broadcast on radio on 15 June 1934.

<sup>9</sup> Phra Maha Thongsup, "Pathakatha nak tham", pp. 265 – 266.

<sup>10</sup> In 1933, 20,397 passed the examinations, 21,111 failed, and 12,871 withdrew from sitting the examinations (Phra Maha Thongsup, "Pathakatha nak tham", p. 272). According to the statistics that Ishii cited, by 1967 the *nak tham* candidates had grown to 144,765, among whom 35,744 passed the examinations (Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society*, p. 96).

<sup>11</sup> Phra Maha Thongsup added that included in these figures were some lay people who were to be teachers to teach Buddhism at elementary school. He said that these people should also be assisted (Phra Maha Thongsup, "Pathakatha nak tham", p. 273).

for life)<sup>12</sup>. Such popular enthusiasm for the study of basic Buddhist doctrines was an important feature of the early decades of the twentieth century, and Buddhadasa was also enthusiastic about the studying of *nak tham* textbooks.

### Activities of lay Buddhist intellectuals

The second development of Buddhism in the early twentieth century was the vigorous involvement of lay Buddhist intellectuals in discussions of the *dhamma*. Since the late nineteenth century, there had been some non-royal intellectuals who, through their publications, expressed opinions, criticism and ideas for the reform of Thai society, politics and religion. K. S. R. Kulap<sup>13</sup> (1834 – 1913), Thianwan or T. W. S. Wannapho<sup>14</sup> (1842 – 1915), and Narin Phasit<sup>15</sup> (1874 – 1950) were famous examples of these intellectuals whose background was that of well-to-do commoners. As a basis for the presentations of their opinions, these people had experience working for foreign and local trading firms, which provided them with a good income. Through their work, they acquired advanced knowledge of the languages, societies, histories and cultures of overseas countries. In addition their early experiences of ordination as novices and monks had provided them with their basic education.

Their activities included criticism of and attempts to reform the contemporary situation of Buddhism in Thailand. In 1900 K. S. R. Kulap and his two sons produced a weekly journal in order “to provide ‘alms of knowledge’ to monks and poor people”<sup>16</sup>. Thianwan, whose sermons were very popular among palace residents while he was a young monk for five years, gave his critical analysis of Buddhist practice in his journal, *Thulawiphak phochanakit*<sup>17</sup>. Buddhadasa remarked that Thianwan was, like Prince

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<sup>12</sup> Suksanti Chirachariyawet (ed.), *7 rop achan sanya* (Seventh twelve-year cycle [i.e., eighty-four years] of Achan Sanya) (Bangkok: Mulanithi nitthisat, Mahawitthayalai thammawat, 1991), p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> About K. S. R. Kulap, see Craig Reynolds, “The case of K. S. R. Kulap: a challenge to royal historical writing in late nineteenth century Thailand”, *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 61 Part 2 (July 1973), pp. 63 – 90.

<sup>14</sup> About Thianwan, see Chai’an-an Samutwanit (ed.), *Sanniphon khong thianwan* (Writings of Thianwan) (Bangkok: Ongkan Naksuksa Mahawitthayalai Ramkhamhaeng, 1974); Walter F. Vella, “Thianwan of Siam: a man who fought giants”, Ronald D. Renard (ed.), *Anuson Walter Vella* (Chiang Mai: Walter F. Vella Fund, Phayap University, 1986), pp. 78 – 91.

<sup>15</sup> About Narin Phasit, see Sakdina Chatrakun na Ayutthaya, *Chiwit, naewkhit lae kantosu khong “narin klung” ru narin phasit: khon khwang lok* (Life, thought and struggle of “Narin Klung” or Narin Phasit: a person who blocked the world) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Matichon, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, “The Case of K. S. R. Kulap...”, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Vella translated the title of the journal as “The equal share journal”, or “Fair deal journal” (Vella,

Patriarch Wachirayan Warort, an intellectual who interpreted the *dhamma* in a contemporary way in the late nineteenth century, and his *sati paññā* or wisdom should have been expanded among some groups of monks. However, Buddhadasa continued, Thianwan had to shock monks by his words, because monks had not reached the level of Thianwan<sup>18</sup>. Narin Phasit attempted a more explicit reform movement of Buddhism along with his political proposals and campaigns. In 1912 Narin established the Association of Buddhists (*Phutthaborisat Samakhom*), and published a journal, *Sara tham* (Essential *dhamma*), in which he severely criticised the inappropriate behaviour of monks. Narin sought a shared place for the overcoming of suffering without excluding any Buddhists, ordained or non-ordained, male or female, and he also sought to restore the *bhikkhuni* ordination for Buddhist women, which had become extinct in the history of Theravāda Buddhism<sup>19</sup>. These progressive movements and speeches were led by lay Buddhist intellectuals who did not depend on the authority of the Sangha or on individual monks, because most monks did not wish to jeopardise their comfortable living or take up rigorous ascetic practice.

Although the good will and higher purposes of these lay intellectuals gained certain support, even from a few monks, their outspokenness against the existing religious order met with resistance. No matter how short the lives of these movements by non-elite lay intellectuals, dissatisfaction with the current religious order and a demand for true Buddhism continued to exist in Thai society into the early twentieth century. The number of less confronting lay Buddhists from elite circles who wanted to express Buddhism, which was not always apparent in daily custom, continued to grow. Buddhadasa indicated four influential intellectuals<sup>20</sup>: No. Mo. So., Khru Thep (also known as Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri), Prince Wan Waithayakon, and Luang Wichit Wathakan as using their acumen. They all presented their view in depth from a

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“Thianwan of Siam”, p. 81). One of Thianwan’s articles on Buddhism, “Rok khong sasana” (Illness of religion), was selected from *Tulawiphak phochanakit* (Vol. 4 No. 147, 16 April 1904) and reprinted in Buddhadasa’s journal, *Phutthasasana* (Buddhism) Vol. 20 (1952), pp. 23 –26. It criticised as ‘illness of religion’ any world-renunciates, either *bhikkhu*, *sāmanera*, *ta then* (old ascetics), *yai chi* (old female ascetics), *upāsaka* (lay men), or *upāsikā* (lay women), who did not understand the purpose of religion, but sought instead to benefit their social status as renunciates. Thianwan indicated that the medicine for such illness is in Buddhism.

<sup>18</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai* ..., p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> Sakdina, *Chiwit, naewkhit lae kantosu...*, pp. 10 – 13; 32 – 45.

<sup>20</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai*..., pp. 114 – 115.

critical point of view. Later on, the Buddhist Association of Thailand (established as *Phuttha-tham samakhon* in February 1934, but a few years later renamed *Phuttha samakhom haeng prathet thai*) and The Young Buddhist Association (*Yuwaphuttika samakhom*, established in January 1949) became significant meeting places for lay Buddhists seeking Buddhist teachings from both ordained and lay teachers. Buddhadasa was to become one of those teachers who responded to this new demand on the Buddhist establishment, which was unprecedented in the daily practice of lay Buddhist life.

### International Buddhist movements

The third important trend in the background of Buddhadasa was the international Buddhist movements, especially the activities of the Maha Bodhi Society. The Maha Bodhi Society was led by Anagarika Dharmapala<sup>21</sup> (1864 – 1933) from Sri Lanka, and it stimulated remarkable numbers of educated Westerners to convert to and study Buddhism. A significant forerunner of the Maha Bodhi Society was the Theosophical Society, which was founded in 1875 in New York by the American Colonel H. S. Olcott (1832 – 1907) and the Russian Madame Blavatsky (1831 – 1907). In 1880, on their arrival in Sri Lanka, which was then under British colonial rule, they founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society, and promoted Buddhist counterparts of holidays, the catechism, and Buddhist schools, as the Christian missionaries had been doing. Anagarika Dharmapala worked with the Theosophists from 1884 until the early 1900s<sup>22</sup>. In 1891, Dharmapala established the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta in order to establish Buddhist control of the place of the Buddha's enlightenment in India. Their activities to gain support for their aims raised the awareness of Buddhist identity in Asian countries, and built up an international network of Buddhists, comprised of both Asian and Western converts.

By the early twentieth century, inspired by the activities of the Maha Bodhi

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<sup>21</sup> About his life and the works of Dharmapala, see Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Return to righteousness: a collection of speeches, essays and letters of Anagarika Dharmapala* (Ceylon: Government Press, 1965).

<sup>22</sup> Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism transformed: religious change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 204 – 206; Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, "Anagarika Dharmapala: toward modernity through tradition in Ceylon", *Contributions to Asian Studies*, Vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 30 – 39.

Society, there were a number of Buddhist journals published in English and distributed all over the world. Among the English journals, those which reached Buddhadasa and his brother<sup>23</sup> in a southern province of Thailand included: *The Maha Bodhi*, published in India from January 1892 onwards; *Buddhist annual of Ceylon* published in Sri Lanka from 1920; *The British Buddhist* published by the British Maha Bodhi Society in England from 1926 onwards; and *The young East* published by the International Buddhist Society in Japan from 1925<sup>24</sup>. The articles in these journals had at least two characteristics. First, there were many stories and reports on Westerners' conversion to Buddhism, and on activities of Buddhist associations and groups in Europe, America, and Asian countries. Second, the Western and Asian authors of the journal articles often discussed major concepts in Buddhism, such as *nibbāna*, *anattā* and the four noble truths, as well as the histories of Buddhism in different local traditions. These Buddhist topics had to be explained philosophically and historically for the new converts who had a high level of education. Those philosophical concepts and the teachings of other traditions of Buddhism were not necessarily familiar to the Buddhists in Asia. Those Asian intellectuals who could read and understand these English journals were intellectually driven to inquire more and more into the philosophy and history of their own religion, to which educated Westerners converted, abandoning their native Christianity.

In fact, Thai intellectuals especially should have felt pride and a degree of responsibility, because their country, Siam, was given an honourable position in the international Buddhist movement in the early twentieth century. In the British Maha Bodhi Society<sup>25</sup>, where Anagarika Dharmapala and Mrs. Mary Foster were the Patrons,

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<sup>23</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 126 – 127.

<sup>24</sup> The volumes of these journals that I looked through were in the collections in the main library and the subsidiary library of the Faculty of Arts, the University of Kyoto. The following analyses of articles in these journals are based on the volumes that I looked at. They included: *The Maha Bodhi* Vol. 39 No. 1 (January 1931) – Vol. 41 No. 12 (December 1933); *Buddhist annual of Ceylon* Vol. 1 No. 1 (1920) – Vol. 4 No. 2 (1932); *The British Buddhist* Vol. 4 No. 1 (October 1929) – Vol. 8 Conference and Farewell Number (1934); and *The young East* Vol. 1 No. 3 (August 1925) – Vol. 10 No. 2 (1942).

<sup>25</sup> The British Maha Bodhi Society was established with the object of “the extension of the knowledge of the tenets of Buddhism, the establishment of a Vihara in London and the promotion of the cause of Buddhism in the West” (*The British Buddhist*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (October 1929), advertisement page for the British Maha Bodhi Society).

the Siamese Ministers in London, Prince Wan Waithayakon<sup>26</sup> and Prince Damras Damrong Devakula<sup>27</sup> after him, were the Presidents of the Society. After the deaths of Mrs. Foster in 1931 and of Dharmapala in April 1933, the position of the Society's Patron was passed on to the then king of Siam, or King Prajadhipok<sup>28</sup>. Why was the honorary position in the international Buddhist society, that originated in Sri Lanka and India, conferred on Siamese royalty? An article introducing Prince Wan related the prestigious position of Siam as follows:

Siam alone stands to-day as an ideal Buddhist State ruled by an enlightened Buddhist King whose government represents a unique combination of modern democratic methods with the principles of *Rajadharma* of bygone times<sup>29</sup>.

Among the colonised Asian Buddhist countries, Siam was the only country that maintained independence and rule by a Buddhist monarchy.

After it was demanded that King Prajadhipok accept the constitution and democratic government by the People's Party in June 1932, the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta sent a telegram to congratulate the King of Siam, who had accepted the demands "in a statesmanlike manner"<sup>30</sup>. The new constitution of Siam was fully published in the September 1932 issue of the journal, *The Maha Bodhi*<sup>31</sup>. The change in the Siamese regime to democracy under a Buddhist constitutional monarchy was viewed as an ideal model for Buddhists who sought independence from colonial rule. Although Siam was prestigious in the international community of Buddhist Asia, King Prajadhipok could not have been very happy to accept the congratulatory message for

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<sup>26</sup> Prince Wan was the President of the British Maha Bodhi Society from July 1929 until October 1930. From 1926 his appointment was as His Majesty's envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain. From 1928 he was also Siam's Permanent Delegate to the League of Nations and Siamese Minister in London. Prince Wan resigned from the Society's Presidency because of returning to Siam in October 1930 (The Editor, "Democratic Prince", *The British Buddhist*, Vol. 4 No. 8-9 (May-June 1930); "Yet another departure", *The British Buddhist*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (October 1930), p. 194). In *The British Buddhist*, the name of Prince Wan is romanised as 'Varnvaidya', but his name is more commonly written as 'Wan Waithayakon'.

<sup>27</sup> Prince Damras was President of the Society after 1932. In 1929 he had been appointed as His Siamese Majesty's envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James and Permanent Representative to the League of Nations, in addition to being Siamese Minister in London (*The British Buddhist*, Vol. 6 No. 11 (August 1933)).

<sup>28</sup> *The British Buddhist*, Vol. 7 No. 11 (August 1933), advertisement for the British Maha Bodhi Society.

<sup>29</sup> The Editor, "Democratic Prince".

<sup>30</sup> "Democratic Siam", *The Maha-Bodhi*, Vol. 40 No. 8 (August 1932), pp. 390 – 391. There was a reply from Chao Phya Mahadhasa, Principal Private Secretary of King Prajadhipok as well.

<sup>31</sup> "New Siamese Constitution: highest power belongs to people", *The Maha-Bodhi*, Vol. 40 No. 9 (September 1932), pp. 415 – 422.



the change. The position of Patron of the British Maha Bodhi Society suddenly became vacant in January-March 1934<sup>32</sup>. In fact, in January 1934 King Prajadhipok left Siam for dental work and eye surgery in Europe in despair at the dictatorial rule of the People's Party. Later in March 1935, the King abdicated the throne, and he died in May 1941.

Despite the fate of King Prajadhipok, Thai Buddhist intellectuals who read those English journals felt a sense of pride in the Buddhism of their home country that had attracted educated Westerners<sup>33</sup>. Because of a sense of responsibility deriving from this honour, together with the inspiring discussions of Buddhist philosophy in the international journals, Thai intellectuals determined to work for Buddhism in Thailand in order to present a good model for foreign Buddhists. The activity of Buddhadasa and his brother was also inspired by these international Buddhist movements<sup>34</sup>.

Buddhism in Thailand was gradually shifting away from local conventional practice. Buddhist education was systematised and spread among Thai people by the Sangha's pedagogical efforts. However, lay intellectuals were not satisfied with the existing state of monks' daily behaviour and ritualistic, incomprehensible sermons in Pali. In journals lay intellectuals expressed their own critical insights into the world and life, and some even examined alternatives for reform. International Buddhist movements gave more incentive to the study of doctrine and to the achievement of ideal Buddhism so that Thailand could contribute to the world. Buddhadasa's own thinking was developed in the wake of such transitions in Buddhism in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>32</sup> *The British Buddhist*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (January-March 1934).

<sup>33</sup> For example, when a Thai Buddhist journal, *Thammachaksu*, translated the news of some Buddhist mission and converts in Europe from the Maha Bodhi Journal, the editor of *Thammachaksu* wrote, "I hope that these news will bring a sense of pride to Buddhists everywhere" ("Thalaengkan buang ton" (Announcement in the beginning), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 23 No. 4 (January 2480/1937)).

<sup>34</sup> In Buddhadasa's journal, they wrote, "These days, some foreigners who are philosophers having high knowledge, study Buddhism and try to practice it for overcoming suffering by expecting the fruit of *lokuttara* happiness, because overcoming suffering is not possible in modern academic studies, such as science. However, they want to see a model of practice, or someone who has already done the practice. How should we, who are placed in the position of the owners of Buddhism in the present time, advise and help them, if we do not have any *bhikkhu* and *samanera* who does good and right practice, at an authentic level (*suppatipanno*), as examples to show?" "Thalaengkan khong khana thammathan" (An announcement from the Khana Thammathan), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (May 1933), p. 8.

## 2. Buddhadasa's family background

Chaiya, where Buddhadasa was born and spent his ascetic life, was an old historical city located at the west end of the projection into the Gulf of Thailand in the middle of the Malay peninsular. Mahāyāna Buddhist ruins were found in this area, and Chaiya is suspected as being one of the centres of the Sri Vijaya Empire from the eighth to the thirteenth century. Situated on the coast of the Malay peninsular, people from different ethnic and religious origins, including Chinese and Muslims, settled in this region. After the fall of the Sri Vijaya Empire, Muang Chaiya was a base of Ayutthaya instead of Nakhon Si Thammarat, to which the adjacent area belonged<sup>35</sup>.

Although Chaiya is known for Mahāyāna ruins, Theravada Buddhism had penetrated the area. When King Vajiravudh visited this area in 1915-16, he was impressed by the elegant manner of the people who upheld *sīla dhamma* (morality) and practised Buddhism. He gave a new name to the Monthon Chaiya, "Monthon Surat Thani" (The state of elegant people)<sup>36</sup>.

Most of the people in Chaiya were engaged in rice growing, and their high quality rice was traded at a good price in Bangkok, other cities in Southern Thailand and in Malaysia<sup>37</sup>. Chinese dwelt in the city marketplace for commerce, and over the generations new migrants kept coming from China to be assimilated by marrying local Thais and local Chinese descendants<sup>38</sup>. Some Muslim groups also migrated to Chaiya in the early Rattanakosin period<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Phuwa ratchakan changwat lae khana kromkan changwat surat thani (Provincial Governor and Administrative Council of Surat Thani) (ed.), *Changwat surat thani – kan chalong 25 phutthasattawat* (Surat Thani province – Celebration for the 25th Buddhist century) (Bangkok, 1957), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Changwat surat thani – kan chalong 25 phutthasattawat*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Prathum Chumphonphan (ed.), *Chaiya – surat thani* (Bangkok: Krung sayam kanphim, 1972, 1976), pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Buddhadasa's grandfather (father's father), Kho Yiko (許二哥?), was from China, and married a local third generation Chinese woman. Those Chinese who married Thais became assimilated, especially when they accepted Theravada Buddhist culture, including ordination and education at temples, as seen in the examples of Buddhadasa's father and brother. When local Chinese married newer migrants from China, they resumed Chinese ancestor worship at home, as in the case of Buddhadasa's cousin, Damri Phanit (a son of Buddhadasa's father's brother, A Siang) (Damri Phanit, interview, Chumphon, 6 March 1999). According to Buddhadasa, there were many Chinese descendants in the area, and on some of the Chinese was conferred the title, Phraya (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 14 – 15).

<sup>39</sup> Prathum, *Chaiya – surat thani*, pp. 4 – 5.

Phumriang, which is located six kilometres east from the present district office of Chaiya and only a kilometre from the seashore, was a city inhabited by Chinese traders, Thai Buddhist artisans weaving hats with *bai lan*, and the so-called white Muslim community engaged in fishing and famous for silk weaving<sup>40</sup>. Phumriang village used to be the centre of Muang Chaiya, and transport to and communication with the nation's capital, Bangkok, was not too difficult<sup>41</sup>. This was where Buddhadasa was born.

Buddhadasa's father, Siang Phanit (1873? – 1922), belonging to the second generation of Chinese migrants born in Phumriang. He dealt with rice, salt, and dried foods at his local shop, and was also a carpenter able to build a ship. Buddhadasa's mother, Khluan (1875 – 1948), was an ethnic Thai from Amphoe Tha Chang. Buddhadasa was born in 1906 as the first child of the family, and named Nguam. He had a younger brother, Yikoei<sup>42</sup> (who later named himself Thammathat (1909 – 2000)), and a younger sister, Kimsoi (1912? – ?).

Buddhadasa's father's family<sup>43</sup> originated in China, but had been assimilated into Thai culture by marrying into local families and accepting Thai Buddhist culture. Buddhadasa's grandfather, Kho Yiko (許二哥?<sup>44</sup>), was born in Taechew and used to live in Hokkien<sup>45</sup>. He came to Thailand as an artisan who made liquor by invitation for a concession (*sanpathan*) brewer in Chaiya. When King Rama VI ordered that all the Thai population have a family name, he was given the Thai family name, Phanit, which

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<sup>40</sup> Prathum, *Chaiya – surat thani*, pp. 73 – 75.

<sup>41</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 45 – 46, 697. In 1935 the regional centre moved from Phumriang to the Talat Chaiya area when the railway station was built and the *amphoe* office moved to be near the railway (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 697).

<sup>42</sup> According to Thammathat, his name, Yikoei, is a Chinese name, which means 'the second chicken' (二鷄). Thammathat did not learn Chinese from his father, but he studied it from textbooks by himself after he quit Chulalongkorn University and returned home in order to run the family business in place of Buddhadasa, who had been ordained at the age of twenty. Thammathat believed that the names, Nguam and Kimsoi, were both Chinese, but he was not sure what those names meant. He also considered himself as almost Chinese (Thammathat Phanit, interview, Chaiya, 4 March 1999).

<sup>43</sup> The following family history is based on the interview with Damri Phanit (1916 – ), the eldest son of A Siang.

<sup>44</sup> I am grateful for this suggestion of Chinese characters by Yang Tsung-Rong.

<sup>45</sup> Buddhadasa and Thammathat, who lost their father in their youth, believed that their grandfather was from Hokkien (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 5; Thammathat Phanit, interview with author, Chaiya, 4 March 1999). However, according to Damri Phanit, a cousin of theirs and a son of A Siang, their grandfather was actually born in Taechew, but he emphasised his background in Hokkien in order to marry Somchin, whose family originated in Hokkien.



means ‘trading’, because his was the only family doing business in the region<sup>46</sup>. Yiko married a third generation Chinese descendant, Somchin, and had three sons: Siang or Buddhadasa’s father, A Siang<sup>47</sup> (1879? – 1956), and An (? – ?). Somchin’s family seemed to have been already assimilated into local Thai culture, as her two cousins remained ordained as Theravada Buddhist monks throughout their lives. One of them, Luang Pho U, was the abbot of Wat Mai Phumriang, and both Buddhadasa’s father and uncle were ordained temporarily as novices.

Yiko died when Siang was thirteen and A Siang was seven, so the brothers were not able to learn Chinese from their father. Siang, who was skilled, especially at shipbuilding, could earn a good income to support himself, in addition to his retail business of rice and dry goods. While the youngest brother, An, was short-lived, the second brother, A Siang, was very influential for Buddhadasa and Thammathat. A Siang was ordained as a novice from the age of seven until he was twenty, and was then ordained as a monk until he was thirty-two. He then became the manager of a trading ship between Bangkok and Chumphon. A Siang was the abbot of Wat Mai Phumriang for four years, and he studied in Bangkok for the last three years of his ordination in 1909 – 1911. While in Bangkok, A Siang was in the position of *phra baidika*<sup>48</sup>, and a

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<sup>46</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Buddhadasa’s father’s name, Siang, and his uncle’s name, Siang, is different in script and tone in Thai, but it cannot be romanised in English. Buddhadasa’s father’s name is written in Thai, *so.-so* and *mai-tho*, and pronounced with the high tone; while his uncle’s name is written *so.-sua* and *mai-tho*, and pronounced with the falling tone. In this chapter, I will call Buddhadasa’s father ‘Siang’, and his uncle ‘A Siang’, which means ‘Uncle Siang’, as Buddhadasa and Thammathat called him.

<sup>48</sup> *Phra baidika* is the lowest of the *thananukrom* (honorary positions) that elder monks at the level of *phra rachakhana* (those monks on whom have been conferred ecclesiastical titles above the level of *phra khru*) can appoint. The higher the ecclesiastical title conferred, the more *thananukrom* monks a monk can appoint. For example, in 1912 when on future Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan (Charoen Yanawaro; 1872 – 1951) was conferred the ecclesiastical title, Phra Ratchamuni, he was allowed to appoint three *thananukrom* monks: *phra khru palat*, *phra khru samu*, and *phra khru baidika*. In 1926 when the title of Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan at the level of *somdet rachakhana* was conferred, he was allowed to appoint ten *thananukrom* monks: *phra khru plat samphiphatthana silachan yanawimon sakon khanisason utdon sangkhanayok pidok thamma rakkhit*, *phra khru winaithon*, *phra khru thammathon*, *phra khru methangkon* *phra khru khu suat*, *phra khru warawong* *phra khru khu suat*, *phra khru thammarat*, *phra khru thammarruchi*, *phra khru sangkhawichan*, *phra khru samu*, and *phra khru baidika*. In the rank of *thananukrom*, *baidika* is the lowest. See the headings, “*thananukrom*”, “*baidika*”, and “*rachakhana*” in *Photchananukrom chabap Ratchabandit Sathan Pho. So. 2525* (A Thai dictionary: the Royal Academy 1982 edition). Also see “Prawat chao phra khun somdet phra phutthakhosachan yanawara thera” (A history of Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan), Chao phra khun somdet phra phutthakhosachan yanawara thera, *Phra mongkhon wisesakatha* [a commemoration book distributed by his disciples at his cremation] (1952), pp. (1) – (28).

secretary of the abbot of his temple, Wat Pathumkhongkha<sup>49</sup>, which indicates that his capability was recognised by his elders.

This background of Buddhadasa's father's family suggests that their Chinese origin inclined them to engage in commerce, but in a cultural and intellectual sense, Buddhadasa's father's generation had already taken to Thai Buddhism rather than keeping Chinese customs<sup>50</sup>. Buddhism played a very important role for Chinese migrants in Thailand as a vehicle for assimilation into Thai culture. Other famous monks, such as Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu<sup>51</sup> and Suchiwo Bhikkhu (who later disrobed and took the name Suchip Punyanuphap)<sup>52</sup>, have similar Chinese backgrounds.

On the other hand, Buddhadasa's mother, Khluan, was completely ethnic Thai, and a daughter of Khun Sitthisan (Leng), who was the first Nai Amphoe of Amphoe Kanchanadit<sup>53</sup>, in the area of old Muang Chaiya. In other words, Buddhadasa's mother was from a local influential family. According to Thammathat and his eldest son, Siri Phanit<sup>54</sup>, their shop in Chaiya named *Ran chaiya phanit* (Chaiya Trading Shop of the Phanit Family) was owned by Buddhadasa's mother, and she had sufficient assets to lend money to people in town, although she did not own much land. She had a cousin, Kim'nguan, or Na Nguan (auntie Nguan for Buddhadasa and Thammathat), who became one of the wives of Phraya Patinanphumirak, the ninth president of the Chinese

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<sup>49</sup> Wat Pathumkhongkha was the temple where Buddhadasa stayed when he studied Pali on A Siang's advice. A Siang took a novice when he went to study in Bangkok. The novice, Maha Klan or later Phra Khru Chayaphiwat, was to become Buddhadasa's teacher of Pali (Damri Phanit, interview). A Siang's connections and advice were important for the path of the young monk, Buddhadasa.

<sup>50</sup> Buddhadasa's father did not speak Chinese except for a few words, but he studied Thai at the temple when he was a temple boy. In Buddhadasa's house, his father celebrated Chinese New Year (*trut chin*) and the autumn Chinese festival (*sat chin*), but the Chinese holidays were not celebrated after his father died when Buddhadasa was sixteen. His uncle, A Siang, never performed Chinese ancestor worship at home. According to Damri, A Siang's son, A Siang could not speak Chinese, but did speak some English for his business, and read Pali fluently because of his long monastic education. A Siang was even capable of writing *bailan*. Both Buddhadasa's father and uncle were talented in making Thai poems (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p.15, 43; Damri, interview). These facts indicate that Thai cultural elements were stronger than the influence of Chinese culture even in Buddhadasa's father's generation.

<sup>51</sup> Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview, Chonburi, 29 April 1999.

<sup>52</sup> Suchip Punyanuphap, interview, Bangkok, 17 August 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Thammathat, interview. According to Buddhadasa in his interview with Phra Pracha, his mother was born in Tha Chang, another *amphoe* in the Chaiya region, and her mother and grandparents were from Tha Chang (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 6). However, Thammathat said that their mother's father worked as the first Nai Amphoe Kanchanadit, and then the family moved to Amphoe Tha Chang.

<sup>54</sup> Thammathat, interview; Siri Phanit, interview, Chaiya, 4 March 1999.

Chamber of Commerce and father of Khun Setthaphakdi, an important prosperous Chinese merchant from the Surat Thani region<sup>55</sup>. Although Buddhadasa's mother was never extravagant, but rather thrifty in nature, their family fortune assisted the non-profit religious propagation activities of Buddhadasa and Thammathat.

In Chaiya, Buddhadasa's family was quite wealthy and well-respected, (in Thai, *thana di*), though not the wealthiest in the town of Phumriang<sup>56</sup>. Their local status is suggested by the marriage partners of Thammathat and the youngest sister, Kimsoi, who were both from local influential families. Thammathat's wife was a granddaughter of the Siyaphai family, the old Chao Muang Chaiya. Kimsoi married into the Hemakun family, which is a very rich merchant family in Surat Thani. Just as the Phanit family, in the early twentieth century it was also amongst the provincial celebrities, or upper middle commoners, who produced persons with high intellectual motives seeking to acquire knowledge through the print media and to express their ideas by their own writings.

Another characteristic of some members of Buddhadasa's family was their delight in seeking new knowledge<sup>57</sup>. His influential former monk uncle, A Siang, had Buddhism as his intellectual foundation. He was even able to read palm leaf writings in Pali fluently, and even able to write them. A Siang always found new books in Bangkok, including the journals of Thianwan and K. S. R. Kulap to which he subscribed, and he sent them to his elder brother, Buddhadasa's father. Through those collections of his father and uncle, Buddhadasa also had a chance to read the works of these distinctive intellectuals when A Siang succeeded to his father's business after his father's death<sup>58</sup>. After disrobing, he developed his concerns in the secular world on top of his Buddhist

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<sup>55</sup> Eiji Murashima, *Kanmuang chin sayam* (Politics of the Chinese in Siam) (Bangkok: Sathaban esia suksa, Chulalongkon mahawithayalai, 1996), p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> Although Buddhadasa said that his family did not have the same status or wealth as Chao Muang or Chinese merchants (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 6), Thammathat and other members of Phanit Family agreed that they were in the higher level, better off than ordinary local farmers or shop owners (Thammathat, interview; Siri, interview; Metta Phanit, the youngest son of Thammathat, interview, Chaiya, 4 March 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Some of the members of the Phanit family did well in their education. For example, among the five children of Thammathat, one studied abroad in Britain and the United States, two graduated from Chulalongkorn University, the other two also graduated from college and university. In A Siang's family, one of the most accomplished children is Dr. Wichan Phanit, or a grandson of A Siang and the eldest son of Damri, who is currently the Director of the Research Funding Council (*phu amnuai kan samnangkan kongthun sanap sanun kanwichai*).

<sup>58</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 16, 43.

education. A Siang became a clerk of a company that dealt with swallow nests, one of the special products of Southern Thailand. He married a daughter of his company manager, who trusted him and recognised his ability, and he settled in Chumphon. The eldest son of A Siang remembers that A Siang had a good collection of books at home, including books on Buddhism, law, and medicine, some of which were printed by Dr. Bradley, who first introduced the printing press into Thailand<sup>59</sup>. A Siang should be understood as a provincial businessman of Chinese descent, and as an intellectual with his Buddhist cultivation and new secular knowledge. An uncle such as A Siang was the most influential intellectual for the brothers, Buddhadasa and Thammathat, who lost their father at the age of sixteen and thirteen respectively.

The brothers, Buddhadasa and Thammathat, had the same personality trait as their uncle, seeking after new knowledge. Their enthusiasm for intellectual inquiry and excitement in discussion were the very sources of so many of their later activities in Buddhism. Based on their rather advanced educational careers, compared to the standard of their contemporaries, they investigated the specialised areas of Buddhism.

One thing that Buddhadasa inherited from his father and uncle more than Thammathat was the ability to write Thai poems<sup>60</sup>. This capability contributed to the popularity of his preaching. Intellectuality had to be supported by a good rhetorical medium in order to be disseminated more widely. Buddhadasa's works became far more popular than Thammathat's, not only because of his ordained status, but also because of his powers of expression.

### 3. The lives of Buddhadasa and Thammathat up to the establishment of Suan Mokkh

Although Buddhadasa<sup>61</sup> became more famous and respected as a monk, the development of his thoughts and activities was always supported by the lay intellectual partnership of his brother, Thammathat<sup>62</sup>. They both became interested in Buddhism

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<sup>59</sup> Damri, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Arun Wetchasuan, interview, Bangkok, 2 March 1999.

<sup>61</sup> Many books on Buddhadasa's life have been published, but I refer to Phra Pracha, *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya*. Since Buddhadasa himself talked about his experiences and opinions in it, *Lao wai...* is in all likelihood the most reliable work to be examined for Buddhadasa's life and works.

<sup>62</sup> For Thammathat's life, I have referred mainly to three sources: interview with Thammathat; "Song si phra phutthasasana, song phu-sathapana mokkhaphalaram – khana thammathan" (Two



through separate, but similar, channels and occasions.

The age difference of Buddhadasa (1906 – 1993) and Thammathat (1909 – 2000) was two years by the Thai calendar<sup>63</sup>, but in terms of education, Thammathat went to school only a year ahead of his elder brother, Buddhadasa. At the age of eight, Buddhadasa started his primary education, reading and writing Thai, as a temple boy (*dek wat*) in his family temple, Wat Mai Phumriang. It seems that his interest in Buddhism had not been noticed when he was a temple boy, since he expressed more interest in traditional medicine that the monks were practising<sup>64</sup>. Buddhadasa started grade one in formal primary school at the age of eleven, attended until grade three, and moved on to secondary school<sup>65</sup>. On the other hand, Thammathat started from formal primary education at the age of seven, finished four years in primary school, and continued his studies in secondary school. When their father died in 1922, Buddhadasa was in the third year, and Thammathat in the fourth year of secondary school. The brothers might have become intellectually mature together regardless of the three-year age difference between them.

On the death of their father, the elder brother Buddhadasa became the manager of his mother's shop in Phumriang, while Thammathat was ordained as a novice with the merit to be dedicated to their late father. They started to belong to different worlds,

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outstanding contributors to Buddhism, two founders of [Suan] Mokkh Phalaram – Khana Thammathan), a leaflet on the lives and works of Buddhadasa and Thammathat, which was published by the Khana Thammathan; and an M.A. thesis on Thammathat: Wira Phaengyang, “Suksa chiwaprawat lae phonngan khong thammathat phanit” (A Study on the life history and works of Thammathat Phanit), M.A. thesis, Mahawithayalai sinakharin wirot phak tai, 1996). Thammathat fell ill on 21 November 1999 because of bleeding in the oesophagus, but just as Buddhadasa had wished, his family did not take him to a hospital for modern medical treatment to prolong his life. His strength gradually decreased, and he finally breathed his last on 18 February 2000 (“Ramluk khun khru thammathat phanit, phu chak pai” (A remembrance of the teacher, Thammathat Phanit, who departed from us), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 68 No. 2 (May, June, July 2000), p. 103). See also *Phutthasasana (chabap phiset: sadudi khru thammathat phanit)* (Special issue: tribute to the teacher, Thammathat Phanit), Vol. 68 No. 3 (August, September, October 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Up until December 1940, or 2483 Buddhist Era, the Thai calendar started its year from April and ended in March. According to the Thai calendar, Buddhadasa was born in May 2449 (1906), and Thammathat was born in March 2451 (1909), so their age difference is only two years, but in the common calendar, it is three.

<sup>64</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 22 – 29.

<sup>65</sup> According to a report of the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1926-27, those who continue studying at secondary school moved on to the first grade in secondary school from the third grade in primary school, instead of completing the fifth grade in primary school (Ministry of Public Instruction, *Report on the work of the Ministry of Public Instruction of the Siamese Government B.E. 2469 (1926-27)* (Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1931)). I am grateful for Prof. Eiji Murashima's advice on this valuable data.

but both found an interest in Buddhism in their respective societies. Although Buddhadasa was only sixteen when his father died, he took full responsibility for the shop (which dealt with daily commodities, such as rice, dried foods, oils, and some books), from buying and selling to delivering goods to customers. Buddhadasa said that he enjoyed engaging in this business<sup>66</sup>. The most significant experience for Buddhadasa during this time was the discussion of the *dhamma* in his shop front with local customers. An old man who worked at the provincial office liked to talk about the *dhamma*, and people raised questions of the *dhamma* when this old man appeared. The man escaped from his work for an hour to talk about the *dhamma* at Buddhadasa's shop. Most of these *dhamma* discussion members were old, while Buddhadasa was still a young boy. He had to prepare for these discussions by means of the *nak tham* textbooks and other books on Buddhism such as those of Thianwan and K. S. R. Kulap that his father had collected at home. As a result of his study, Buddhadasa was confident that his explanations were more correct than other people's whose opinions came only from speculation. In 1925, when Buddhadasa was nineteen, a *nak tham* school opened in Wat Photharam, Phumriang, and everyone was invigorated and excited to talk about the *dhamma*<sup>67</sup>. This seems to be the beginning of Buddhadasa's interests in the *dhamma* and Buddhism, as a lay Buddhist shopkeeper in a provincial town, before ordination<sup>68</sup>.

While Buddhadasa was running the shop, Thammathat continued his education in Surat Thani as a novice, and found interest in Buddhism in his own circle. After several months of his noviciate at Wat Mai Phumriang, Thammathat moved to Wat Traithammaram in Surat Thani and resumed his study in high school. In the temple in Surat, Thammathat met a novice friend who wrote and circulated within the temple a newsletter on Buddhism. Thammathat liked the *nangsuphim thiang* or argumentative newspaper, to which he also contributed. Thammathat continued pursuing Buddhism

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<sup>66</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 41 – 42.

<sup>68</sup> According to Thammathat, the brothers never talked about Buddhism in their childhood. Thammathat said that he was not able to explain why Buddhadasa became interested in Buddhism, but assumed it was because of Buddhadasa's experience as a temple boy because the temple abbot was capable in preaching the *dhamma* (Thammathat, interview). However, Buddhadasa did not mention the *dhamma* he studied when he talked about his experience as a temple boy in the interview with Phra Pracha. It was rather during the time when Thammathat was away from home for his education, and Buddhadasa was running his shop that Buddhadasa started to be interested in Buddhist *dhamma*.

after disrobing, even during his further study in Suan Kulap High School in Bangkok for grades seven and eight, and during the first year in Chulalongkorn University in the Faculty of Arts and Science in the preparatory course for Medical School. Thammathat became fluent in reading English through lessons by Western teachers when he was in the elite high school and university. He came across Buddhist journals in English, such as *The young East* and *The Maha Bodhi* in the library of Chulalongkorn University, and he discovered Thai books and journals on Buddhism, which were published in Bangkok, including *Suksa thammada* (ordinary education)<sup>69</sup>. Thammathat cultivated his interests through lay Buddhist movements both in foreign countries and in Bangkok until he left school to take over the family business in place of his then ordained brother.

The education of Buddhadasa and Thammathat should be understood in their contemporary context. Buddhadasa had to stop his formal education in the third year in secondary school in order to run the family's shop after his father's death. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Public Instruction, in the year 1926 in all of Thailand, there were only 2,844 students who enrolled in the third year in secondary school, among whom 1,938 passed the final exam<sup>70</sup>. Thammathat, after completing the sixth grade in secondary school in Surat Thani, continued his education to grade seven and eight in order to matriculate, he was among the very elite in the country. According to the same statistics in the whole of Thailand, there were only 305 students who enrolled in the eighth grade in secondary school, and among them 72 passed the graduation exam<sup>71</sup>. Although Thammathat had to quit his education because of his brother's ordination, he was one of the few selected students of his time. Their high educational accomplishment should not be evaluated by the standards of the late twentieth century.

In 1926, at the age of twenty, which fulfils the age qualification for full ordination to become a monk, Buddhadasa became a monk, Phra Nguam Inthapanyo, at his family temple, Wat Mai Phumriang, which belongs to the Mahanikai Order. Buddhadasa and his family followed the Thai tradition for Buddhist males to be ordained for three months before getting married, but he never disrobed<sup>72</sup>. For the first

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<sup>69</sup> Thammathat, interview.

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Public Instruction, *Report on the work of the Ministry of Public Instruction*.

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Public Instruction, *Report on the work of the Ministry of Public Instruction*.

<sup>72</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 51 – 52.

two years as a monk at Wat Mai Phumriang, he voluntarily gave sermons<sup>73</sup> and wrote an internally circulated newspaper<sup>74</sup>. These were the most basic methods for holding *dhamma* discussions in a small part of the Buddhist public sphere, which existed in many different localities, as Thammathat had experienced in Surat Thani.

Buddhadasa's attitude to the study of Buddhism became serious after he experienced the monastic life in Bangkok in his third year of ordination in 1928. After passing the third and second grades of *nak tham* examinations in Phumriang, Buddhadasa was persuaded by A Siang to study in Bangkok at Wat Pathumkhongkha, the temple where A Siang used to be *phra baidika*. Buddhadasa was disappointed with the *vinaya* offences of Bangkok monks, whom he once thought of as excellent and as *arahant*. After a few months stay in Bangkok, Buddhadasa felt like disrobing because he was about to become the same as other monks. Buddhadasa returned home in Phumriang, but it was an inappropriate time for disrobing. So he read books by himself, including the works of lay intellectuals and foreign journals that Thammathat gave him, and he passed the first grade *nak tham* at the end of the rains retreat<sup>75</sup>. Because the study was so much fun, he forgot about disrobing.

In 1930 during his fifth year of ordination, after his experience as a teacher at a *nak tham* school that his wealthy aunt, Nguan Setthaphakdi founded at Wat Phra Boromathat Chaiya<sup>76</sup>, Buddhadasa decided to study Pali in Bangkok in order to investigate Buddhism more deeply. This time, Buddhadasa ignored whatever other Bangkok monks did. He had private Pali lessons with Phra Khru Chayaphiwat (Klan), who was a disciple of A Siang while he was in robes, he studied English using

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<sup>73</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 70 – 71.

<sup>74</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 74 – 76.

<sup>75</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 78 – 87.

<sup>76</sup> Kimnguan, or Nguan for short, was one of the wives of Phraya Patinanphumirak, a very wealthy Chinese merchant in Surat Thani. She donated 5,000 baht for building the *nak tham* school in the historic Sri Vijaya temple for the merit of her dead parents. Buddhadasa was already famous in the region for his ability to explain the *dhamma* in his sermons and for serious study of Buddhism, so his aunt recruited Buddhadasa to be a teacher in her newly opened school. Buddhadasa taught two classes of students, and all students passed the third and second grade of *nak tham* examinations except one whose answer sheet was lost by the examiners. This result must be far better than the old *nak tham* school in Phumriang. His aunt, Nguan, offered a reward for Buddhadasa's teaching work, a set of one *pitaka* of the three. Buddhadasa instead requested a Thai typewriter, which he was to use throughout his life, because he could borrow and read *Tipitaka* volumes in the temple (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 89 – 90).

Linguaphone records, and played with cameras and typewriters by himself<sup>77</sup>. Buddhadasa passed the most basic, third level of the Pali examination on the *Dhammapada* in 1930 without much difficulty, but he felt tired studying the fourth level, which studied a very short section of the *Tipiṭaka*, the *Maṅgala sutta*, and its extensive commentary, *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, on which the teachers based their explanations. Buddhadasa still expected to pass the fourth level, though he found it rather difficult to agree with the teachers and other students<sup>78</sup>. After he failed the fourth level of Pali examination at the end of 1931, he determined to return home in Chaiya in order to start to do what he believed to be true. In May 1932, Buddhadasa became secluded in an abandoned temple, which was renovated as his place of *dhamma* practice, Suan Mokkhphalaram.

Although Buddhadasa's formal ecclesiastical education ceased at the third level of the Pali examination, this did not mean that his scriptural studies remained at a basic level. Even before his study of Pali in Bangkok, his philosophical understanding of Buddhism was advanced. The young Buddhadasa's intellectual maturity was demonstrated in his sermon in 1930, *Phra phutthasasana chan phuthuchon* (Buddhism at the level of unenlightened ordinary people), which was published and distributed by his aunt, Kim'nguan Setthapakdi to inaugurate the opening of her new *nak tham* school where Buddhadasa taught for a year. It was not only at a time when Buddhist philosophy was not yet commonly known amongst monks or well explained in books, but the sermon very logically explained key Buddhist concepts, and is perhaps much more difficult to read than his later popular sermons<sup>79</sup>. Furthermore, Buddhadasa studied Pali by himself after he abandoned the ecclesiastical examinations. Buddhadasa's early works, which he translated and edited from Pali scriptures, such as *Phutthaprawat chak phra ot* (The life of the Buddha in his own words), were highly respected even by *pariyatti* monks in Mahamakut Buddhist University, where it was chosen as a sub-textbook<sup>80</sup>. Buddhadasa was respected as a Pali *pariyatti* scholar, and his academic standard should not be judged from the level of his formal education.

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<sup>77</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 94 – 103, 111 – 114.

<sup>78</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 110 – 111.

<sup>79</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Phra phutthasasana chan phuthuchon* (Bangkok: Klum sukka lae patibat tham, reprint edition).

<sup>80</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 300.

While Buddhadasa pursued his study of Buddhism into the Pali scriptures as a monk, his lay brother Thammathat investigated Buddhism in foreign Buddhist journals in English. After his return home from Chulalongkorn University, Thammathat met Sirisena, a Sinhalese traveller staying in Chaiya, and learnt specifically about the work of Anagarika Dharmapala and the Maha Bodhi Society. Thammathat became more interested in Buddhist movements around the world and he started subscribing to Buddhist journals in English such as *Maha Bodhi*, *The British Buddhist*, and *Buddhist Annual of Ceylon*. Thammathat gave Buddhadasa those journals to read, but Buddhadasa said that he did not understand them very well<sup>81</sup>. Although Buddhadasa studied English by himself, it seems that it was not until the mid-1940s that he was able to translate English works. English literature was Thammathat's specialised field of knowledge because of his formal training. The brothers exchanged views and respected each other's knowledge. Buddhadasa's Pali and Thammathat's English complemented each other<sup>82</sup>.

Thammathat started translating some of the English articles for publication in Thai newspapers, such as *Sri krung*, *Deli me* (Daily Mail), and *Thai khasem*, and after 1929 he started using his penname "Thammathat" (in Pali, Dhammadāsa), which means a slave of the *dhmma*, instead of his given name, Yikoei<sup>83</sup>. Buddhadasa imitated the penname of his brother and named himself, "Phutthathat" in Thai or "Buddhadasa" in Pali, which means a slave of the Buddha. Using that name, he had contributed some articles of religious criticism to the daily newspaper, *Krunthep deli me* (Bangkok Daily Mail)<sup>84</sup>, before his establishment of Suan Mokkh. Moreover, through introductions by Thammathat, who had corresponded with them, Buddhadasa met such persons in the news as Narin Phasit (1874 – 1950)<sup>85</sup> and Phra Lokanatha (1897 – 1966)<sup>86</sup>, an Italian

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<sup>81</sup> Thammathat, interview; Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 87 – 88, 126 – 127.

<sup>82</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 204.

<sup>83</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 127; "Bannathikan thalaeng" (Editor's note), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 3 (November 1933), p. 106.

<sup>84</sup> Buddhadasa said that the *Krunthep deli me* did not put his penname, Phutthathat, with his article (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 156). The pseudonym, Phutthathat or Buddhadasa, became more known to people through his articles in the journal, *Phutthasasana*, which was launched May 1933.

<sup>85</sup> Narin visited Buddhadasa at his temple in Bangkok, Wat Pathumkhongkha, on advice from Thammathat. The group of Thammathat agreed with Narin because Narin wanted monks to be strict, instead of being superstitious as they commonly behaved. Thammathat seemed to believe that his brother, Buddhadasa, was a strict monk who was critical of superstitions so that both Narin and Buddhadasa should agree with and help each other. However, Buddhadasa did not agree with Narin

*bhikkhu* whose project of a world Buddhist mission created a sensation in Thailand from 1933 to 1934. Thammathat's interest in contemporary Buddhist movements seems to have been a significant stimuli for Buddhadasa.

However, as a monk, Buddhadasa was more involved in the monastic world than Thammathat. Those books that impressed Buddhadasa and from which he received most influence were not only those of lay Buddhist thinkers, but also those of the Sangha's doctrinally most influential figure, Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot. Buddhadasa in fact collected all the works by Wachirayan by himself, because the collection of all his works was not then yet published. Buddhadasa said that he liked Wachirayan's style of writings, which

... had the principles of a *nak prat* (philosopher, a person with wisdom). [We] can consider that he was a pioneer of modern/up-to-date interpretation of the *dhamma* (*phu bukboek kan tikhwam thamma hai than samai*). [He] interpreted miracles comprehensively<sup>87</sup>.

Buddhadasa considered that the reforms undertaken by Wachirayan were important progress. However, the problem of the Sangha being outdated were rather to be seen in conservative elder monks who did not see any necessity to catch up with the changing world. He said,

The period of Somdet Phra Maha Samana Chao [i.e., Wachirayan] can be considered as a certain level of pioneering and moving toward quite a few further changes. However, there are few who continue it, who are as smart as him, or as capable as him. [Thus, the reform] did not go beyond inflexible rules, as far as he

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(Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 121 – 122).

<sup>86</sup> Buddhadasa first went to meet Phra Lokanatha accompanied by Sanya Dhammasakdi, one of Lokanatha's supporters in Thailand (see more details in p. 60). After the unsuccessful first tour and the decline in Lokanatha's popularity, Thammathat asked Buddhadasa to visit the house of Phra Aphaiwong, which Phra Lokanatha announced in *The Maha Bodhi* journal as a place he stayed in Bangkok. However, no one seemed to be living in the house, and Buddhadasa did not meet Phra Lokanatha (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 129 – 130). A biography of Lokanatha and his mission are reported in: Karuna Kusulasai, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai* (Life without choice) (Bangkok: Mae kham phang, 1986), pp. 69 – 93, 240 – 242, 260 – 261; Phra Maha Chanya Sutthiyano, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha* (The life and work of Ven. Panyanantha) (Bangkok: Borisat Amarin, 1991), pp. 63 – 88. According to Karuna, who was one of the novices involved in the tour, Lokanatha, or Salvatore Cioffi before his ordination, was born in Italy and was raised a Roman Catholic. He completed a bachelor's degree in science at Columbia University in the United States, and in 1925 he was ordained as a Buddhist monk in Burma. In the journal, *Maha Bodhi* in January 1933 (2435 Buddhist Era), he advertised three Buddhist world missions, by a Burmese group in 1933, by a Thai and Cambodian group in 1934, and by a Sinhalese group in 1935 (this was translated and reported as "Phiksu doen pai phae sasana tang prathet" (A monk who goes to propagate Buddhism in foreign countries), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (November 1933), pp. 64 – 73). Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*, reprinted newspaper and journal articles about Lokanatha's mission in: Vol. 1 No. 2, 3, 4; Vol. 2 No. 1, 2, 3, 4; Vol. 3 No. 1+2, 3; Vol. 4 No. 1; Vol. 5 No. 2, 3, 4; Vol. 6 No. 1; and Vol. 7 No. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 112 – 113.

had established [them]. [People] are not brave enough to touch or change even a word. Problems exist like this in the circle of religion<sup>88</sup>.

In this critical view of conservative monks, Buddhadasa implied that his work was to make further progress based on the achievement of Wachirayan's reform.

When he looked at the harsh attacks on corrupt monks made by notable lay Buddhist activists, Buddhadasa was rather sceptical, as were the elder monks in the Sangha and conservative circles<sup>89</sup>. For example, Thammathat and some other lay members of the Khana Thammathan supported Narin's critical campaign against the existing state of Buddhist practice and favoured his plan to revive *bhikkhuni* ordination. On the other hand, Buddhadasa considered Narin as "half crazy, half intoxicated" (*khrung ba, khrung mao*), and as "seeking fame by complimenting the four Buddhist groups"<sup>90</sup>, which in the Thai Theravāda tradition had lost *bhikkhuni* out of the *bhikkhu* (ordained men), *bhikkhuni* (ordained women), *upāsaka* (laymen), and *upāsikā* (laywomen).

Also in the case of Phra Lokanatha, Buddhadasa was not as enthusiastic as Thammathat. Thammathat was very excited with the news of Lokanatha's project of a Buddhist world missionary tour, which had been advertised in *The Maha Bodhi* journal and been translated and collected along with related news and articles about Lokanatha in both English and Thai journals<sup>91</sup>. On the other hand, Buddhadasa did not agree to join in Lokanatha's world *dhamma* mission to Bodhgaya, Jerusalem, and Rome. When Lokanatha was still at the peak of his popularity, Buddhadasa wrote an article, "Thammai mai pai kap Phra Lokkanat" (Why I did not go with Lokanatha) under another pseudonym "Parien dek" (A boy with the Pali qualification) in a daily

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<sup>88</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 123 – 124.

<sup>89</sup> Aside from the case of Narin that I examine in the text, Buddhadasa's view on K. S. R. Kulap was also rather closer to the royalist elite who discredited Kulap. When Buddhadasa learnt of some works of Kulap, and heard a story from his uncle, A Sing, who actually had had a chance to talk with Kulap, Buddhadasa agreed that Kulap's works enabled people in the provinces to gain a wider knowledge, and were in opposition to the establishment circle. However, Buddhadasa concluded that Kulap was boasting of his achievement against the king, and wanted to become famous so that he insisted unverified information was in fact true (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 43).

<sup>90</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 121.

<sup>91</sup> Not only Thammathat, but many Thai intellectual Buddhists were excited by Lokanatha. The founders of the Buddhist Association of Thailand, such as Phra Ratchathamnithet and Sanya Dhammasakdi, supported the campaign of Lokanatha who wanted to take Thai monks and novices on the tour. Panyanantha Bhikkhu and Bunchuan Khemaphirat, who later became Buddhadasa's co-workers of *dhamma* propagation, also accompanied Lokanatha to Burma and India. However, Buddhadasa did not agree to go on the world tour with Lokanatha, and was rather sceptical about the popularity of Lokanatha (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 129 – 130).



newspaper, *Prachathipatai* (24 November 1933)<sup>92</sup>. Among the four reasons that Buddhadasa pointed out for not going with Lokanatha, the first one seems to be the most important to examine<sup>93</sup>. Buddhadasa wrote that he was only engaged in *pariyatti dhamma* or scriptural studies, but not much with *samana dhamma* or ascetic practice. It would be difficult to have solitude, which is appropriate and necessary for practising *samana dhamma*, during a big campaign for propagation. Unlike his lay brother who was excited by the propagation of the Buddhist *dhamma* as something to be developed, Buddhadasa, a monk, was more concerned with pursuing his own path to *arahantship* that the Buddha exemplified for his disciples.

For similar reasons, Buddhadasa did not completely believe in or agree with the mission of Anagarika Dharmapala which Thammathat respected as a model for his activities. Although Thammathat extensively translated and introduced Dharmapala's writings and activities, Buddhadasa considered that some of his works were good, but some others were reckless (*ba bin*). In Buddhadasa's view, the academic standard of Dharmapala did not reach the ultimate level of the *dhamma*, and also his spirituality was not perfect. Buddhadasa indicated that Dharmapala still believed in rebirth as ordinary, uneducated people do, and he struck the head of a Westerner who entered a temple *vihāra* without taking off his shoes. Buddhadasa criticised this attitude of Dharmapala as being more worldly than religious oriented<sup>94</sup>. In fact, Dharmapala did not receive a good response from the Thai elite and wealthy classes when he came to Thailand for fund-raising. He wanted to purchase the historical sites of Buddhism in India from the landowners. Prince Damrong's analysis was that because Dharmapala's attitude was hateful and critical of the destruction of Buddhism in India for the past seven hundred

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<sup>92</sup> This article was also reprinted in his journal, *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (May 1934), pp. 210 – 212.

<sup>93</sup> The second of the four points that Buddhadasa indicated was that it was difficult to practise the *dhamma* on a world tour if one was attracted by the catchy advertisement of travelling the world. The third was that Phra Lokanatha was not trustworthy enough, since he named himself, Lokanatha, which can really only indicate the Buddha. The fourth was similar to the third, Lokanatha claimed in a Visakha conference that he would not have taught other people if he was not yet in one of the streams of *arahantship*. That means that Lokanatha, who had already started preaching, had accomplished *arahantship*, but Buddhadasa could not believe in his claim (“Parian dek”, “Thammai mai pai kap Phra Lokkanat”, pp. 211 – 212).

<sup>94</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 128 – 129. Buddhadasa's critical comment on Dharmapala's belief in rebirth referred to Dharmapala's famous words at his death, “Let me be reborn... I would like to be born again twenty-five times to spread Lord Buddha's Dhamma” (Ananda Guruge (ed.), *Return to Righteousness*, p. xliii).

years, Thai people did not feel that they would receive merit by this Buddhist restoration, which instead might turn out to be merely revenge based on *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong views)<sup>95</sup>. Buddhadasa's attitude was closer to the common sense of the Thai elite rather than one favouring joining in protest and reformist campaigns, the argumentative side of things which his brother liked.

The brothers both came to have strong interests in Buddhism in their respective circles, but their ways of looking at things were not always the same, partly due to their differences in educational backgrounds (which gave them access to different languages), and also in their ordination status. However, their different ordained status and roles were necessary for the development of their activities: Suan Mokkh for *dhamma* practice, and the Khana Thammathan (*dhamma-dāna* group) for material and propagation support, both of these co-operating to produce the journal, *Phutthasasana* (Buddhism).

#### 4. The activities of Suan Mokkh and the Khana Thammathan

Buddhadasa gave up his studies in Bangkok and returned to Phumriang in March 1932. Thammathat's group found and renovated an abandoned temple, Wat Traphangchik, for the solitude of Buddhadasa's ascetic practice. On 12 May 1932, Buddhadasa entered the temple for *vipassanā* meditation, and named it Suan Mokkh Phalaram, which means "a place having power for liberation"<sup>96</sup>. In July 1932, the Khana Thammathan came together as a group, which consisted of ordinary town commoners of Chinese descent<sup>97</sup>. They opened a room for listening to monks' preach-

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<sup>95</sup> Damrong first met Dharmapala when he was visiting India in 1891. Dharmapala explained his plan of restoring Buddhism in India by making the historical site of Buddhism in Bodhgaya a centre for propagating the *dhamma*. However, the Hindu landowner of the Bodhgaya site did not sell the land to Dharmapala so Dharmapala sought assistance from Prince Damrong to talk to the governor-general of India to pressure the owner. Damrong declined his co-operation, first because he was a guest of the government of India, and unable to intervene in politics. Second, Damrong indicated that propagation of the *dhamma*, which has primary importance over land ownership, can be started from anywhere, so why did they have to start with strife over land. Dharmapala seemed to be unhappy with Damrong's response and never sought contact to him (Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Ratchanuphap, *Nithan borankhadi* (Ancient stories) (Published as a cremation volume for Nang Nian Laphanukrom, 1968), pp. 57 – 58).

<sup>96</sup> Buddhadasa found in the premises of the abandoned temple that there were many trees of *mok* and *phla*. By those names of the trees, he named the temple Suan Mokkh Phalaram, "a garden of *mok* and *phla* trees", which can also mean "a place having a power for liberation (Pali: *mokkha*)" (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 155 – 156).

<sup>97</sup> Thammathat, interview.

ing. Coincidentally in the same year on 24 June, the so-called Constitutional Revolution was made by the People's Party, which demanded King Prajadhipok sign the Constitution that claimed sovereignty for the people. Buddhadasa commented on this coincidence as follows:

Therefore, the calendar of Suan Mokkh is easiest to remember in a short phrase: "the same year of the change of political system". We consider this point as a sign of a new change in order to make things better to the utmost of our abilities<sup>98</sup>.

Even though Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan had nothing to do with this political change in Bangkok, their activities stood for a popular expression and exchange of opinions outside elite, royalist circles.

In order to start their Buddhist activities, Buddhadasa and Thammathat asked their mother for seed money. In June 1932, after the establishment of Suan Mokkh, their mother agreed to draw up a legal will to make *thun ton takun phanit* (The foundation fund of the Phanit family) using her savings of 6,368 baht<sup>99</sup>. This amount, called in their Thai dialect, *ngoen phuan phi* (literally "money of a ghost's friend"), was for illness in old age and for making merit before death. Their mother, Khluan, originally intended to build either a temple or a monastery hall with her personal savings in order to accumulate good merit for her future lives, just as did other old people in Thailand who were about to leave this world. The brothers persuaded their mother that the expenditure of her money on building a hut for monks and publishing a journal would make more merit than building ten beautiful monastery halls. They explained that their way was more meritorious because some people would become clear in the teachings of the Buddha and some other people might become eager to practice the *dhamma* of the Buddha, while ten beautiful monastery halls would never make people feel that way<sup>100</sup>. Through the interest that they gained from their mother's fund, which was approximately 500 baht per year<sup>101</sup>, they could pay for the initial cost of sustaining the lives of monks in Suan Mokkh and publishing the journal, until their activities were

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<sup>98</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Sip pi nai suan mok: lao ruang chiwit nai wai num* (Ten years in Suan Mokkh: talking about the life when young) (Nonthaburi: Kong thun wutthit tham), p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> "Prawat nang khluan phanit" (A history of Mrs. Khluan Phanit), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (August 1948), p. 86.

<sup>100</sup> "Matu buchanuson" (Commemoration for mother), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (August 1948), p. 80.

<sup>101</sup> "Thalaengkan khong khana thammathan", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 3 No. 1 – 2 (May – August 1935), p. 639.

supported by other donations.

Having Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh and Thammathat in the Khana Thammathan in different ordained status but working for a common goal, the brothers took complementary roles in the activities. Buddhadasa needed appropriate support for his religious practice. He wanted to avoid the situation in which an ordained monk has to contradict his precepts, such as dealing with money, in the way he had experienced in the temple in Bangkok. His lay brother prepared ideal conditions for solitude, and provided just the necessary food and basic materials to survive in order for Buddhadasa to pursue the *dhamma* that would lead him to religious attainment.

It was this *dhamma* that was most essential for the lay Buddhist movements to seek and to propagate to others. For the lay Buddhists in the Khana Thammathan, who were not able to devote their entire lives to religious practice, they could not precisely express the true *dhamma* that should replace superstitious Buddhism. Without the presence of the *dhamma* in their movement, their campaign to attack superstitions could not propose any alternative. When the *dhamma* that Buddhadasa explored and taught was valid and useful for his lay supporters, the support for his religious practice and for the delivering of his messages was meaningful for the movement to restore the true Buddhism that the Buddha had had preached.

The monks in Suan Mokkh and the lay people in the Khana Thammathan were in a reciprocal relationship. Buddhadasa and the monks in Suan Mokkh, a temple dedicated to ascetic practice, gained material support from the Khana Thammathan, and the lay group received *dhamma* teaching from an ordained authority in robes. Their essentially inter-dependent relationship corresponds to the traditional exchange of *vatthu-dāna* (material offering) and *dhamma-dāna* (offering of the *dhamma*) between monks and laity.

The propagation of the *dhamma* was the inseparable joint activity of Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh, and Thammathat and the other lay supporters in the Khana Thammathan. *Dhamma* propagation was conducted through the print media and through speeches. Their journal, *Phutthasasana*, and preaching in a room in the Khana Thammathan, a gathering place of people, were the common activities of Suan Mokkh and of the Khana Thammathan.

Since the beginning of Suan Mokkh in 1932, there have been three main

characteristics in Buddhadasa's thought throughout his life essential in the activities of Suan Mokkh and the Khana Thammathan. First, he emphasised the ultimate purpose of Buddhism in the overcoming of suffering. Whatever exists in the Buddhist tradition of Thailand or in the Pali scriptures, Buddhadasa judged it as non-Buddhist or unnecessary if it had nothing to do with this purpose. He explained that suffering was to be overcome by rational causality (Pali: *hetu phala*), as formulated in the four noble truths, the law of dependent origination (Pali: *paṭiccasamuppāda*), and *idappaccayadā*. Second, Buddhadasa gave the most significance in present practice to overcoming suffering here and now. He encouraged people to receive the fruit of Buddhist teachings immediately by practising; it was not necessary to wait until future lives. Third, Buddhadasa promoted Buddhist teaching more to lay Buddhists and others further away from the Buddhist ordained circle. This was Buddhadasa's and the Khana Thammathan's work of propagating Buddhism. Their mission was different from proselytising traditions of Christian missionaries, who attempted to convert other religious believers to Christianity. For Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan the propagation of the *dhamma* meant the promotion of a Buddhism that teaches the overcoming of suffering here and now, regardless of the receivers' already being Buddhist or not.

In fact, these characteristics of Buddhadasa's thought and the Khana Thammathan almost coincided with their forerunner, the lay Buddhist movement led by Narin Phasit. Narin established the Association of Buddhists (*phutthaborisat samakhom*), which renovated an abandoned temple in Nonthaburi province adjacent to Bangkok. The idea of *dhamma* practice for overcoming suffering was central to both groups. Narin intended for his association "to make a convenient place for the *dhamma* practice (which is not wrong – note by Narin) for any Buddhist who aims at the overcoming of suffering without asking whether they be men or women, whether donning yellow, black, or white robes, whether their hair is long or short"<sup>102</sup>. The overcoming of suffering was recognised as the true practice of the *dhamma* by Narin, and he attempted to expand his movement by restoring the *bhikkhuni*, or the Theravāda Buddhist women's ordination.

Nevertheless, the Khana Thammathan was different from Narin's movement in

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<sup>102</sup> Narin Phasit, *Chuai bamrung chat* (Assist nurturing the nation) (1914), p. 34.

two ways. First, the Khana Thammathan came up with the same criticism of corrupt monks and existing superstitious Buddhist beliefs as Narin's lay association, which had provoked more conflict with the Sangha authorities than change for the better. Although the Khana Thammathan was a group of progressive lay Buddhists just like Narin's, the Khana had Buddhadasa, a monk whose practice and teachings were recognised as exemplary by his audience, including both the elder monks in the Sangha and lay elite intellectuals. The ideal model of the *dhamma* practice that Buddhadasa exemplified in Suan Mokkh was essential to the Khana Thammathan and lay Buddhists who sought the same purpose of overcoming suffering by a true *dhamma* practice.

Second, unlike Narin's confronting movement against authorities, Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan carefully avoided unnecessary conflict. Even though Buddhadasa was already famous and trusted for his intellectuality among the elder monks in his hometown, he did not tell anyone about his plan to seclude himself in a forest temple for meditation practice, except for Thammathat and the members of the Khana Thammathan<sup>103</sup>. Buddhadasa expected that his idea of following the path of the Buddha written in the scriptures was difficult to be believed especially among academic monks. In fact, his teacher of Pali in Bangkok, Phra Khru Chayaphiwat, considered *vipassanā* meditation already outdated and did not agree with Buddhadasa's idea of conducting meditation practice<sup>104</sup>. When they started to renovate the abandoned temple for Buddhadasa's solitude, they legally drew up a contract to hire the place from the government in order to obtain legal rights to occupy the land<sup>105</sup>. Buddhadasa also reported the purpose of his activities in Suan Mokkh to the chief monk of the province (*chao khana changwat*) Sangha administration<sup>106</sup>. Their prudent preparations seemed to be partly because they had learnt from the experiment of Narin Phasit (who founded various reformist groups of religion before Buddhadasa), which were so controversial

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<sup>103</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 135, 149.

<sup>104</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 136.

<sup>105</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 153; "Thalaengkan khong khana thammathan" (Announcement of the Khana Thammathan), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (May 1933), p. 12. Later, they stopped paying the rent for the land and temple of Suan Mokkh, because when Buddhadasa had an audience with Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanawong, he laughed at their over-carefulness of legally hiring a temple in order to let a monk abide there (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 154).

<sup>106</sup> "Thalaengkan khong khana thammathan" (Announcement of the Khana Thammathan), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (August 1933), p. 55.

that the goodwill of his movement was difficult for the people at large to accept<sup>107</sup>. Over all, Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan were careful enough not to be at odds with the public and religious authorities in order to conduct what they believed to be true and good. Although both Narin and Buddhadasa were similarly from well-to-do commoner backgrounds, it did not mean that Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan overtly challenged the status quo as representatives from the middle class against the authoritarian control of the absolute monarchy or the Sangha.

Narin's movement was short-lived, while Suan Mokkh and the Khana Thammathan became more influential, even though both made very similar attempts to promote the *dhamma* to the laity to overcome suffering. Suan Mokkh started as a place for Buddhadasa's solitude, but more monks and novices were coming to visit and stay for conducting practice. The old Suan Mokkh in Phumriang was too small to meet this demand, so they moved to the present Suan Mokkh in Chaiya in 1944. Not only monks and novices, but also women ascetics and lay intellectuals came to visit Buddhadasa and stayed in Suan Mokkh to consult about *dhamma* practice temporarily for a while. University students over several generations organised a group of temporarily ordained monks and came to Suan Mokkh to receive Buddhadasa's preaching during their holidays. Since the late 1980s, Achan Pho, the present abbot of Suan Mokkh after Buddhadasa's death, had opened a regular meditation course for foreigners and Thai lay Buddhists and members of other religions. According to Metta Phanit, who took responsibility for the present Khana Thammathan when his father Thammathat grew old, Suan Mokkh is supported by people who feel that Buddhadasa's teachings have benefited their lives even after Buddhadasa's death.

## 5. Important early exchanges with contemporary intellectuals

In the early stages of the activities of Buddhadasa and the Khana

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<sup>107</sup> Although Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan tried to avoid conflict, some members of the Khana Thammathan believed strongly in Narin's movement and made Buddhadasa's teacher, Phra Khru Chayaphiwat, angry by proposing Narin's ideas (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 136). In the beginning of their activities, troubles were inevitable, for example, some actually distrusted the Khana Thammathan as "disciples of Narin", and the monk in Suan Mokkh as "crazy" ("Matu buchanuson" (Commemoration and respect for the late mother), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (August 1948), p.82).

Thammathan, their journal, *Phutthasasana* (Buddhism), had a great impact on the intellectuals in the Buddhist public sphere. There were very good responses to their journal from both ordained and lay Buddhists who were pursuing profound meaning and a way of practice beyond the conventional Buddhism to which they were already accustomed. The intellectual exchanges with these intellectuals were significant for Buddhadasa in further developing his thought. Also, their discussions were an important part of the contemporary Buddhist public sphere.

In this section, I am going to examine three kinds of people who encountered Buddhadasa at the beginning of his activities, and who contributed to his intellectual development: young progressive monks and novices; academic elder monks in the Sangha; and lay intellectuals who had studied overseas.

### Progressive monks and novices

Some of the most progressive monks and novices in the early 1930s became followers of the world mission led by the Italian monk, Phra Lokanatha. This initiative was perceived as honourable work for the religion and was supported by many high status people, including King Prajadhipok and important government officials connected to the People's Party. Lokanatha called his members "lion-hearted *bhikkhus* and *samaneras*" as they dedicated themselves to the propagation of Buddhism in Bodhgaya, Jerusalem, and Rome. But the group also included those who were simply interested in travelling all over the world<sup>108</sup>.

In the face of difficulties faced on the way from Northern Thailand to Burma, through Tak, Mae Sot, and up to Yangon, Lokanatha soon lost control of the more than one hundred followers of his idealistic project. When they went through the jungle, quite a few members either became ill or dropped out even before leaving the territory of Thailand. In May 1934 when the group arrived in Yangon, Burmese people told them that in the previous year Lokanatha took about three hundred Burmese monks and novices on a very difficult journey to India, where a number of them died. Therefore, only a few Burmese people respected and supported Lokanatha and his Thai followers. Most Thai monks abandoned Lokanatha to return to Thailand, and only about ten young

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<sup>108</sup> Karuna, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai*, pp. 69 – 79.



novices remained to continue the journey in India<sup>109</sup>. Among the monks who left Lokanatha in Yangon, there were two future co-workers of Buddhadasa's *dhamma* propagation activities, Phra Pan Pathumuttaro (known as Panyanantha Bhikkhu; 1911 – ) and Phra Bunchuan Khemaphirat (1917 – ). On the other hand, among those who followed Lokanatha, there was Sāmanera Karuna Kusalasai, who remained in India and corresponded with Buddhadasa in Thailand.

Ten monks from the South, including Pan and Bunchuan, went ahead of the main group, and Lokanatha sent a telegram to someone in the town where they were heading. After leaving Bangkok, they practised real *dhutaṅga* (ascetic practice), sleeping only in the open air, sometimes in a graveyard, keeping a vegetarian diet, and so forth. They even gave sermons in English for Burmese people, because as a schoolteacher Bunchuan knew English, and Pan learnt it in his secondary education, which was not widespread at that time<sup>110</sup>. This was a very adventurous experience for them. However, when Lokanatha lost control of nearly a hundred newly ordained, uneducated monks who started fighting each other because of the fatigue of the journey, he accused the ten monks from the South of splitting from the group. After the splitting of the group in Yangon, Pan returned to Thailand, and Bunchuan went to India by himself<sup>111</sup>.

Although in the beginning those monks were admired for their aspirations, when the members returned from Burma, Thai people were disappointed by the unsuccessful mission of Lokanatha. Abbots of temples in Bangkok even rejected the returnees<sup>112</sup>. At a suggestion of his friend, Pan went down south in Songkhla province, where he gained tremendous popularity as an excellent preacher of the *dhamma*. In Songkhla, Pan first read Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*. The biographer of Pan wrote:

Most articles [in *Phutthasasana*] were the works of Ven. Buddhadasa. He encouraged and stimulated readers to feel like doing *dhamma* practice. He [Pan] read [the journal] and felt very satisfied with it. He thought, "Ah, Ven. Buddhadasa

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<sup>109</sup> The consequence of Lokanatha's mission that I describe here is based on newspaper articles that the Khana Thammathan reprinted in their journal: "Khao phra lokanat nam phikkhu thai ok pai chak prathet sayam" (News about Phra Lokanatha, who leads Thai monks out of Siam), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (August 1934), pp. 284 – 294.

<sup>110</sup> Chalong Cheyakhom, *Than bo. cho. khemaphirat* (Ven. Bunchuan Khemaphirat) (Bangkok: Somsan), p. 43; Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 63 – 84.

<sup>112</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 87 – 88.

should have been in the group of Phra Lokanatha”<sup>113</sup>.

In fact, while Buddhadasa openly disagreed with Lokanatha, this statement of Pan suggests that Buddhadasa and Lokanatha shared progressive elements that their contemporaries could recognise.

After the splitting of Lokanatha’s group, Bunchuan, went on to stay in India for two years. There he also read the journal, *Phutthasasana*, and he started contributing many articles and translations to it from English journals beginning in May 1936 onwards<sup>114</sup>. Because of his foreign experience and ability to translate English, his contributions brought previously unknown information to Thai Buddhist readers, and enriched the discussions of the journal. Bunchuan was given a special introduction in the issue in August 1936 by the journal editor, Thammathat<sup>115</sup>.

Returning from India in 1936, Bunchuan asked Pan to spend the rains retreat at Suan Mokkh. In that year, there were only four monks and a novice staying at Suan Mokkh. They saw Buddhadasa was writing *Tam roi phra arahan* (Following the footprints of *arahant*) by translating Pali scriptures into Thai that appeared as a series of articles in *Phutthasasana*. In the evening they discussed the *dhamma*, in all aspects, such as scriptural studies, practice, and propagation. According to Pan’s biographer, Bunchuan often expressed disagreement and argued with Buddhadasa, but Buddhadasa explained his views and gave his reasons. Pan, who was still younger than Bunchuan and Buddhadasa, listened rather quietly, and gained much insight from these discussions. After the rains retreat, Buddhadasa recommended that Pan study Pali in Bangkok in order to work further for Buddhism<sup>116</sup>.

Although Bunchuan and Pan never had another chance to spend a rains retreat with Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh, they shared ideas and co-operated with each other. Bunchuan later became involved in the Sangha administration, was appointed to the head of the Chumphon province ecclesiastical division, and on him was conferred the title, Phra Ratchayanakwi. Pan became known as Panyanantha Bhikkhu for his sermons on the *dhamma*. At the cremation of Bunchuan, Buddhadasa commented on the

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<sup>113</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 99.

<sup>114</sup> Bo. Cho. [abbr. Bunchuan] Khemaphirat, “Khwaam suam sun khong phra phutthasasana nai india” (Decline of Buddhism in India), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (May 1936), pp. 11 – 26.

<sup>115</sup> “Bannathikan thalaeng” (Editor’s announcement), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (August 1936), pp. 217 – 218.

<sup>116</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 104 – 105, 108.

relationship between the three:

We say that the three of us are brothers. Ven. Bunchuan, Ven. Panyanantha and I called each other three brothers, because we have the same purpose in life<sup>117</sup>.

Among the members of Lokanatha's mission, there was another who was referred to by Buddhadasa his "brother of the *dhamma*". This was then Sāmanera Karuna Kusalasai (1920 – ). Karuna was going to be fourteen years old when Lokanatha's group came to his town in Nakhon Sawan province. Because he was an orphan, he thought that this tour would give him a better chance for an education abroad. In February 1934 he was ordained as a novice by Lokanatha and joined the world mission<sup>118</sup>.

When the group split up in Yangon, Karuna followed Lokanatha with about ten novices to India. Lokanatha took them to Almora, a town in the Indian Himalayas, where Dr. Jina, a Burmese physician disciple monk of Lokanatha was doing *dhamma* practice. Lokanatha left the Thai monks with Dr. Jina and went to Sri Lanka to organise Sinhalese monks and novices to join his world mission. In the winter, the group had to move to a warmer place. On their way to Sarnath, they visited the Buddhist holy places of Lumbini and Kusinara. In this journey, they had to face difficulties with wild animals and malaria. After the group's leader, Dr. Jina, became seriously ill and was taken back to Burma by his family, most of the remaining Thai disciples of Lokanatha also decided to return to Thailand. Karuna was the only one who had to stay at the Maha Bodhi Society in Sarnath, because he was seriously ill with malaria. When he had recovered, the secretary-general of the Maha Bodhi Society allowed him to study under their novice education programme for the world Buddhist mission<sup>119</sup>.

In India Karuna had an unusual opportunity for Buddhist education as a Thai novice. From 1935 to 1939, Karuna studied together with Sinhalese monks and novices at the Maha Bodhi Society in Sarnath. He learnt Hindi and English from an Indian teacher with the assistance of a pocketbook edition of McFarland's English-Thai Dictionary, and also he learnt Pali using Sinhalese script. His study of Hindi was assisted by Dr. Bhadanta Ananda Kausalyayana, a famous Indian *bhikkhu* who

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<sup>117</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 106. About Panyanantha's life and co-operation with Buddhadasa's activities, see also Chapter II, pp. 98 – 106.

<sup>118</sup> Karuna, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai*, p. 73.

<sup>119</sup> Karuna, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai*, pp. 76 – 93.

propagated Buddhism in Europe. After two years of study, Karuna got first place in the Hindi examinations in all India, and he was able to write articles in Hindi journals. In 1938, his Hindi was qualified as equivalent to that of a high school graduate. He also studied English through a correspondence course from Bennett College in England, and after four years he received a diploma in English, which was equivalent to the London Matriculation or Senior Cambridge level. He gave up studying Pali in Sinhalese script only at the elementary level, because he would be able to study Pali in Thailand. Instead, he started to learn Sanskrit, which is important for Thai literature and culture, but which was difficult to study in Thailand. From 1940, Karuna continued his study in Vishavabharati Shantiniketan University, which was founded by Rabindranath Tagore. He was majoring in Indology, and studied Sanskrit with Pandit Hazari Prasad Dwivedi<sup>120</sup>. The knowledge Karuna acquired in India was, for most Thai Buddhists at the time, very interesting and difficult to access.

Moreover, before he left Thailand with Lokanatha, Karuna had already studied to the third year in secondary school, so he was able to translate his new knowledge into Thai. When he was in the Maha Bodhi Society at Sarnath, he found two Buddhist journals there, i.e., *Phutthasasana* and *Thammachaksu*. These Thai journals had been sent to the Maha Bodhi Society as a companion organisation working for the propagation of the *dhamma*. Karuna discovered an interest in the “modern” Buddhism that *Phutthasasana* introduced, so in early 1936 he sent a letter to the Khana Thammathan together with some English books that the Maha Bodhi Society had published, as well as some writings by Phra Lokanatha, as well as postcards of the Buddhist sites in India<sup>121</sup>. Correspondence between Buddhadasa and Karuna began in this way.

Under the pseudonym, “A Thai *sāmanera* in Sarnath”, Karuna contributed eleven articles to Buddhadasa’s journal, *Phutthasasana*, from February 1936 to February 1942<sup>122</sup>. These articles of Karuna included up-to-date news about Buddhist

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<sup>120</sup> Karuna, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai*, pp. 94 – 103.

<sup>121</sup> Karuna Kusulasai, Bangkok, 6 and 29 November 1998; “Thalaengkan khana thammathan” (Announcement by the Khana Thammathan), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 3 No. 4 (February 1936/2478), p. 747.

<sup>122</sup> These eleven articles of Karuna were: “Chotmai chak samanen thai nai india” (A letter from a Thai novice in India), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 3 No. 4 (February 1936), pp. 711 – 718; “Ngan chalong mulakan kutti wihan nai prathet india” (A celebration in India for the foundation of a *vihāra* where

movements in India, such as that of Dr. Ambedkar, and translations of either English or Hindi articles about the history of Buddhism and Buddhism in other traditions. Karuna not only enriched Buddhadasa's journal with news and information, but also sent him English books available in India and connected Buddhadasa to important Indian monks, such as Ananda Kausalyayana and Rahula. Karuna said that sometimes Buddhadasa asked Karuna to seek advice from Ananda on a good book about certain Buddhist topics, Karuna bought the books that Ananda recommended, and sent them to Buddhadasa<sup>123</sup>. Karuna's role would have been very important for Buddhadasa to keep up with international movements and scholarship.

By the same token, Buddhadasa's advice and encouragement were very supportive for Karuna, who was an orphan and a Thai novice alone in India. Buddhadasa himself also studied Sanskrit and Indian philosophy with Swami Satyananda Puri, a Hindu scholar who settled in Thailand and often gave lectures in Thai, but he encouraged Karuna to revive Sanskrit in Thailand and to write a Hindi language textbook for Thais. Buddhadasa also sent good Thai books to Karuna, and informed him of recent situation of Buddhism in Thailand, such as Luang Wichit's nationalistic thoughts and the conflict between the Thammayut and Mahanikai orders. Buddhadasa attempted to share ideas on contemporary Thai Buddhism with Karuna whom he regarded as a co-worker for the same purpose<sup>124</sup>.

Karuna was also introduced by Buddhadasa to a contact person on the editorial board of *Thammachaksu*, to which he contributed four articles from May to October

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there used to be a *kuti* (monk's hut) used by the Buddha), Vol. 4 No. 1 (May 1936), pp. 59 – 64; “Khao di thung phuttha mamaka sayam” (Good news for Thai Buddhists), Vol. 4 No. 3 (November 1936), p. 336; “Khao kan-khluang-wai khong phra phutthasasana nai india” (News about Buddhist movements in India), Vol. 5 No. 1 (May 1937), pp. 122 – 126; “Phra maha wihan phutthakhaya” (A *vihāra* in Bodhgaya), Vol. 5 No. 2 (August 1937), pp. 194 – 203; “Phutthasasana nai prathet yipun” (Buddhism in Japan), Vol. 5 No. 4 (February 1938), pp. 341 – 346; “Wanna sut nai india” (Untouchables in India), Vol. 6 No. 1 (May 1938), pp. 41 – 48; “Phonsawadan khong phra wihan phutthakhaya” (History of the Bodhgaya Temple), Vol. 6 No. 3 (November 1938), pp. 195 – 202; “Horyoyi – pathom phuttha wihan khong yipun” (Horyoji – the first temple of Japan), Vol. 7 No. 2 (August 1939), pp. 130 – 138; “Nam thiao namasakan sathan thi saksit nai india” (Visiting holy places in India), Vol. 8 No. 3 – 4 (November 1940), pp. 183 – 190; “Kan-phoeiphræ phutthasasana” (Propagation of Buddhism), Vol. 10 No. 1 (February 1942), pp. 93 – 94.

<sup>123</sup> Karuna, interview, 29 November 1998.

<sup>124</sup> Karuna published the letters from Buddhadasa to commemorate his memory. They are collected in: *Phutthathat ramluk: likhit Than 'phutthathat' thung nong chai doi tham, 'karuna kusalasai'* (A memory of Buddhadasa: letters from Ven. Buddhadasa to a younger brother in the *dhamma*, Karuna Kusalasai) (Bangkok: Mae Kham Phang, 1993).

1939<sup>125</sup>. He also wrote a number of short reports about Buddhist and other movements in India for a Thai daily newspaper, *Prachachat*, of which Kulap Saipradit and Malai Chupinit were the editors. He received the newspapers in return. Karuna brought new knowledge from India to the intellectual Buddhist community of Thailand.

Unfortunately, he had to terminate this role because of the outbreak of World War II. As an allied nation of Japan, Thailand declared war against Britain and the United States on 25 January 1942. On 8 February, Karuna was arrested and sent to a concentration camp as a citizen of an enemy nation of India's suzerain state, Britain<sup>126</sup>. Although the war interrupted correspondence between Karuna and Buddhadasa, their correspondence in all likelihood contributed to the development of Buddhadasa's understandings and to his own thoughts on Buddhism.

#### Sangha elders and academic monks

Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*, also received good responses from academic elders of the Sangha, not just from young progressive monks and novices. In the 1930s through to the late 1940s, Buddhadasa was given a number of honours by elder Thammayut monks.

One of the most supportive elders was Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan (Charoen Yanawaro; 1872 – 1951) at Wat Thepsirin. Charoen was born in Chonburi province and studied Thai script at Wat Khao Bang Sai, the temple of Chao Khun Chonlathopmakhunnamuni (Punnako Phut). The abbot of this Thammayut temple had good connections with King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn<sup>127</sup>. When Charoen was ordained as a novice and studied higher *pariyatti dhamma* (scriptural studies), he was introduced to a school at Wat Ratchabophit, whose principal also had connections with a

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<sup>125</sup> "Phra phutthasasana sun hai pai chak India yang rai?" (How did India lose Buddhism?), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 27 No. 7 (April 1939), pp. 652 – 663; "Phra phutthasasana sun hai pai chak india yang rai?" (Continued from the previous issue), Vol. 27 No. 8 (May 1939), pp. 748 – 758; "Mahatma Nichiren", Vol. 27 No. 10 (July 1939), pp. 935 – 943; "Mahatma Nichiren" (Continued from the previous issue), Vol. 27 No. 11 (August 1939), pp. 1035 – 1042; "Phra Phutthasasana nai India patchuban" (Buddhism in present day India), Vol. 28 No. 1 (October 1939), pp. 39 – 51.

<sup>126</sup> Karuna, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai*, pp. 104 – 105.

<sup>127</sup> Chao Khun Chonlathopmakhunnamuni was once ordained as a monk by the then monk, Prince Mongkut, who established the Thammayut Order. After he disrobed, he worked for the Office of the Royal Page. After he retired, he was once again ordained as a monk, and became the abbot of Wat Khao Bang Sai. When King Chulalongkorn travelled in Chonburi, and learnt the background of the abbot, he promoted the ecclesiastical title of the abbot to the level of *phra racha khana* ("Prawat

prince<sup>128</sup>. After he ordained as a monk in 1902, Charoen came first in every level of the Pali ecclesiastical examination at Mahamakut Buddhist Academy. Charoen's ability was recognised by Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot, and he was appointed to the Pali school at Wat Thepsirin. In 1908 at the age of twenty-eight, he was also appointed director of education of Monthon Prachinburi, and in January 1909, he was appointed abbot of Wat Thepsirin<sup>129</sup>. After that, he held a number of positions responsible for ecclesiastical education and examinations, as well as for ecclesiastical administration. He was highly respected for his devotion to duty and thriftiness, and his sermons at Wat Thepsirin were very popular among well-educated lay Buddhists in Bangkok<sup>130</sup>. Among elder monks in the Sangha, he was known as the most progressive and the best acquainted with Westerners<sup>131</sup>. In January 1932, he was elected chairperson of the Elders' Council, and as acting Supreme Patriarch until 1938<sup>132</sup>.

In June 1937 while Charoen was the acting Supreme Patriarch, Buddhadasa had the honour to receive a visit from him and have him stay overnight at Suan Mokkh. Charoen visited there after his inspection trip to the Southern provinces. Buddhadasa went to welcome him at Surat Thani station and accompanied him to Chaiya station. Over seventy monks and novices, fifty-two students at the Phuttha Nikhom high school, of which Thammathat was the principal, and many more people in the region turned out to welcome him. Charoen gave his books to some of them and gave a pamphlet about meditation to everyone. However, his leg was not in good shape, he took two hours to

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Chao Phra Khun Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan Yanawara Thera", pp. (1) – (2)).

<sup>128</sup> The principal was Phra Khru Winaithonchai, a *thananukrom* of Phra Ong Chao Phra Arunniphakkhunakon ("Prawat Chao Phra Khun Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan Yanawara Thera", p. (2)). About the meaning of *thananukrom*, see footnote 48.

<sup>129</sup> "Prawat Chao Phra Khun Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan Yanawara Thera", pp. (3) – (4).

<sup>130</sup> "Prawat chao phra khun somdet phra phutthakhosachan yanawara thera", pp. (17) – (18); Ubasika Unchit Tirattana, interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999. According to Unchit, who used to be a high school teacher and later became a co-founder of Suan Usom, or Buddhadasa's followers' women's place for *dhamma* practice, Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan (Charoen) directly taught practical *dhamma*. Later she read Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*, and thought that both the teachings of Charoen and Buddhadasa were in the same line. Phra Dunlayaphaksuwaman, one of the judges who assisted Buddhadasa, also highly respected Charoen as a disciple who had been ordained by him (Thippawan Patthomsathan (a daughter of Phra Dunlayaphaksuwaman), interview, 22 August 1998; Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 221).

<sup>131</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 122.

<sup>132</sup> After the change of the Sangha Act in 1941 under the Phibun government, in July 1941 Charoen became chair of the ecclesiastical assembly, and in May 1950 he became chair of the ecclesiastical cabinet. He filled many important positions in the Sangha throughout his life ("Prawat chao phra khun somdet phra phutthakhosachan yanawara thera", pp. (4) – (27)).

walk the five or six kilometres from the station to Suan Mokkh. Charoen gave a sermon for two hours, and listeners filled the temple premises. Charoen gave several sets of his own printed *dhamma* sermons, poems and Chinese sermons to Suan Mokkh and Khana Thammathan, and talked with Buddhadasa in the evening and in the following morning. Through their talk on practice, scriptural study, and translation, Buddhadasa wrote that he learnt countless new things. He had an impression that Somdet Charoen strictly adhered to the precepts just like a newly ordained monk who had entered the order yesterday<sup>133</sup>. Charoen's visit was only five years after the establishment of Suan Mokkh and in the eleventh year for Buddhadasa as a monk. Considering the difference of their age and status in the Sangha, this was a tremendous honour for Buddhadasa.

After this first visit, Buddhadasa recalled that Charoen had assisted with funds for Khana Thammathan's publications, but he had never given special favour to Buddhadasa's promotion to ecclesiastical titles or ranks. Every time Buddhadasa went to Bangkok, he visited Charoen at Wat Thepsirin. Charoen gave Buddhadasa the honour of conversing in his private room. In their talks, Charoen told Buddhadasa that it was too early to teach people about *anattā* (non-self), but he liked to talk to Buddhadasa about hidden *dhamma* as he understood it. Charoen expected Buddhadasa to propagate his ideas of the *dhamma*, because Buddhadasa was able to express things clearly. Buddhadasa sometimes wrote about Charoen's unusual interpretations in his journal, and was even criticised by other elder monks. Buddhadasa did not always agree with Charoen, but these were not very serious difficulties. He never brought up his disagreements to argue with Charoen. Charoen called Buddhadasa "Maha Nguam, he who fits with my character"<sup>134</sup>.

Charoen's personal background suggests that he played a role as a promoter of Wachirayan's reform of ecclesiastical education. Buddhadasa was also inspired by Wachirayan's textbooks and sermons as being innovative for the new era. Based on the common ground of basic doctrinal understanding, which was standardised by the uniform textbooks and examinations, both Charoen and Buddhadasa were pursuing religion at deeper levels. From the point of view of a Sangha elder, such as Charoen,

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<sup>133</sup> "Somdet phra phutthakhosachan yiam lae phak raem nai suan mok" (Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan visited and stayed overnight at Suan Mokkh), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (August 1937), pp. kho. – cho.; Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 187.



Buddhadasa's interpretation was not perceived as "deviant" (*diarathi*), but rather as a good attempt. Beyond the level of the standard formulae, there was room to be explored. At this level, people had freedom of individual interpretation, and their opinions did not always coincide. Charoen, as a high level elder of the Sangha, had few chances to be overtly criticised, while Buddhadasa, who could perform individual activities in a province, was more open to public discussion of his own ideas. Buddhadasa was always ready to face up to disagreements in the Buddhist public sphere, in which people could express their own understandings, which differed from the standard formulae of the modern ecclesiastical education system.

Buddhadasa also had intellectual exchanges with academic monks at Mahamakut Buddhist Academy, the then most advanced academic institute for Buddhism in Siam. In 1937, the Academy adopted Buddhadasa work, *Phuttha prawat chak phra ot* (The life of the Buddha in his own words), as a textbook for the Academy's students<sup>135</sup>. Phra Maha Thongsup (Suphamak), the head of the textbook bureau of the Academy, was a good academic friend of Buddhadasa. Buddhadasa said that they probably knew each other through the journal, *Phutthasasana*. Buddhadasa bought an extra copy of *Communism* in the Home Library series for Thongsup to read. He explained that because communism was then well-known as an enemy of Buddhism, they should have some knowledge of it, and he wanted to know what Thongsup would think<sup>136</sup>.

Apart from their intellectual communication, Buddhadasa was introduced through Thongsup to another elder monk in the Sangha, Somdet Phra Wachirayanawong, the Supreme Patriarch and the chair of the committee of Mahamakut Buddhist Academy residing at Wat Bowonniwet. The Somdet often visited the textbook bureau at Mahamakut in the evening to talk with monks working there. Thongsup spoke of Suan Mokkh to the Somdet before Buddhadasa's meeting with him. When Buddhadasa was accused of being a communist by Phra Thipparinya, this Somdet did not even take the

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<sup>134</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 383 – 386.

<sup>135</sup> Thongsup told Buddhadasa to expand the book by investigating more about the social conditions in India contemporary with the Buddha. Buddhadasa felt he had clearer understandings in the topic when he visited India in 1955, but by then Thongsup had already disrobed. At that time, Buddhadasa's work at Suan Mokkh did not allow him to seclude himself to write a book, so the book was left incomplete, only a chapter of the book was done (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 300).

<sup>136</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 301 – 302.

matter seriously, but said instead, “I would like to stay with you at Suan Mokkh. Here it is too busy”<sup>137</sup>. Through a suggestion of Thongsup, the Somdet even bought the complete set of the *Tipitaka* for Suan Mokkh, because up to then Buddhadasa could only afford to buy twenty volumes of it, and he had to borrow the rest from Wat Boromathat Chaiya, a noted historical temple in Chaiya<sup>138</sup>.

Buddhadasa had few troubles with Sangha elders about his own doctrinal interpretations. At the beginning of his activities, these elder Thammayut monks were supportive of Buddhadasa. Another Thammayut elder, Phra Sasanasophon (Plot) at Wat Rachathiwat, also defended Buddhadasa from Phra Thipparinya’s accusation, and assisted in Buddhadasa’s promotion to ecclesiastical titles and administrative appointments, such as to the head of the Propagation Unit (*Ongkan Phoeiphae*) of Surat Thani province, and of the fifth region, under the 1941 Sangha Act<sup>139</sup>. Buddhadasa also had a good relationship with an elder in the Mahanikai Order, Phra Phimolatham (At) at Wat Mahathat, by whom he was given the honour of giving a speech at the sixth council in Burma as a representative of the Thai Sangha. Buddhadasa’s ability was recognised by these elders in the Sangha. Rather than to the Sangha elders, Buddhadasa’s originality of interpretation became rather controversial for other participants in the Buddhist public sphere, which was becoming more and more active from the 1930s onwards up to the middle of the century.

### Lay elite intellectuals

Through the print media, Buddhadasa also became acquainted with and started personal correspondence with lay intellectuals. As important figures for Buddhadasa’s early development of his thought, at least two judges who had studied abroad should be mentioned, Sanya Dhammasakdi and Phraya Latphlithammprakhan (Wong Latphli).

Sanya Dhammasakdi (1907 – ), who is known for having the trust of the present king, King Bhumibol, who selected and appointed him to be interim Prime Minister after the 14 October uprising in 1973, and also to the chair of the Privy Council, actually has had a significant role in Buddhist circles. While Sanya was studying law in

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<sup>137</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 301.

<sup>138</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 463.

<sup>139</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 371 – 372. About the position of the Propagation Unit under the

London from 1930 to 1933, he was excited to find that many Western people were interested in Buddhism at the British Maha Bodhi Society. He also attended *dhamma* lectures every week. The method of teaching the *dhamma* as a lecture seems to have been interesting to Sanya, perhaps in contrast with Thai monks' solemn sermons which were read from a Pali text in *bailan* and given from the higher preaching seat in the monastery hall. Sanya wrote an article about the activities of the British Maha Bodhi and published it in *Thai khasaem ruam khao*, a weekly newspaper in Thailand. Eventually Buddhadasa read Sanya's article and sent a letter to him in London. In the letter, Buddhadasa introduced the activities of the Khana Thammathan, which was effective in propagating the principle of the *dhamma* directly to the people. Sanya felt that this should be a new attempt, which was different from ordinary monks, and he also replied to Buddhadasa<sup>140</sup>. Even before reading Sanya's article, Buddhadasa would have had the idea of *dhamma* propagation through reading the English journals of international Buddhist movements, and he had already put it into practice in the Khana Thammathan. Sanya also found a similar enthusiasm to Buddhadasa for the propagation of the *dhamma* by his direct participation in the activities of the British Maha Bodhi Society in London. This experience of Sanya became an impulse for him to lead the lay Buddhist activities of the Buddhist Association of Thailand, which he, together with other elite bureaucrats in higher positions, helped to establish after his return from England. The two Thai intellectual Buddhists had parallel interests in *dhamma* propagation but came to it through different paths.

Sanya and Buddhadasa met each other for the first time around the end of 1933 or the beginning of 1934. When Phra Lokanatha, the Italian monk who organised the world Buddhist mission, gave a public lecture at Wat Bowonniwet in order to call for participants, Sanya, who had just returned from England and was interested in Buddhism, acted as interpreter. From the audience one young monk asked many questions of Lokanatha about his philosophy of the world mission. In the end, Lokanatha saw that the monk had asked good questions so he must be very interested in the propagation of Buddhism. Lokanatha asked the young monk to join his tour. The

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1941 Sangha Act, see Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society*, p. 105.

<sup>140</sup> Suksanti Chirachariyawet (ed.), *7 rop achan sanya* (Seventh twelve-year cycle [i.e., eighty-four years] of Achan Sanya) (Bangkok: Mulanithi nitthisat, Mahawitthayalai thammawat, 1991), p. 141.

young monk smiled and said he would prefer to work in Thailand first. After the question and answer, the young monk introduced himself to Sanya, as the one who had sent the letter in England<sup>141</sup>.

After this first meeting, the relationship between Sanya and Buddhadasa became important for each other's activities. Sanya invited Buddhadasa into his circles, such as the Buddhist Association of Thailand and the Ministry of Justice as a lecturer to teach Buddhism for new trainee judges. Both institutions were socially regarded as elite, and Buddhadasa was considered appropriate to teach those highly educated bureaucrats and notables. Contrary to the old days when monks and temples were respected as holders of knowledge, in the twentieth century lay people in the secular world became much better educated than those who spent their lives in monasteries. Many monks felt hesitant to teach lay elites, because their knowledge was insufficient. Buddhadasa was one of the few monks who could teach religious messages, which have no equivalents in secular areas of study. Instead of just performing the conventional rituals, Buddhadasa investigated Pali scriptures and English works on Buddhism and adapted his understandings of Buddhism for people to apply to their lives. Sanya, who perceived the relevance of Buddhist teachings to lay social life and who actually was part of the elite, helped connect Buddhadasa to new audiences. In other words, Sanya opened up more channels for Buddhadasa to play his role in the Buddhist public sphere.

The other important lay intellectual associate of Buddhadasa was Phraya Latphlithammaprakhan (Wong Latphli; 1894 – 1968)<sup>142</sup>. Before knowing Buddhadasa, Phraya Latphli had already had a successful career as an elite judge. From 1913 to 1917, he studied at the City of London College. In 1917 he returned in Thailand and passed as first class barrister-at-law at the top of his class. By the time he read Buddhadasa's journal in 1933, he was already the director of the criminal court and foreign case court, as well as the director of the appeal court. Towards the end of his career as a judge, in 1941 he became president of the Supreme Court, and from 1953 to 1957 he was appointed Minister of Justice in the cabinet of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram. As a judge in responsible positions, he had a much higher salary than other government

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<sup>141</sup> Suksanti, *7 rop achan sanya*, pp. 141 – 142.

<sup>142</sup> In the following, I will call him by the shortened form, Phraya Latphli.

officials did<sup>143</sup>.

From the viewpoint of Sanya Dhammasakdi, who studied law with Phraya Latphli (then his *bandasak* was Phra Inthapanya: 1922 – 1928; he was conferred the title of Phraya from August 1928), everyone admired him as a smart, energetic teacher who had just accomplished his study in England. He was known as an excellent tennis player, and even received trophies as a golf player, because of his personality to practise eagerly until he was proficient. With the same energy, Sanya wrote that Phraya Latphli pursued studying and practising the *dhamma*<sup>144</sup>.

Buddhadasa called Phraya Latphli “the firstborn comrade among all the folks in the Khana Thammathan” (*sahai thammathan khon hua pi haeng chao khana thammathan thang lai*), or “the number one comrade of the Khana Thammathan”. The intellectual exchanges with Phraya Latphli were what Buddhadasa considered the most important for his thought and activities. Phraya Latphli was one of the first lay elite intellectuals who supported the activities at Suan Mokkh. Buddhadasa recalled:

... when we started the activities of the Khana Thammathan and Suan Mokkh, [our activities were looked on] suspiciously, as those of such crazy people as Narin Klung, who was working about the same time, because everything [we did] was out of the ordinary, and of the nature that they did not believe that we could do. However, [Phraya Latphli] held out a helping hand when he knew about us, even from the very first year of the tri-monthly journal, *Phutthasasana*, which was launched in 1933<sup>145</sup>.

Phraya Latphli even offered to work for the Khana Thammathan’s *dhamma* propagation activities by throwing away his career as a returnee from overseas education and as an elite bureaucrat. Buddhadasa replied that the activities were not so great for someone to do such a thing. Instead of putting this idea into practice, Phraya Latphli became the best friend for Buddhadasa to discuss his thinking with and the best supporter of the Khana Thammathan and Suan Mokkh<sup>146</sup>. In terms of material support, Phraya Latphli

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<sup>143</sup> “Prawat phraya latphlithammaprakhan”, Khana thammathan lae phu thi khaorop nai khunnatham khong phraya latphlithammaprakhan (The Khana Thammathan and a group which respect the moral principles of Phraya Latphlithammaprakhan) (ed.), *Mahawitthayalai chiwit khong phutthathat phikkhu, panya nai phutthasasana nikai sen khong khun prachak* (A university of life by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, and Insight in the Zen School of Buddhism by Khun Prachak) (A cremation volume for Phraya Latphlithammaprakhan, 19 September 1968), pp. ko. – tho.

<sup>144</sup> Sanya Thammasak (Sanya Dhammasakdi), “Kham ramluk” (A note of memory), *Anuson nai ngan sadet phra ratch damnoen phra ratcha than phloeng sop: phraya latphlithammaprakhan (wong latphli)* (Commemoration for the cremation: Phraya Latphlithammaprakhan (Wong Latphli)) (19 September 1968).

<sup>145</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Anumothana” (Blessing), Khana Thammathan et al., *Mahawitthayalai chiwit khong Phutthathat Phikkhu ...*, p. (4).

<sup>146</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Anumothana”, pp. (4) – (5).

funded the construction of enough *kuti* for the increasing numbers of monks at Suan Mokkh, he provided robes for each monk, and also brown sugar every month for monks there to drink in the evening. His financial support was helpful for Suan Mokkh, which otherwise was started only with the savings of Buddhadasa's and Thammathat's mother<sup>147</sup>.

In 1938, Phraya Latphli first visited Suan Mokkh together with his judicial colleagues, Phraya Pharotratchasuphit (Choi Hemachan; 1885 – 1970) and Sanya Dhammasakdi<sup>148</sup>. This was only a year after the visit of Phra Phutthakhosachan (Charoen), and was one of the first occasions for Buddhadasa to receive a visit from lay elite intellectuals from Bangkok<sup>149</sup>. Buddhadasa commented that these three were all good readers of his works and the journal, *Phutthasasana*, and inspired by Phraya Latphli, good readers increased<sup>150</sup>.

Phraya Latphli was also very important for Buddhadasa's intellectual development. Every time Phraya Latphli bought books, he bought two copies: one for himself and the other for Buddhadasa. For example, he bought the books of Krishnamurti, and the *Complete Works of Vivekananda*, who was the teacher of Swami Satyananda Puri, a renowned Hindu scholar settled in Thailand<sup>151</sup>. Also, Phraya Latphli introduced Buddhadasa to famous religious teachers in Bangkok, such as Phra Phatthanta Wilasa, a Burmese Abhidhamma teacher, and Swami Satyananda Puri, with whom Buddhadasa discussed Vedanta philosophy and the history of Indian philosophy, also perhaps through whom he studied Sanskrit<sup>152</sup>.

Moreover, Buddhadasa's translations of the Zen books, the *Sutra of Wei Lang* and *The Zen teaching of Huang Po*, became famous, these books were first introduced

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<sup>147</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 184; Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Anumothana", p. (5).

<sup>148</sup> Phraya Pharotratchasuphit (in the following I will call him in short, Phraya Pharot) was also an important member of the Buddhist Association of Thailand. He was the Association's president and vice-president several times. He is also known as the first contemporary Thai to write a book on vegetarianism through the influence of Phra Lokanatha (*Thammabannakan nai ngan phra ratcha than phoeng sop phraya pharotratchasuphitthammaphiwithhepsuphabodi (choi hemachan)* (A writing on the *dharmma* at the cremation of Phraya Pharotratchasuphit (Choi Hemachan)) (1970); Phraya Pharotratchasuphit, *Witthi prakop ahan mangsawirat* (Recipes for vegetarian dishes) (Bangkok: Chomrom Phim Thammathan Pao Keng Teng)).

<sup>149</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 196.

<sup>150</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Anumothana", p. (6).

<sup>151</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 389, 515.

<sup>152</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Anumothana", p. (6); *Phutthathat ramluk*, pp. 33, 41, 45; Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 509 – 512, 515 – 517.

to him by Phraya Latphli. At first, Buddhadasa said that he was not capable of translating an English book, but Phraya Latphli insisted that Buddhadasa could do it. He told Buddhadasa that the English in the book *Sutra of Wei Lang*, was quite easy, but to have the right interpretation was difficult. He said that because the book had ordinary words and sentences but with deep meanings, it could not be translated properly without an understanding of the true *dhamma*<sup>153</sup>. Phraya Latphli encouraged Buddhadasa to translate and publish all the chapters as a series in *Phutthasasana*. In order to make it more easily for Buddhadasa, Phraya Latphli made a draft translation of the first chapter, and let Buddhadasa edit it and continue the rest by himself<sup>154</sup>. Buddhadasa further checked his translation with a Chinese Zen Buddhist preacher, Tan Mo Siang. Tan Mo Siang even indicated the mistranslation present in the English translation by Wong Mu-lam from the original Chinese. Buddhadasa adopted the original meaning of the Chinese text that Tan Mo Siang suggested in his translation into Thai<sup>155</sup>.

According to Buddhadasa, what Phraya Latphli wanted was

... the “*dhamma*”, not Buddhism. Studying Buddhism was [for Phraya Latphli] to acquire or to reach what is called the “*dhamma*”, which does not belong to any particular religion<sup>156</sup>.

Phraya Latphli was especially interested in Krishnamurti, who, according to Buddhadasa,

... taught the *dhamma* which is a salvation for human beings by not necessarily concerned with religion, [so] ultimately abolish attachment to any religion, ideology, association, or groups<sup>157</sup>.

Because of the influence of Krishnamurti, Phraya Latphli’s understanding of Buddhism was unique. Buddhadasa explained his understanding as follows:

To sink deep into the liberal/liberated ideas, just as the thought of Krishnamurti, was the foundation of thought and desire of the mind or spirit of [Phraya Latphli]. [It was also] used in the search for the “*dhamma*” of Buddhism, which is not limited to Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or others, which were reformed as Zen Buddhism and so on<sup>158</sup>.

These characteristics of Phraya Latphli’s understandings of Buddhism, religious teachings, and the *dhamma* would have been shared with Buddhadasa.

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<sup>153</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 501.

<sup>154</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Anumothana”, pp. (3) – (4).

<sup>155</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp.501 – 502.

<sup>156</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Anumothana”, p. (8).

<sup>157</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Anumothana”, p. (8).

<sup>158</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Anumothana”, pp. (8) – (9).

Buddhadasa's leap from the Theravada Buddhist scriptures to his own integration of various ideas in other schools of Buddhism and other religions must have been rooted in the intellectual exchanges with Phraya Latphli. In this way, Buddhadasa's thought was enriched by non-Theravāda schools and consequently also became controversial for Thai Buddhists.

Phraya Latphli and Buddhadasa seem to have been excited to talk with each other about these topics. Buddhadasa said that they wrote letters every week for many years, and when Buddhadasa went to Bangkok, they escaped from other visitors to talk just by themselves<sup>159</sup>. Although unfortunately their letters seem to have already been lost when Buddhadasa wrote his memoir of Phraya Latphli when the latter died in 1968, their intellectual exchanges were most significant for the development of Buddhadasa's thought. Phraya Latphli was one of the most important discussants discovered by Buddhadasa in the Buddhist public sphere through publishing his journal. Also, based on the inspiration from their discussions, Buddhadasa further nurtured his own thoughts and expressed them to the public.

In this chapter, I have examined important background for and experiences of Buddhadasa in the early twentieth century, especially up to the late 1930s. By this time Buddhadasa's intellectual interests were growing, the education in basic doctrine prevailed, and he had critical opinions about the current situation of Buddhism. Also, the development of print media and the overseas experience of some privileged bureaucrats brought the ideas about non-traditional approaches to Buddhism in international Buddhist movements. Among educated Thai individuals there was a growing demand for understanding and the practical applications of the *dhmma* to everyday life. Buddhadasa's family members, including his uncle, brother and himself were also in this current. Buddhadasa and his brother, Thammathat, developed their intellectual concerns in their respective circles through expressing and discussing their opinions with their friends. The two brothers found interests in Buddhism through their separate experiences, and they supported each other in the activities of Buddhism as monk and as layman. In particular, their co-operation in the publication of the journal,

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<sup>159</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Anumothana", p. (7).



*Phutthasasana*, was most significant for *dhamma* propagation in the Buddhist public sphere. As a result, Buddhadasa led the contemporary Thai Buddhist world as a progressive intellectual monk, and he was supported in this by both academic elders in the Sangha and lay elite intellectuals. In response to the journal, Buddhadasa acquired important associates who inspired him in his intellectual pursuits.

At the same time, the inspiration that Buddhadasa gave to the Thai Buddhist public encouraged people to assist Buddhadasa's teaching to become widely disseminated in society. In the next chapter, I will trace these propagation activities.

## Chapter II Propagation of the *dhamma* by Buddhadasa's followers

As I have examined in the previous chapter, Buddhadasa developed his intellectual concerns inspired by interactions taking place in his contemporary public sphere. More opportunities to contact different ideas were made available to Buddhadasa by the development of scriptural studies and education for Thai monks and lay Buddhists, by the growing demand to participate in authentic Buddhist practice among the laity, and by communications with international Buddhist movements. Even though Buddhadasa was born and spent most of his time in a provincial town, Chaiya, he consistently acquired new information and ideas, especially in exchanges with close relatives, such as his uncle and brother, who had more opportunities to contact the literate classes in Bangkok. Buddhadasa became involved in the Buddhist public sphere through his writings in the journal *Phutthasasana*, which he and his brother started publishing as a part of the activities of the Khana Thammathan in 1933.

Some of the readers of Buddhadasa were profoundly impressed and indebted to his teaching for providing a meaning to their life. They chose to dedicate some of their wealth and energy to propagate his teaching further for the benefit of others. Through those dedicated lay followers who respected his teaching as the very *dhamma* or the essential teaching of Buddhism, Buddhadasa became more and more widely known to the people at large. This chapter will examine the development of the propagation of Buddhadasa's teaching by his followers.

In order to spread religious concerns from the small discussion groups around him to the broader society, Buddhadasa and his followers relied on mass communication which developed remarkably in Thailand after the mid-nineteenth century. One of the most significant tools for propagation was the print media, in particular journals and small pocketbooks for free distribution. In Thailand, it is common to donate money for the publishing of some hundreds or thousands of copies of a book to be distributed for free at a commemorative occasion, particularly at a cremation or anniversary. In a cremation volume, the deceased person's biography in brief and condolence messages are published together with a narrative, which the deceased person or the chief mourner considers beneficial for everyone to find out about. Sermons of monks are most often chosen for a cremation volume, probably because sermons can give a didactic

instruction, to nurture morality and insight. Such publication and distribution of commemorative books in turn contributes to the propagation of the message of Buddhism, and also is a major part of the marketing of a publisher who specialises in *dhamma* books<sup>1</sup>. Some followers of certain monks or lay teachers occasionally donate money for publishing sermons for free distribution, and some with a very strong dedication to their master even establish a publishing and printing house in order to publish their master's books and so propagate their teaching more widely. Publishing by individual followers significantly contributes to a wider distribution of a preacher's works. This is also the case for the propagation of Buddhadasa's sermons.

When people were impressed by a sermon in one of Buddhadasa's books, which were either sold or freely distributed, small discussion groups emerged outside the personal circle of the preacher. These small groups are formed at *dhamma* bookshops, among students, and among colleagues at work. Through an inspiration from Buddhadasa, some of them have further developed as associations of Buddhism which have programmes and activities of their own. Their activities include not only publishing booklets for free distribution or at a low cost, but also inviting Buddhadasa and other preachers for *dhamma* lectures, organising public panel discussions at temples, and giving public speeches to transmit particular ideas of Buddhadasa that they have understood.

In Thailand the oral aspect of the *dhamma* propagation is as significant as publication of journals and booklets on the *dhamma*. Not only did Buddhadasa train himself as a preaching monk before even publishing his journals and books, but also oral propagation continued to be promoted by new technologies, such as radio and television broadcasting, as well as cassette tapes and CDs. The role of cassette tapes of sermons is particularly important for the propagation of preaching by Thai monks and lay teachers. Even though Buddhadasa was an intellectual monk who was able to write books, some of his audience preferred to receive his message orally rather than through written or published works. In the case of less educated monks and lay teachers who

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bancha Chaloechaikit, the owner of the publishing house, Samnakphim Sukkhaphap Chai (Mind Health), which specialises in books on health, language textbooks, and *dhamma* books, especially by Buddhadasa, the books on the *dhamma* are sold the most, because people order them as cremation volumes (Bancha Chaloechaikit, interview, Bangkok, 1 August 1998).

were unable to write books, the role of the cassette tape was particularly significant to propagate their ideas. The sermon cassette tapes are sold at each individual preacher's monastery, and also in cassette shops, which specifically deal with many famous preachers' tapes. Direct utterance is a very effective way to transmit the power of a preacher's message.

Through these mass communication technologies, Buddhadasa's innovative idea of Buddhism was propagated to a wider audience in Thai society. In this chapter, I will trace the expansion of the propagation of Buddhadasa's teaching by his lay supporters. First of all, I will examine the journal, *Phutthasasana*, which Buddhadasa and his brother, Thammathat, published as a part of the activities of the Khana Thammathan. Then, I will explore the propagation of the *dhamma* that was expressed by Buddhadasa through lay groups independent of the Khana Thammathan. Among many groups around Buddhadasa I will focus on three groups that represent three important characters. One is the Buddhist Association of Thailand, which has been led by Sanya Dhammasakdi, a pious lay disciple of Buddhadasa, and it had a significant role in transmitting the *dhamma*, especially among the elite and intellectuals in Bangkok. Next is the group of Wat Umong in Chiang Mai, which is headed by Chao Chun Sirorot, and which stands for the propagation of the *dhamma* in the other provinces where distinctive local practice of Buddhism existed. Last is the circle of the Sublime Life Mission, which is organised by Wirot Siriat, together with its fellow associations run by Pun Chongprasoet and Sawai Kaewsom. Through the propagation effort of the last group, Buddhadasa's teaching spread more to the masses.

### 1. The journal *Phutthasasana*

The propagation of the *dhamma* by Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan started with the journal *Phutthasasana*. It has been published every three months from May 1933 with an official permit for publication. In order to distribute a newly launched journal, the Khana Thammathan made an advertisement and had printed a free distribution coupon for their publication in the weekly journal, *Thai khasaem ruam*

*khao*<sup>2</sup>. The first issue of *Phutthasasana* was distributed free to the 133 people who responded to the Khana Thammathan with the free coupon and stamp, and the second issue was also sent to those fourteen people who were too late for the first distribution<sup>3</sup>.

The journal, *Phutthasasana*, which was at first distributed free, was in the beginning usually printed in 1,000 copies. The number of copies printed increased to a peak of 2,500 during Buddhadasa's lifetime<sup>4</sup>. The journal was mailed to subscribers, and payment was made by money order. In order to reduce the cost of sending money orders, the Khana Thammathan contracted with shops in other provinces to become payment agents, such as in Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Songkhla, and Phisanulok<sup>5</sup>. The provincial agent shops had expanded by November 1933 to seven altogether including the ones in Roi Et and Chonburi. According to the advertisements of these shops in *Phutthasasana*, most of the agents, through which *Phutthasasana* attempted distribution, were textbook shops. They dealt with textbooks for schools and monasteries, and with foreign language books in the provinces. In Bangkok the Mahamakut Buddhist Academy's bookshop also retailed their journal, but not many were sold.

Apart from the mail order subscribers, many copies of *Phutthasasana* were ordered by wealthy, faithful readers for free distribution to propagate the *dhamma*. Copies of the journal were preferred for distribution at cremation and other memorial ceremonies, as part of merit making customs in contemporary Thailand. Since journal publishing was a non-profit-seeking activity of the Khana Thammathan, such big orders for distribution were an important contribution both in terms of finance and spreading the message.

The journal *Phutthasasana* was read by Thai students in foreign countries, such as Britain, India, China, and the Philippines<sup>6</sup>, as seen in some article contributors'

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<sup>2</sup> The wife of the owner of *Thai khasaem*, Khun Ying Khachaseni, was from the Chaiya area, and married a man with the title of Phraya. Thammathat contacted the owner of *Thai khasaem* to place the advertisement for his journal, and the *Thai khasaem* agreed to publish the free coupon of *Phutthasasana* (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 212).

<sup>3</sup> "Thalaengkan khong khana thammathan", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (August 1933), p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> According to Metta Phanit, the youngest son of Thammathat who is now responsible for the Mulanithi Thammathan (Dhammadana Foundation), the journal *Phutthasasana* is most recently published in 5,000 copies, and retailed in bookshops through book distributors (Metta Phanit, interview, 4 March 1999).

<sup>5</sup> "Thalaengkan khong khana thammathan", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (August 1933), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> "Chotmai naksuksa num: chak nakrian thai nai muang manila (Philippines)" (A letter of a young

background. Thammathat seems to have sent some copies to the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta so that Samanera Karuna Kusalasai, then a Thai novice who was studying in India, could read and contribute to the journal *Phutthasasana*<sup>7</sup>. Other Thai students abroad seem to have read copies of the journal that their family in Thailand sent to them. Such famous intellectuals as Samak Burawat, a scientist and Marxist philosopher, and Sot Kuramarohit, a socialist thinker, were inspired by the journal and produced some works and articles related to Buddhism while they were in Britain and China respectively<sup>8</sup>. These responses from highly educated Thai students abroad indicate the good academic standard of the journal that was worth reading overseas.

The distribution of the journal suggests the geographical extent where the journal was circulated and read. Even though Buddhadasa and his brother were in a provincial town in Southern Thailand where they wrote, edited and printed their articles, they could communicate with an intellectual audience all over the country and abroad through publishing their journal. The journal itself was a very public space for Buddhist discussion which Buddhadasa and the Khana Thammathan created for Thai intellectuals in 1933, a year after the Constitutional Revolution.

*Phutthasasana* is probably one of the best materials to study the development of Buddhadasa's thoughts, because series of his articles have been collected chronologically from the beginning. However, Buddhadasa did not create his unique, original ideas alone without any relationship to the discussions of other Buddhist intellectuals. Buddhadasa's intellectual position should become clear when his works in *Phutthasasana* are compared with the discussions of Buddhist intellectuals in which Buddhadasa himself was involved. Among various places where discussions on Buddhism took place, panel discussions, lecture gatherings, and publications, the

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student: from a Thai student in Manila (Philippines)), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 2 No. 3 (November 1934), pp. 354 – 357.

<sup>7</sup> Karuna contributed eleven articles from August 1935 to May – August 1942. See footnote 122, Chapter I.

<sup>8</sup> Samak Burawat was inspired by *Phutthasasana*, and wrote *Phutthapratchaya athibai duai wittayasat* (Buddhist philosophy explained by science) (Bangkok: Rongphim song tham, 1937) while he was studying in England (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 554; Samak Burawat, "Suan mokkha-phalaram", *Ha sip pi suan mok: phak nung mua khao phut thung rao* (Fifty years of Suan Mokkh: Part I When they spoke of us) (Bangkok: Suan usom mulanithi, 1982), p. 1157). Sot Kuramarohit contributed three articles in *Phutthasasana*: "Top a'ngun on ruang kanbuat" (Answering A'ngun On about ordination), Vol. 2 No. 4 (February 2477/1935), pp. 418 – 430; "Chotmai naksuksa num" (A letter of a student), Vol. 3 No. 1-2 (May-August 1936), pp. 469 – 476; and "Anatta kap atta"

sequence of Buddhist journals are a good record of the history of ideas among Thai Buddhists. Through an analysis of major Buddhist journals including *Phutthasasana*, discussion trends in contemporary Thai Buddhism and the ideological position of Buddhadasa will be revealed.

From 1933 to the end of the World War II, there were three major journals particularly discussing Buddhism in Thailand, apart from *Thalaengkan Khana Song*, the journal of the Sangha's official announcements. Those three included, Mahamakut Buddhist Academy's *Thammachaksu*, the Khana Thammathan's *Phutthasasana*, and the Buddhist Association of Thailand's *Phuttha-tham* (Buddha *dhamma*). *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana* were coincidentally (re-) started in 1933, and *Phuttha-tham* was begun in 1934. In terms of academic standards, *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana* were more important than *Phuttha-tham* until the end of World War II. Every book and journal had to reduce their print-run toward the end of the war, because paper for publishing books became very expensive and difficult to find. In order to examine the development of Buddhadasa's thoughts in the context of his contemporary discussion of Buddhism, I will compare *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana* until the late 1950s.

From 1933 up until the 1950s and throughout World War II, the two Buddhist academic journals, *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana*, created the major intellectual currents of Buddhism in Thailand. Although both offered opportunities for intellectual exchanges that together created a discussion space, they had their own distinctive characteristics in basic structure and contents. *Thammachaksu* contained articles such as translations of Pali scriptures into Thai, transcribed sermons, essays, award winning questions on the *dhamma*, and news. On the other hand, *Phutthasasana* was originally constructed of three parts: *pak khwam-ru thua pai* (general knowledge), which included articles, award winning *dhamma* questions and news, *pak traipidok plae* (*Tipitaka* translation), and *pak songsoem patibat tham* (*dhamma* practice promotion).

At first glance, both had a section of Pali *Tipitaka* translation, but their orientations were quite different. *Thammachaksu* intended to translate all the Pali scriptures little by little through their series of translations<sup>9</sup>, whereas the Pali translation

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(Non-self and self), Vol. 3 No. 4 (February 2478/1937), pp. 701 – 710.

<sup>9</sup> Phra Maha Thongsup Charuwanno, "Thalaengkan buang ton", *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 22 No. 2 (November 1936), pp. ko. – kho.

section of *Phutthasasana* selected special verses of wit and epigrams usually confined in the inaccessible world of Pali. Buddhadasa's selections included harsh criticism against corrupted practices of monks and their incomplete insight into the *dhamma*, such criticism already existed within the Buddhist scriptures. Buddhadasa drew attention to the *dhamma* in Pali scriptures for non-Pali specialist Buddhists to apply either for their ordained or lay lives, without them needing to read all the scriptural texts to find this.

Second, in *Thammachaksu*, there was little concern with the aspect of practice, whilst *Phutthasasana* provided a special section for it. For the section promoting *dhamma* practice, Buddhadasa translated and edited verses from the Pali *Tipitaka* which related to the practice for overcoming suffering to reach perfect sainthood. The series of this section was named, *Tam roi phra arahan* (Following the footprints of the *arahant*), and became one of the first recognised works of Buddhadasa. Similarly, though published in the scripture translation section, Buddhadasa wrote *Phuttha prawat chak phra ot* (The life of the Buddha in his own words), in which he translated and edited the Buddha's life of *dhamma* practice in order to reach enlightenment. Even though Buddhadasa did not have any particular meditation teacher to study with, unlike the case of forest monks in Northeastern Thailand, he examined the methods that were documented in the Pali scriptures. Just like those academic monks who contributed to *Thammachaksu*, he started as a scholarly *pariyatti* monk by studying Pali and reading as many books as he could find. However, what he found in the scriptural studies was the practise of *vipassanā* meditation as a forest monk, an element of Buddhism ignored by the *pariyatti* monks in Bangkok. Buddhadasa's special role was in this regard. The academic monks in Mahamakut Buddhist Academy and the elders in the Sangha were found to acknowledge that Buddhadasa had rediscovered the reputation of *vipassanā* meditation in Pali scriptures.

Third, in the sections of general articles and sermons, in the beginning the two journals had distinctive characters. For a couple of years after *Thammachaksu* was re-launched in October 1933, this section in *Thammachaksu* was dominated by the transcribed or written sermons of monks. In this tendency of *Thammachaksu*, which was set in place by academic monks, there was little place for lay Buddhists to express their opinions. If any lay people were involved, they were likely to have been formerly



ordained and to have passed ecclesiastical examinations. In this context, lay Buddhists needed to obey the authority of Buddhist academics, otherwise they might merely pay respect to the sacred sermons in a printed form. On the other hand, *Phutthasasana* was not only run by an ordained person, Buddhadasa, but also by his lay brother, Thammathat. Thammathat expressed his excitement and concerns in Buddhism as a lay Buddhist with a higher education in secular society. Thammathat had a column called "Samrap naksuksa num" (For young students) in order to show how the teachings of Buddhism can help the life of young intellectuals who lived outside monasteries, but who were going to be leaders of the country. For example, Thammathat argued that the four *ariya sacca* (four noble truths: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way to the cessation of suffering), are a necessary study for human beings, because other subjects in school never teach this<sup>10</sup>. In this way of presentation, the journal *Phutthasasana* directly responded to concerns of lay Buddhist intellectuals as well.

Another distinctive character of the general section of *Phutthasasana* in contrast with *Thammachaksu* was a wealth of information about Buddhist movements in foreign countries, which centred on the concerns of newly converted Western Buddhists with an educated background. *Thammachaksu* only started reporting some news after October 1936 and publishing translations of foreign language articles after September 1937. Although *Thammachaksu* extensively introduced translations of foreign authors' articles from *The Maha Bodhi* journal after 1937, the translated articles became limited in number by the end of 1942. An opening announcement in the January 1942 issue suggests that there seemed to be some dissatisfaction from a conservative faction about having many translated articles by foreigners<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, *Phutthasasana* had competent translators of English articles, such as Thammathat in the first few years, Bhikkhu Bunchuan Khemaphirat, who returned from Lokanatha's tour in India, and Samanera Karuna Kusalasai, who contributed from the Maha Bodhi Society in Sarnath.

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<sup>10</sup> Thammathat, "Samrap naksuksa num", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (August 1933), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> The announcement did not openly say that there existed some opposing opinions against foreign articles, but it attempted to explain the editorial policy of including various kinds of articles, such as scriptural translation, sermons, and translations of foreign articles. ("Thalaengkan", *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 27 No. 4 (January 1942)). *Thammachaksu* resumed publishing translated articles from foreign journals after the end of World War II.

These translated articles in *Phutthasasana* dealt with the expansion of Buddhism in Europe and America, the present situations in Buddhist countries around the world, and histories of Buddhism in ancient India and in Mahāyāna Buddhist countries. These translators and other readers of foreign articles should have received some influence from Western Buddhists, however, it must not be ignored that instead Thai Buddhists felt proud of their religion, which was becoming more accepted in the Western world, rather than acquiring in a humble way any Western interpretation of Buddhism.

It should also be emphasised that both *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana* intended to introduce and translate the works of Thai authors into English in order to contribute to the propagation of Buddhism in other countries. In 1934, the Khana Thammathan introduced themselves in *The British Buddhist*, an international journal in English<sup>12</sup>. Those translated articles in Thai journals were necessary in order for Thai Buddhists to catch up on the contemporary international movements and to take part in and contribute to it with their tradition of Buddhism.

The other characteristic feature of *Phutthasasana* was its call for argumentative exchanges of different opinions on controversial issues, although *Thammachaksu* also had award winning questions on the *dhamma* that were a kind of method to encourage their readers to participate in the journals and to present their different interpretations<sup>13</sup>. Apart from the *dhamma* questions, *Phutthasasana* liked to discuss controversial issues, such as vegetarianism that Lokanatha Bhikkhu brought to Thailand, and interpretations of the key Buddhist concept, *anattā* (non-self), which is difficult to realise in everyday experience. There were various responses from the readers who agreed, disagreed and were uncertain. Sometimes, the editors, Thammathat and Buddhadasa, wrote an open letter under their pseudonyms to raise questions and provoke answers from readers.

One such example was Thammathat's open letter, under his pseudonym, A'ngun On<sup>14</sup>, who was worried whether he should be ordained as a monk or remain as a

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<sup>12</sup> "From Siam", *The British Buddhist*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (January-March 1934), pp. 114 – 115. Details introduced in Chapter I also support this view. See Footnotes 33 and 34 in Chapter I.

<sup>13</sup> The same editorial style can be found in a journal, *Suksa thammada*, which was published from 1919 until at least 1924 by a lay Buddhist group, and from which Thammathat said that he gained an idea for his journal, *Phutthasasana* (Thammathat, interview). The *Suksa thammada* is held in the National Library of Thailand from vol. 2 (1920) to vol. 6 (1924).

<sup>14</sup> Buddhadasa mentioned that A'ngun On was actually Thammathat in his interview with Phra Pracha (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 216).

layman. A'ngun On wrote that he was bored with the social incidents about which he wrote as a newspaper reporter, but he still wanted to depend on himself instead of alms, to retain his freedom outside the 227 precepts, and was not sure whether monks might exploit fellow countrymen<sup>15</sup>. There were two responses to A'ngun On published in *Phutthasasana*. The first response from Khaisaeng pointed out that A'ngun On's desire to eat whatever he wanted without depending on alms was a *kāma taṇhā* (thirst after sensual pleasure), and defended the true way of living of a monk as thrifty enough not to disturb lay supporters' lives. Khaisaeng insisted that the renounced life is a method to achieve the overcoming of suffering instead of a restriction of freedom, and recommended the Buddha's teachings for lay people who are satisfied with the worldly life<sup>16</sup>. The other response was from Sot Kuramarohit, a communitarian socialist then studying in Beijing. Sot interpreted A'ngun On's question of whether to be ordained or not was actually intended to blame ordained monks' way of living, which is firstly selfish and lazy in exploiting fellow countrymen, and secondly contradicts human nature, such as not being allowed to have a wife. Sot defended the way of monks from his communitarian point of view which analyses that every occupation has a necessary duty and is of equal value in society. Sot understood that the duty of monks is to maintain and succeed in the Buddha's teaching and 227 precepts. This duty of monks cannot be perfected by people with other duties, such as physicians, politicians and soldiers. For those who are willing to determine that they can accept this duty, the 227 precepts were not something that deprives them of the freedom of human beings. Also, Sot argued that when monks do their duty of succeeding in Buddhism and teaching what they have achieved to other people, their role is fair enough in society, not exploitative<sup>17</sup>. These discussions in *Phutthasasana* indicate the journal's reaching a qualified standard, in which it presented a discussion of a concern to educated Buddhists based on reasonable arguments.

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<sup>15</sup> A'ngun on (pseud. Thammathat), "Ruang samrap naksuksa num: chotmai naknangsuphim num" (For young students: a letter from young newspaper reporter), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (May 1934), pp. 172 – 175.

<sup>16</sup> Khaisaeng, "Chotmai top naknangsuphim num", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (August 1934), pp. 296 – 299.

<sup>17</sup> Sot Kuramarohit, "Top a'ngun on ruang kanbuat", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 2 No. 4 (February 2477/1935), pp. 418 – 430.

After the period of the serious shortage of paper at the end of World War II<sup>18</sup>, the discussions in both journals, *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana*, became more active and developed a variety of concerns. The changes in *Thammachaksu* were remarkable. Three new characteristics appeared in the post-war *Thammachaksu*: first, the return of translated articles from English language Buddhist journals; second, the much more frequent participation of lay intellectuals; and third, the growing concerns with other Buddhist traditions and other religions' ideologies. *Thammachaksu* also started publishing English language articles in order to transmit their ideas to foreign readers as well. These new trends reflected the substantial growth of the lay Buddhist groups, such as the Buddhist Association of Thailand (*phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai*) and the Young Buddhist Association of Thailand (*yuwaphutthika samakhom haeng prathet thai*). The intellectual members of these lay Buddhist associations, such as Samak Burawat and Sathian Photinantha, introduced philosophical and historical discussions of Buddhism into the traditional Buddhist academia dominated by scripturally expert monks. The role of lay intellectuals, particularly those in the Young Buddhist Association, were supported by Sujivo Bhikkhu (who later disrobed and took the name Suchip Punyanuphap), a young Pali scholar monk in Mahamakut Buddhist University. The post-war period by the end of the 1950s was one of the most prosperous eras of *Thammachaksu*.

During this period, *Phutthasasana* also continued vigorous discussions, which shared the same intellectual trends of Buddhism appearing in *Thammachaksu*. Although *Phutthasasana* had already had two of these elements, the ideas of foreign Buddhists' and lay people's participation from the beginning, *Phutthasasana* in the post-war period became responsive to the discussions in *Thammachaksu*. For example, after *Thammachaksu* published a translation of Christmas Humphreys' article, "Twelve Principles of Buddhism" in June – October 1946<sup>19</sup>, Buddhadasa published his

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<sup>18</sup> *Phutthasasana* issued only one volume of thirty-eight pages with bad quality paper for two years in 1944 and 1945, and another volume of twenty-one pages for the year 1946. It got back to normal to appear every three months after February 1947. *Thammachaksu* was also affected by war and reduced publication from monthly to every four months from October 1945, and the papers of the two volumes in 1945 and 1946 (Vol. 31 No. 1 – 4 (October 1945 – January 1946), Vol. 31 No. 5 – 8 (February – May 1946)) were very bad quality. The paper quality of *Thammachaksu* returned to normal from June – September 1946, but appeared every three to two months after then.

<sup>19</sup> "Lak 12 kho haeng phra phutthasasana khong nai khritmat hamfre, nayok ho phutthasasanik haeng krung london" (The twelve principles of Buddhism by Mr. Christmas Humphreys, the

translation of the same article in *Phutthasasana* in February 1947<sup>20</sup>. This translation was probably Buddhadasa's first translation of a long English essay, which indicates the improvement in his English by then, and he became very famous for his beautiful Thai phrases that conveyed the original message better than the other translation in *Thammachaksu*<sup>21</sup>.

More important was that *Thammachaksu* and *Phutthasasana* together created an intellectual enthusiasm in Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism, among Thai Buddhists whose interest in Buddhism had originated in the Pali scriptures. In the great popularity of Mahāyāna Buddhism from the late 1940s, the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, especially Tan Mo Siang (陳慕禪) and Sathian Phothinantha, had significant roles. Tan Mo Siang was a Taichew-speaking Chinese Zen Buddhist lay preacher at the Institute for Studies of Chinese Buddhism (中華佛學研究社). Sathian Phothinantha, who was perfectly bilingual in Chinese and Thai, often translated Tan Mo Siang's preaching. Even though general ideas on the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism had been translated from English articles and published in *Phutthasasana* and also a few in *Thammachaksu* before the end of the war, further philosophical ideas from Mahāyāna Buddhism would not have been so easy to be comprehended without these two Chinese-Thai intellectuals.

Tan Mo Siang and Sathian were essential to Buddhadasa's interest in and translation of an English text on Mahāyāna Buddhism into Thai. In February 1947, *Phutthasasana* published Buddhadasa's public lecture at the Institute for Studies of Chinese Buddhism, entitled "Kho khuan sap kiaw kap lak phutthasasana rawang nikai tang tang" (Points that should be known about different schools of Buddhism)<sup>22</sup>. This

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President of London Buddhist Lodge), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 31 No. 9 – 12 (June – October 1946), pp. 77 – 84. No translator's name was given.

<sup>20</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Lak phutthasasana 12 kho khong hamfre" (The twelve principles of Buddhism by Humphreys), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (February 1947), pp. 5 – 33.

<sup>21</sup> According to a biographer of Chitti Tinsaphat (1909 – 1995), Chitti started following the teachings of Buddhadasa, because he reached a deep understanding of the book through Buddhadasa's translation of it, although he did not have much understanding and impression from other translation of the same book by other elder monk (Khana nittisat lae mulanithi nittisat mahawitthayalai thammasat (The Faculty of Law and the Foundation for the Faculty of Law, Thammasat University) (ed.), "Prawat lae phonngan sastrachan chitti tinsaphat" (A history and work of Professor Chitti Tinsaphat) (23 January 1990) (A commemoration video for the eighty year anniversary of Prof. Chitti Tinsaphat)). Chitti served as a judge, the dean of the Faculty of Law at Thammasat University, and a member of the Privy Council.

<sup>22</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Kho khuan sap kiao kap lak phutthasasana rawang nikai tang tang",

indicates Buddhadasa's concern for Buddhist ecumenism. In the next issue, *Phutthasasana* started Buddhadasa's famous translations on Zen Buddhism, *Sutra of Wei Lang*, from English into Thai<sup>23</sup>. For this translation, Buddhadasa sought advice from Tan Mo Siang about the original Chinese concepts of Zen Buddhism. It has to be noted that Buddhadasa was not at odds with his contemporary Thai Buddhist academic monks, although many scholars have indicated that a Mahāyāna element is a characteristic of Buddhadasa's thought, which deviated from the orthodox Theravāda Buddhism of Thailand. Contrarily, one of the most orthodox Thai Buddhist academics in Mahamakut Buddhist University was also excited with the new knowledge about another school of thought in Buddhism. Sathian's articles and translations in particular were frequently published in *Thammachaksu*. Buddhadasa said that his translations of English texts on Mahāyāna Buddhism were appreciated by everyone because they helped to clarify a previously unknown philosophy<sup>24</sup>.

Not only other traditions of Buddhism but also other philosophies became of interest to academic Buddhists who expressed their opinions in the Buddhist journals. Hinduism especially attracted Thai intellectual Buddhists' concerns in the 1930s through the impact of Swami Satyananda Puri, a Hindu philosopher who had migrated from India to Thailand. Even though in the old days Thai cultures were influenced by Indian cultures, contemporary Thais were unaware of these connections. Swami Satyananda Puri was often invited to give public lectures, his lectures were published in *Thammachaksu* up until the early 1940s<sup>25</sup>, and Buddhadasa also visited him for private lessons<sup>26</sup>. However, the Swami's "Greater India" point of view was not welcome to Thai Buddhists. In one of his speeches at Chulalongkorn University in 1932 entitled, "The origin of Buddhist thought", he regarded Buddhism as a part of Hindu philosophy<sup>27</sup>.

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*Phutthasasana*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (February 1947), pp. 35 – 48.

<sup>23</sup> Wong Mu Lam, "Sut khong wei lang" (Sutra of Wei Lang), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 15 No. 2 (May 1947), pp. 96 – 123.

<sup>24</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 501.

<sup>25</sup> Sawami Sathayananthaburi (Swami Satyananda Puri), "Ruang winyan" (About *viññāna*), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 26 No. 8 (May 1941), pp. 890 – 902; Sawami Sathayananthapri, "Khwam-kao-na haeng sasana" (Progress in religion), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 26 No. 11 (August 1941), pp. 1184 – 1188; Sawami Sathayananthapri, "Kala haeng sasana" (Time in religion), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 27 No. 10 (July 1942), pp. 879 – 884.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter I, p. 63 and footnote 152.

<sup>27</sup> The date of the speech is uncertain. His speech was given in English, and published in: D. N. Das (ed.), *Speeches and writings of Swami Satyananda* (Bangkok: Thai-Bharata Cultural Lodge, 1940),

Thai Buddhist intellectuals, such as Prince Wan<sup>28</sup> and Phra Ratchathamnithet<sup>29</sup>, critically responded to the Swami in Chulalongkorn University's journal, *Mahawitthayalai*.

In the early 1940s Thai Buddhists were antagonistic to adherents of Catholicism. Because of the nationalist sentiment during the Thai-French Indochinese Conflict, both *Phutthasasana* and *Thammachaksu* became critical of Roman Catholicism represented by French missionaries. Buddhadasa seems to have been affected by this atmosphere, and he wrote a critical article on Roman Catholicism in *Phutthasasana*, "Top panha batluang" (Answering questions of a Catholic father) in November 1939 – February 1940<sup>30</sup>. An article with a similar reaction is found in *Thammachaksu* in February 1940<sup>31</sup>.

In the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand after World War II, Thai Buddhists appear to have been keenly interested in other systems of religious thought compared and contrasted with Buddhism. In Mahamakut Buddhist University, Sujivo Bhikkhu started teaching "Comparative religions" around 1946 as a new subject for student monks. He published his lecture notes as a textbook in 1961<sup>32</sup>. Also, it seemed to be in the post-war period when Buddhadasa, after his initial prejudice against Christianity, started to be interested in inter-religious dialogue. *Phutthasasana* in August 1948 reprinted an article from the Catholic journal, *Udomphan*, which was edited by a promoter of inter-religious dialogue, Father John Ulliana<sup>33</sup>. By the early 1960s, Buddhadasa had developed his intellectual associations with other religions, such as the Catholic John Ulliana just mentioned, and the Muslim Haj Prayun Wathanayakun.

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pp. 1 – 38.

<sup>28</sup> M. C. Varnvaidya Varavarn (Wan Waithayakon), "My impressions of Swami Satyananda Puri's Lecture on the 'Origin of Buddhistic thoughts'", *Mahawitthayalai* (University), Vol. 10 No. 5 (1932), pp. 630 – 633.

<sup>29</sup> Phra Ratchathamnithet, "Khvam-nuk chua khana" (A thought in a moment), *Mahawitthayalai*, Vol. 10 No. 6 (1932), pp. 813 – 819.

<sup>30</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Top panha batluang", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 7 No. 3 – 4 (November 1939 – February 1940), pp. 280 – 335.

<sup>31</sup> Mom Chao Chatchawarit Kasemsan, "Kham top panha khong batluang khong mom chao chatchawarit", *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 24 No. 10 (February 2482/1939), pp. 959 – 973.

<sup>32</sup> Suchip Punyanuphap, "Khamnam nai kanphim khrang thi raek" (Introduction for the first printing), *Sasana priap thiap* (Comparative religions) (Bangkok: Mahamakut Ratchawitthayalai, 1961, 1997), p. kho.

<sup>33</sup> "Sut thai lua khon diaw" (At the end, being left alone), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (August 1948).

*Phutthasasana* published an article by Prayun in 1953<sup>34</sup> and one by Buddhadasa in 1963 on whether the *dhamma* is “God”<sup>35</sup>.

In comparison with the Buddhist academics in the Mahamakut Buddhist University, who were the main contributors to the journal *Thammachaksu* up until the early 1950s, Buddhadasa can be seen to have shared contemporary concerns in the Buddhist public sphere at that time, rather than deviating from the academics who were closest to the Sangha administration. However, Buddhadasa and the academics in *Thammachaksu* gradually became differentiated around the late 1950s or the early 1960s. During this period and after, Buddhadasa further developed his understanding of the world and religion on the basis of Theravāda Buddhism through dialogues with other traditions of Buddhism and with other religions. On the other hand, during the 1960s and 1970s in the midst of the Cold War period, *Thammachaksu* took up political incidents and Buddhism, such as Buddhism in Vietnam by Kukrit Pramoj<sup>36</sup>. Those articles indicate that *Thammachaksu* became closer to such politicians as Kukrit, who was politically supportive to the status quo.

From the early 1950s, *Phutthasasana* became a less significant journal for discussions in the Buddhist public sphere, the same as *Thammachaksu* around the late 1950s. Instead, *Phuttha-tham*, the journal of the Buddhist Association, and *Phutthachak* (A realm of Buddhism), a journal of Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University, became more substantial from the 1950s and the late 1960s respectively. During the Cold War period in the 1960s and 1970s, *Phutthachak* incorporated social issues into Buddhism, especially after 1969, and around the same time, the group of socially engaged Buddhists, including Sulak Sivaraksa, started contributing to the journal<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Prayun Wathayanakun, “Wan idilawat ha”, *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 21 No. 3 – 4 (August – November 1953), pp. 127 – 132.

<sup>35</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, “Thamma khu phra chao?” (Is the *dhamma* “God?”), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 31 No. 3 – 4 (August – November 1963).

<sup>36</sup> For examples, Khukrit Pramot (Kukrit Pramoj), “Chalachon nai wiatnam tai” (Uprisings in South Vietnam), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 48 No. 11 (August 1963); Khukrit Pramot, “Hetkan nai wiatnam tai” (Incidents in South Vietnam), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 48 No. 12 (September 1963); Khukrit Pramot, “Khwam-wunwai thi wiatnam tai” (Confusions in South Vietnam), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 49 No. 1 (October 1963); Khukrit Pramot, “Phuttha borisat nai wiatnam tai” (Buddhists in South Vietnam), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 49 No. 2 (November 1963); Khukrit Pramot, “Ratthaban wiatnam tai kap phuttha borisat” (South Vietnamese government and Buddhists), *Thammachaksu*, Vol. 49 No. 2 (December 1963).

<sup>37</sup> Before the 14 October uprising in 1973, Sulak’s articles in *Phutthachak* included in the special issue, “Khrongkan oprom phra phikkhusu phua songsoem kan-phatthana thong thin” (The project of



*Phutthasasana* became smaller in terms of pages and had fewer articles from around the 1960s<sup>38</sup>, but Buddhadasa's lectures and interviews were very often published in *Phuttha-tham* and *Phutthachak* to represent a Buddhist point of view in the social turmoil.

When the journal *Phutthasasana* became less significant, Buddhadasa had already become important in the Buddhist public sphere. Buddhadasa said that the editors became tired of working on the journal, and it gradually took on the role of just a newsletter of the Khana Thammathan<sup>39</sup>. Instead, Buddhadasa was invited to talk in the Buddhist Association of Thailand in Bangkok from 1940, and famous newspaper reporters summarised Buddhadasa's lectures at the Buddhist Association in their papers. Also, the Suwichan Bookshop opened in Bangkok in 1953 specifically to publish and retail Buddhadasa's books. In other words, by the early 1950s, these other places provided more opportunities than his journal for Buddhadasa to propagate his understanding of the *dhamma* in the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand.

## 2. Propagation to elite intellectuals: The Buddhist Association of Thailand

The Buddhist Association of Thailand, or *Phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai nai phra boromruchupatham*, gave Buddhadasa significant opportunities to become known among intellectuals in Bangkok, even though the association was not an

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training monks for promoting rural development), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 23 No. 7 (July 1969); Sulak Siwarak, "Wat kap kan-anurak sinlapakam lae saphap waetlom" (Temples and fine arts and environment conservation), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 26 No. 12 (December 1972); So. Siwarak, "Champen tong mi sasana ru mai" (Is it necessary for us to have religion or not?), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 27 No. 2 (February 1973), pp. 22 – 26; So. Siwarak, "Damrong chiwit yu phua arai" (For what do we live?), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 27 No. 3 (March 1973), pp. 12 – 16. The articles of Sulak and his group of engaged Buddhists often appeared again near to the 6 October coup in 1976. Their articles included: Tit Nat Han (Thich Nhat Hanh), "Baep fuk hat samrap charoen sati", *Phutthachak*, Vol. 30 No. 4-5 (April-May 1976), pp. 5 – 11; Nikolat Bennet (Nicolas Bennett?), "Santi withi kap kan-sawaeng ha thang thi sam" (The peaceful method and pursuit of the third way), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 30 No. 6-7 (June-July 1976); Prawet Wasi (Prawase Wasi), "Thammai son tham mai dai phon" (Why do we not receive a result?), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 30 No. 7 (July 1976); Sulak Siwarak, "An nuang ma chak kham samphat than kittiwuttho phikkhu" (In relation to the interview of Ven. Kittivuddho Bhikkhu), *Phutthachak*, Vol. 30 No. 7 (July 1976), pp. 23 – 25. From around August 1976 when the 6 October coup was approaching, and the violence of counter-insurgency escalated, articles that were related to politics and society disappeared from *Phutthachak*, and by 1977 the journal only published articles on Pali study and English literature.

<sup>38</sup> Buddhadasa said that he and Thammathat gradually got tired of working on the journal, and it recently became a newsletter of the Thammathan Mulanithi (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 217).

<sup>39</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 217.

organisation aimed solely at propagating Buddhadasa's preaching. In fact, the most central figure of the association, Sanya Dhammasakdi, who has been elected to the President many times, related the personal significance of Buddhadasa for the association as being, "The inspiration by which I accepted the load of working for the Buddhist Association until today was the inspiration that I received from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, though it was indirect"<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, this most long-lived and substantial lay Buddhist association in Thailand had the same feature of Buddhadasa's teaching that indicated a way for lay people to overcome suffering, the highest goal of Buddhism. The Buddhist Association of Thailand promotes the idea of giving more active roles to the laity in Buddhism, which has traditionally been represented by the Sangha, the association of the ordained monks. In this section, I will explore two aspects of the Buddhist Association of Thailand, first, as a development of lay Buddhist involvement, and second, as an important place for Buddhadasa's preaching to Bangkok intellectuals.

#### The establishment of the Buddhist Association of Thailand

The Buddhist Association of Thailand<sup>41</sup> was established on Magha Puja Day, 28 February 1934, by a group of bureaucrats under the rule of the People's Party who were interested in Buddhism. The establishment of the Buddhist Association was discussed among five persons, namely Luang Siriratmaitri (former secretary of the Embassy of Thailand in London and a member of the People's Party), Luang Woraphakphinit (secretary-general of the Board of Audit), Phra Ratchathamnithet (Phian Ratchathamnithet; 1891 – 1965) (the director of the Department of Religious Affairs), Luang Ronasitthiphichai (the director of the Department of Publicity and a

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<sup>40</sup> Suksanti Chirachariyawet (ed.), *7 rop achan sanya* (Seventh twelve-year cycle [i.e., eighty-four years] of Achan Sanya) (Bangkok: Mulanithi nitthisat, Mahawitthayalai thammasat, 1991), p. 149.

<sup>41</sup> The following history of the Buddhist Association of Thailand is based on: Sanya Thammasak (Sanya Dhammasakdi), "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma nai 35 pi khong Phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai nai phra boromarachupatham" (The history of establishment, works, and transition in the thirty-five years of the Buddhist Association of Thailand under Royal Patronage), *Kham thalaeng kitchakan nai rop pi phutthasakkarat 2533 khong phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai nai phra boromarachupatham* (The announcement of the activities in the year 1990 of the Buddhist Association of Thailand under Royal Patronage) (Bangkok: Samnakngan khong Phutthasamakhom haeng Prathet Thai, 1992), pp. 5 – 30; Sanya Thammasak, *Nathi khong phutthasamakhom* (The duty of the Buddhist Association) (Bangkok: Phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai, 1961).

member of the People's Party), and Sanya Dhammasakdi (then an assistant judge at the Civil Court)<sup>42</sup>. Among the thirty-three original committee members for the establishment of the Buddhist Association, Sanya regarded Phra Ratchathamnithet as the most important supporter. He provided a place to meet and was officially in the position of director of the Department of Religious Affairs<sup>43</sup>.

While they were either doing their work or studying in London, Luang Siriratmaitri, Luang Woraphakphinit, and Sanya Dhammasakdi were impressed by the work of the British Maha Bodhi Society. They felt that they would like to make a lay Buddhist association that contributed to the propagation of Buddhism, especially in order to support the Italian monk, Phra Lokanatha, who brought the idea of sending a Buddhist mission of a hundred monks and novices from Thailand to the world around February 1934. Sanya explained that the atmosphere of that time was an excitement in attempting something new after the Constitutional Revolution in 1932, and a curiosity about a foreign white monk, Phra Lokanatha<sup>44</sup>.

For the establishment of a lay Buddhist association, there was some sort of scepticism among the Sangha. Originally the name of the association was "Phuttha-tham samakhom", or the Buddha-Dhamma Association. As far as Sanya remembered, this name was because the association should be an adherent to the *dhamma* of the Buddha, and propagate the *dhamma* of the Buddha to the people. However, the association was criticised for ignoring the Sangha because the Sangha was the only one of the triple gems of Buddhism excluded from the name. A few years later, they changed the name to "Phuttha-samakhom", or literally the Buddha's Association, and when the association's activities were under way, such misunderstandings disappeared<sup>45</sup>.

In fact, the Buddhist Association of Thailand did not cause any problems for the Sangha, unlike the preceding lay Buddhist association of Narin Phasit, who often challenged the authority of the Sangha in some understandings of texts and by his

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<sup>42</sup> *Anuson nai ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop: phra ratchathamnithet (phian ratchathamnithet)* (Commemoration for the cremation: Phra Ratchathamnithet (Phian Ratchathamnithet)) (11 April 1966). The political affiliation of some of these people to the People's Party was indicated by Prof. Eiji Murashima. I am grateful for his advice.

<sup>43</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", pp. 7–8.

<sup>44</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 7.

profoundly innovative attempts to restore the female monastic order. Also, the recognition of the Buddhist Association can be understood in the situation after the Constitutional Revolution in 1932. By this Revolution, some important Thammayut members of the Elders' Council, who came from a royalist background, felt threatened<sup>46</sup>, and the prestige of the Sangha became perhaps shaken or less certain than the rule of the absolute monarchies which had been supporting the Sangha. On the other hand, some of the important members of the Buddhist Association had connections with the People's Party, which overthrew the system of absolute monarchy. In other words, the lay Buddhists in the Buddhist Association belonged to the new politically powerful elite circle, which became more confident in itself in contrast to the somewhat shaken authority of the Sangha.

However, the actual activities of the Buddhist Association were nothing challenging, but in fact co-operated with the Sangha. Sanya wrote,

... this association never thought to compete with the *bhikkhu's* Sangha, which has had the duty to propagate the *dhamma* of the Buddha. Instead, this Association works as a disciple of the monks, serves monks, and invites those [lay people] who do not respect monks to respect monks<sup>47</sup>.

Its activities had two dimensions: one, the enforcement of the traditional lay role of *dāna* to the monks; the other was a new role, that is propagation. As for its first activity, the Buddhist Association organised an alms-giving ceremony of the people on Visakha Puja Day in 1934. On this occasion, the Association invited 1,250 monks and novices, headed by the Supreme Patriarch, to the schoolyard of the Suan Kulap High School. Since the following year, 1935, the Buddhist Association has been assigned the alms-giving ceremony on New Year's Day at the Sanam Luang (Phrameru Ground)<sup>48</sup>. Apart from ceremonial alms-giving, the Buddhist Association also supported the welfare of monks and novices by providing textbooks on *vinaya*, meeting medical expenses, and practical arrangements when they had to escape from bomb damage during World War II<sup>49</sup>. These activities were a systematisation of the traditional lay role towards monks, but were not as innovative as the other role, the propagation of the

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<sup>46</sup> Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest recollections: wandering monks in twentieth-century Thailand* (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 1997), p. 187.

<sup>47</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", pp. 18 – 20.

*dhamma* through newly developed communication technologies.

For the propagation of the *dhamma*, the Buddhist Association held various kinds of activities: publishing journals, free distribution books, holding schoolchildren's essay competitions<sup>50</sup>, regular public lectures, radio broadcasting of *dhamma* talks<sup>51</sup>, and arranging religious instruction in schools<sup>52</sup>. From the beginning publication of Buddhist journals has been one of the most important propagation activities of the Association. The Buddhist Association published the monthly journal, *Phuttha-tham* (the Buddha's *dhamma*), from May 1934 until it was faced with a financial deficit in May 1935. They replaced *Phuttha-tham* with the tri-monthly journal, *Ramruk* (Memory), from 1935 to 1939. When *Ramruk* experienced financial difficulties, they published instead *Nangsu thalaengkan khong phutthasamakhom* (The newsletter of the Buddhist Association) until 1942. After the period of commodity shortage during the war, they restarted publication in October 1951 with the monthly journal, *Phuttha-tham*, which continues until today<sup>53</sup>.

The regular public lecture was the other propagation activity that the Buddhist Association conducted from 1934 onwards, soon after its establishment. The regular public lecture was not very popular in the beginning, so the preachers were not very happy to give lectures to such small audiences of around ten<sup>54</sup>. Sanya analysed a reason of its unpopularity as,

... there were not many speakers who could accept to expound the *dhamma* for 'phu-ru', or knowledgeable people. This was very unusual at that time<sup>55</sup>.

In other words, the preachers were not as educated as the main committee members of

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<sup>50</sup> This also began in 1934, and was probably the first activity for youth in Thailand, according to Sanya (Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", pp. 12 – 13).

<sup>51</sup> The Buddhist Association was given an opportunity to propagate the *dhamma* on the radio from the Department of Publicity by an offer for it to send once a month an article on Buddhism "for the propagation and promotion of good morality of people" (Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 17). In 1965, the Buddhist Association broadcast *dhamma* lectures and *dhamma* conversations sixty-seven times, a total of forty hours; in 1966, fifty-three times for twenty-seven hours; and in 1967, forty-two times for thirty hours (Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 17).

<sup>52</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 12. Aside from the journals, the Buddhist Association published and distributed books on the *dhamma*: 36,489 copies in 1965, 43,000 copies in 1966, and 36,610 copies in 1967 (Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 12).

<sup>54</sup> Sanya Thammasak, *Nathi khong Phutthasamakhom*, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 15.

the Buddhist Association, who were the country's elite bureaucrats, some of whom had even been educated in Europe. However, later the Association's lecture became a very prestigious *sathaban*, or an academic institution. The lecturers felt proud to address the Buddhist Association<sup>56</sup>. It was only after World War II that the lecture series gained popularity, when the Buddhist Association held the lectures at the library of Mahamakut Buddhist University. During that time, listeners overflowed from the library and the members of the Association grew<sup>57</sup>. Buddhadasa was actually one of the popular lecturers in the period of expansion of the Buddhist Association's lecture series.

### The Buddhist Association as a place for Buddhadasa's propagation of the *dhamma*

Buddhadasa was first invited to preach at the Buddhist Association in 1940<sup>58</sup> by Sanya Dhammasakdi. He had known Buddhadasa since the early 1930s through their mutual writings on Buddhism<sup>59</sup>. The lecture at the Buddhist Association was Buddhadasa's physical debut in the society of Buddhist intellectuals and the elite in Bangkok. Buddhadasa had already become known among Buddhist intellectuals by publishing the journal *Phutthasasana* for seven years. The Buddhist Association advertised Buddhadasa's first lecture in daily newspapers. Buddhadasa recalled that two to three hundred people listened to his first lecture<sup>60</sup>, which seems to have been a special feature programme of the Buddhist Association at that time.

Buddhadasa's first *dhamma* lecture at the Buddhist Association, "Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham" (The way to reach the Buddha *dhamma*), was a

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<sup>56</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Prawat kan-kotang, phonngan, lae khwam-pen-ma ...", p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> The Buddhist Association still called itself in Thai "Phuttha-tham samakhom" then, instead of "Phuttha-samakhom haeng prathet thai" as it is at present.

<sup>59</sup> Buddhadasa first found Sanya's article on the activities of the British Maha Bodhi Society in the weekly newspaper, *Thai khasem ruam khao* (Thai Khasem news collection edition), to which Sanya contributed from London while he was studying there. Buddhadasa wrote a letter to Sanya in London to inform him of his similar activities with the Khana Thammathan in Chaiya, Thailand, and Sanya also replied to Buddhadasa. They first met each other in 1933 at Wat Bowonniwet in Bangkok at Phra Lokanatha's preaching to recruit monks and novices for the Buddhist world mission, where Sanya, a newly returnee from London, was an interpreter. At this preaching, Buddhadasa put many interesting questions to Phra Lokanatha. After the questions and answers, Buddhadasa and Sanya introduced themselves to each other, realising that they had already exchanged letters. In 1938, Sanya visited Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh together with senior judges: Phraya Latplithammaprakhan, and Phraya Parotrachasuphit. (*7 rop achan sanya*, pp. 139 – 142.)

<sup>60</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 321.

tremendous hit among Bangkok intellectuals. Buddhadasa, a self-taught young intellectual monk from the provinces, exhibited his extensive knowledge of the theory of Buddhist practice written in the scriptures, which very few in Thailand had inquired into and he explained it to the lay Buddhist public.

In this lecture, Buddhadasa aimed to share *phuttha-tham* (Pali: *buddha-dhamma*), or the Buddha's *dhamma*, with lay Buddhist intellectuals, by co-operating with the propagation activities of the Buddhist Association of lay Buddhists. He opened his lecture by saying:

Although I am not a member of the Buddhist Association, because this association does not have any ordained members, I am a member of this association in spirit. This is because this association has the same purpose that I have – that is, to propagate the Buddha's *dhamma*<sup>61</sup>.

Buddhadasa articulated the word, *phuttha-tham*, in three ways. According to Buddhadasa, *phuttha-tham* means first, “the teaching of the Buddha” or the *pariyatti-dhamma* (scriptural study); second, “the *dhamma* that makes us become a *buddha*” or the *paṭipatti-dhamma* (practising the *dhamma*); and third, “the normality of the Buddha, ... or “‘the thing’ that the Buddha found out”, or the *paṭivedha-dhamma* (realisation of the *dhamma*)<sup>62</sup>. Among these three, Buddhadasa examined in his lecture the third meaning of *phuttha-tham*, the *paṭivedha-dhamma*. Buddhadasa reasoned that only a few people could reach the Buddha's *dhamma*, particularly the ordained monks, if we define *phuttha-tham* in the first and second meanings. Instead, in the third meaning, Buddhadasa said:

You do not have to go either through the *Tipiṭaka* or through ascetic meditation practice in order to reach the Buddha *dhamma*. ... The Buddha *dhamma*, or the thing that the Buddha found out, was a public thing that is available to everyone, it exists everywhere, and is ready to touch every person in every moment<sup>63</sup>.

In other words, Buddhadasa was teaching the essence of Buddhism to lay Buddhists in the secular world, those who used to be considered as too far away to reach the Buddha *dhamma*. This was in fact what the lay intellectuals in the Buddhist Association were interested in.

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<sup>61</sup> Phikkhu Phutthathat Inthapanyo (Buddhadasa Inthapanyo Bhikkhu), “Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham, Patthakatha Phiset”, *Chumnum patthakatha phuttha-tham* (Collection of lectures on the Buddha *dhamma*) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Sukkhaphap Chai, 1992), pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>62</sup> Phikkhu Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham”, pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>63</sup> Phikkhu Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham”, p. 5.

The lecture further expanded on the actual ways to reach the Buddha's *dharmma*, based on Buddhadasa's extensive scriptural studies. Buddhadasa explained that in order to reach the Buddha's *dharmma*, we have to get rid of our attachments to worldly matters which are impermanent, suffering, and have no self. People consider these things as permanent, pleasurable, and self-entities because of *avijjā* (ignorance), and therefore are attached to them. Buddhadasa indicated three steps to overcome these wrong conceptions. By *paññā* (wisdom) we have to examine: first, visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and bodily sensations that our instinct tends to become attached to; second, attachment to any ideologies, which disturb the freedom of the mind that can distinguish *nibbāna* and the Buddha's *dharmma*; and third, attachment to self<sup>64</sup>. These are the ways Buddhadasa examined on how to overcome the attachments that prevent us from attaining the Buddha's *dharmma*. Buddhadasa indicated training of mind through meditation which is thoroughly described in the scriptures<sup>65</sup>. In this path, Buddhadasa thought that ordained monks could make a good achievement faster than those practising in lay worldly life. Buddhadasa considered ordained monks as "more advanced models that lay people can follow to practise for accomplishing the perfect state of mind"<sup>66</sup>.

This first lecture of Buddhadasa at the Buddhist Association had a great impact on lay Buddhist intellectuals in Bangkok. The Buddhist Association took down Buddhadasa's lecture in shorthand, and it was first published in his journal, *Phutthasasana* in November 1940 with some of Buddhadasa's own editorial corrections. Then, the lecture was published as a cremation volume first by Phraya Pharoetrachasuphit, an important member of the Buddhist Association who was elected to the vice-presidency many times, and was one of the three judges who visited Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh for the first time in 1938. This cremation volume reached the hands of Chao Phraya Thammakmontri (1877 – 1944), who is also known by his pseudonym, Khru Thep, as a poet and as "a teacher of schoolteachers". He wrote many school textbooks and worked for the Ministry of Education and Religion until the early

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<sup>64</sup> Phikkhu Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham", pp. 10 – 30.

<sup>65</sup> Phikkhu Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham", pp. 41 – 58.

<sup>66</sup> Phikkhu Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Witthi haeng kan khao thung phuttha-tham", p. 40.



1930s<sup>67</sup>. Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri commented on Buddhadasa's lecture in the cremation volume, "This book will never die"<sup>68</sup>. The lecture was reprinted in many cremation volumes, and made known to people the depth of Buddhist teaching. This lecture caused Buddhadasa to become acknowledged as a scholarly monk among elite intellectuals.

After his first lecture, all Buddhadasa's lectures at the Buddhist Association were taken down in shorthand in order to be published. They attracted many intellectuals. One of his lectures at the Buddhist Association, "Phuttha-tham kap chettanarom khong prachatipatai" (The Buddha's *dhamma* and the spirit of democracy) in January 1947 had the honour to have in the audience Pridi Phanomyong (1900 – 1983), who was the regent of King Rama VIII<sup>69</sup>. Also, Kulap Saipradit (1905 – 1974), a leading intellectual journalist, attended every lecture of Buddhadasa at the Buddhist Association. He wrote a short summary of each lecture for his newspaper<sup>70</sup>. Another journalist, Wilat Maniwat (1924 – )<sup>71</sup>, who was born in the same town Buddhadasa was from, contributed articles on Buddhadasa to Supha Sirimanon's weekly journal, *Nikon wan athit*. He indicated that Buddhism as presented by Buddhadasa could endure critical examination by modern European philosophers<sup>72</sup>. Wilat regarded another famous lecture by Buddhadasa to the Buddhist Association, "Phukhao haeng witthi phuttha-tham" (Mountainous hindrance on the way to the Buddha *dhamma*), as the book that he would bring with him if he were banished to an island<sup>73</sup>. Buddhadasa's

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<sup>67</sup> About Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri, see Chonthila Sattayawatthana (ed.), *Khru thep* (Bangkok: Thai Watthana Phanit, 1992).

<sup>68</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 321.

<sup>69</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 322. See details in Chapter V, p. 232.

<sup>70</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 321 – 322. Some of Kulap's summary of Buddhadasa's lecture are collected in *Ha sip pi suan mok: mua khao phut thung rao* (Fifty years of Suan Mokkh Volume I: when they talked about us) (Bangkok: Suan Usom Mulanithi, 1982). For example, Isarachon (a pseudonym of Kulap Saipradit), "Thi ni lae thi nan" (Here and there), originally published in *Prachamit* (10 March 1946), collected in *Ha sip pi suan mok*, pp. 1201 – 1204; Isarachon, "Phuttha-tham lae santiphap" (The Buddha's *dhamma* and peace), originally published in *Suphap burut* (6 June 1946), collected in *Ha sip pi suan mok*, pp. 1205 – 1209.

<sup>71</sup> Wilat's biographical information here is based on: Wilat Maniwat, interview, Bangkok, 1 February 1999; Chuai Phulaphoem, "Chom na phu-praphan: Wilat Maniwat" (The face of the writer: Wilat Maniwat), Wilat Maniwat, *Thamma samrap khon nok wat* (The *dhamma* for the people outside temples) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Dok Ya, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Manop (a pseudonym of Wilat Maniwat), "Thamma parithat Phutthathat Phikkhu" (The *dhamma* critique of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), originally published in *Nikon wan atthit* (9 April 1944), *Ha sip pi suan mok*, pp. 1166 – 1200.

<sup>73</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 324.

reputation was well established by his lectures at the Buddhist Association in addition to his journal, *Phutthasasana*.

However, Buddhadasa's stimulating lectures did not go ahead without conflict. A former judge and an important supporter of Wat Mahathat, Phra Thipparinya (Thup Klamphasut) (1890 – 1977), sued Buddhadasa as a communist in both religious and political circles after he listened to the lecture, "Phukhao haeng witthi phuttha-tham" in June 1949<sup>74</sup>. Phra Thipparinya criticised Buddhadasa for regarding the Buddha as a hindrance to reach the Buddha's *dhamma*, and promoted an extensive campaign to censure Buddhadasa's offence against the Buddha, although this attempt was not successful. Buddhadasa was in trouble again in January 1965 for his lecture at the Buddhist Association by saying that the Abhidhamma is not written in the form of the Buddha's own speech. The Abhidhamma group in the Buddhist Association brought up his comment as a problem and attacked Buddhadasa by claiming that Buddhadasa had defamed the Abhidhamma as not being the Buddha's words<sup>75</sup>. Because of this conflict with the Abhidhamma group, Buddhadasa refrained from giving lectures at the Buddhist Association<sup>76</sup>, and the Abhidhamma group was already withdrawing from the Buddhist Association from 1962 after conflict with the older members<sup>77</sup>.

Buddhadasa's general reputation as a controversial thinker was developing in the 1960s, but the role that the Buddhist Association played for the propagation of Buddhadasa's preaching was significant. Buddhadasa's lectures at the Buddhist Association were further spread by intellectual journalists who wrote columns in their newspapers. Buddhadasa's popularity suggested strongly that he was responding to lay Buddhists' growing concerns with the *dhamma*. The Buddhist Association stands for the spread of the active participation of the laity in the Buddhist public sphere.

### 3. Wat Umong in Chiang Mai: propagation into the areas of other local traditions

The propagation of Buddhadasa's preaching of the *dhamma*, which originated in Southern Thailand, had an impact on and was transmitted by his lay disciples not

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<sup>74</sup> See details in Chapter V, pp. 247 – 250.

<sup>75</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 324. See details in Chapter IV, pp. 204 – 207.

<sup>76</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 324.

only to the nation's capital, but also to other regions of Thailand. Buddhadasa also had a devoted supporter in Chiang Mai Province in northern Thailand, where a distinctive local tradition of Buddhism had been practised.

In the Chiang Mai region, prior to the 1902 Sangha Act that regulated all the temples and monks within the territory of Siam, a distinctive rank of monk's honorific titles was applied<sup>78</sup>, and monks behaved differently although in theory they should have a common set of precepts<sup>79</sup>. Their distinctive tradition once caused trouble with the centralised Sangha authorities. A highly respected local monk, Khruba Siwichai (1877 – 1939<sup>80</sup>), was accused for ordaining monks and novices as he had been doing despite the fact that under the new Sangha Act, he was not qualified to do so by the Sangha authority in Bangkok. This incident was settled by 1921<sup>81</sup>, the central Sangha Elders recognised that both ecclesiastical and secular local officers suspected Siwichai's popularity as a kind of *phi bun* (a revolt led by a charismatic monk, which took place at the turn of the twentieth century<sup>82</sup>).

Toward the end of the World War II, the regional differences in monastic practice were integrated into the central Thai Sangha's standard, especially by two groups of monks belonging to the Thammayut Order. On the one hand, *pariyatti* Thammayut monks with bureaucratic appointments promoted Thammayut ordinations and ecclesiastical education and examination as a means of standardisation and unification of provincial monks. The Thammayut Order of scriptural studies

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<sup>77</sup> See details in Chapter IV.

<sup>78</sup> For example, the titles of Phra Khru and Sangkharat were voted on and conferred by lay people and monks (Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest recollections*, p. 41).

<sup>79</sup> For example, some monks ate supper in the late afternoon, although any meal after noon is prohibited in the *vinaya* (Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest recollections*, p. 166). Some parents of small novices in the countryside still prepare their evening meal at home, because they are too small to refrain from eating (Phenchai Sirorot, interview, Chiang Mai, 15 March 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Although Kamala gave the life period of Khruba Siwichai as 1878 – 1937 (p. 43), both the notice board in his temple and his commemoration book related that Siwichai was born on 11 June 2420 B.E. (1877), and died on 21 February 2481 (1939). *Prawat khong phra khruba chao siwichai: nakbun haeng lanna thai* (A biography of Khruba Siwichai: a meritorious person in Lanna Thai) (a commemoration book for the opening of Phra Khruba Chao Siwichai Museum, 1994), pp. 5, 179.

<sup>81</sup> The year and the course of events need to be ascertained, since the data are contradicted in Kamala's *Forest recollection*, pp. 43 – 45, and *Prawat khong phra khruba chao siwichai*, pp. 73 – 75. The year 1921 is based on the latter source.

<sup>82</sup> *Prawat khong phra khruba chao siwichai*, pp. 73 – 75. About *phi bun* peasant rebellions, see Shigeharu Tanabe, "Ideological Practice in peasant rebellions: Siam at the turn of the twentieth century", Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe (eds.), *History and peasant consciousness in South East Asia* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1984), pp. 75 – 110.

consolidated its influence through taking over a historical temple of the Lanna Kingdom, Wat Chedi Luang, as the first Thammayut temple and its centre in the north. One of the most important bureaucrat monks who expanded the order in the province, Chao Khun Ubalikhunupamachan (Chan Sirichantho) (1857 – 1932)<sup>83</sup>, took a significant role as the first abbot of Wat Chedi Luang after the temple started to affiliate with the Thammayut Order in 1928 – 1931<sup>84</sup>. The systematised scriptural education there attracted local monks and novices in the north, and integrated them into the system of the central Sangha.

On the other hand, the Thammayut Order expanded in the north through its forest meditation monks, who originated in Northeastern Thailand and followed the charisma of Phra Achan Man Phurithatto (1871 – 1949)<sup>85</sup>. After Man's year-long appointment as the abbot of the Wat Chedi Luang in 1932 and his *dhutaṅga* in the north, his disciple Thammayut forest monks followed him: Luang Pu Wean Suchinno (1887 – 1985)<sup>86</sup>, Phra Achan Tu Achalathammo (1888 – 1974)<sup>87</sup>, and Luang Pu Sim Phutthacharo (1909 – 1992)<sup>88</sup>. The ascetic practice and the personality of these monks were highly respected and supported by the people in the north, although they were from different origins. Because of the spontaneous faith of people towards those forest monks, the ordination of local Thammayut monks and their followers strengthened the

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<sup>83</sup> About Chao Khun Ubali, see Phra Ubalikhunupamachan (Sirichantho Chan), *Attanoprawat, thamma banyai lae khirimannatha sut* (Autobiography, Dhamma lecture, and Girimaṇḍa Sutta) (Bangkok: Chomrom Phutthasat Ko. Fo. Pho., 1988). Also, Kamala's study examined Ubali's and other Sangha officials' relations with forest monks, especially in "Chapter 7 Relation with Sangha officials", *Forest recollections*, pp. 172 – 197.

<sup>84</sup> Phra Thammadilok (Chan Kusalo) (ed.), *Nam chom wat chedi luang: chabap somphot 600 pi phra that chedi luang* (A guide to Wat Chedi Luang: the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Grand Pagoda), pp. 43 – 44.

<sup>85</sup> cf. Tambiah, *The Buddhist saints of the forest and the cult of amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; J. L. Taylor, *Forest monks and the nation-state: an anthropological and historical study in Northeastern Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993; Kamala, *Forest recollections*).

<sup>86</sup> About the biography of Luang Pu Wean, see *Luang pu wean suchinno* (Chiang Mai: Wat Doi Mae Teang, Amphoe Phrao).

<sup>87</sup> About the biography of Phra Achan Tu, see "Chiwaprawat than phra achan tu atchalathammo" (Life history of Than Phra Achan Tu Atchalathammo), *Atchalathammaphibucha nai thi raluk nuang nai ngan tham bun khelai wan koet khrop 66 pi lae chalong samanask phat yot phra khru phawanaphirat (sang sangkitcho)* (Worshipping Atchalathammo in commemoration of the merit making ceremony for the approaching 66<sup>th</sup> birthday and the promotion of ecclesiastical title and honorary fan of Phra Khru Phawanaphirat (Sang Sangkitcho) [current abbot of Wat Pa Achan Tu]) (Chiang Mai: Wat Pa Achan Tu, Amphoe Mae Taeng, 1996), pp. 1 – 86.

<sup>88</sup> About the biography of Luang Pu Sim, see his cremation volume, *Phutthacharanuson nai ngan phra ratchathan phloeng sop phra yanasithachan (Luang pu sim phutthacharo)* (Chiang Mai: Samnak song Tham pha Plong, Amphoe Chiang Dao, 1993).

ties with the Central Thai authorities of the Siamese Sangha, although this may not have been their fundamental intention, in the first half of the twentieth century.

In terms of both political and religious administration, the north had already been integrated into the nation-state of Siam/Thailand before Buddhadasa's preaching arrived there towards the end of World War II. Contrary to the Thammayut monks who were attached to administration tasks in their preaching and education in provinces, Buddhadasa and his group came to the north from a different region in a private status, and Buddhadasa's teaching spread through newly developed mass communication techniques. By that time, Buddhadasa's group from Chaiya, in the South, and the people in Chiang Mai, in the North, belonged to the same public sphere for the exchange of intellectual expressions and opinions using a common language and script. The geographical expansion of the propagation activities of Buddhadasa's group was a part of the inclusion of the north as a Thai Buddhist public sphere.

#### The beginning of Buddhadasa's propagation in the north: Chao Chun Sirorot

For this geographical extension, Buddhadasa had significant support from Chao Chun Sirorot (1896 – 1995)<sup>89</sup> for his propagation of the *dhamma*. Chun was born as a son of Chao Inthapat, who descended from a Lord of Chiang Tung, Chao Kramom, and his wife, Duang, who was from a family of Karen, a hill tribe. When Chun's father, Chao Inthapat, married Chao Mae Buaphan, who was also descended from a lord of Chiang Tung, his mother, Duang, left her first husband and returned to her parents' home with her children. Later, Duang married Kaew Rattanaphon, who was a janitor of a provincial government school, and who brought up Duang's sons, i.e. Chun and his brother. Even though he was called "Chao" (Lord) as a descendent of Chiang Tung's lord, Chun was not in a position to inherit the full family fortune and honour, but rather had to struggle to find his way as a commoner.

One important thing that Chun benefited from in his noble family background

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<sup>89</sup> The following description of Chao Chun's life history is based on Chao Chun Sirorot, *Chiwaprawat nai chun sirorot thi chao khong khian lao wai eng: pho. so. 2439 – 2529* (A life history of Mr. Chun Sirorot, which is written by himself: 1896 – 1986); Dr. Phra Maha Chanya Sutthiyano (ed.), *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun* (Life, thoughts, and works of Chao Chun) (Bangkok: Borisat Amarin). The biography in the latter book was written from interviews with Chao Chun by Phra Maha Chanya (Phenchai Sirorot, interview).

was an opportunity for higher education. Since most farmers then considered the education of their children as a waste of opportunity to work<sup>90</sup>, Chun could not have had an education if he had been from a commoner's family. Chun was supported in his education by his father and his stepmother, Chao Inthapat and Chao Mae Buaphan, who also lived in Chiang Mai Province. He finished fourth grade in secondary school, which few people had reached and he was qualified to become a government official. After some work experience as a clerk of a school in Lampang, Chun continued his study in the school for training teachers of agriculture in Nakhon Pathom for two years and graduated from it in 1921. Based on this educational career, Chun established and managed a similar school in Chiang Mai, and he later engaged in newly introduced cash crop agriculture, such as tobacco.

Chun, after marrying Chao Surichai (a descendent of King Rama I from her father's lineage and of King Kawila of Lanna Thai Kingdom from her mother's), with whom he had ten children, had to struggle with his business, which was *dukkha* (suffering) for him. When Chun succeeded in the tobacco business in 1933 – 1943, and achieved stability and enough wealth, he became devoted in Buddhism on meeting Luang Pu Sim Phutthacharo, a *dhutaṅga* monk. Chun first met Sim, in Amphoe Chomthong, Chiang Mai Province, where he was evacuated from World War II. Chun started learning what life was in the Buddhism that was preached by Sim<sup>91</sup>. Chun devoted his support to Sim's first settlement in Chiang Mai until more support established a temple for Sim, Wat Santitham, the first forest school of the Thammayut temples in the north<sup>92</sup>. Apart from Sim, Chun also listened to sermons of such famous forest monks as Phra Achan Man and Luang Pu Waen, both of whom often came to Chiang Mai for *dhutaṅga* ascetic practice, and occasionally gave sermons to people<sup>93</sup>.

A few years after he became interested in the *dhamma* through his meeting with Sim, Chun first read a book of Buddhadasa's around 1944 – 1945. The book was entitled, *Kanpatibat tham* (practising the *dhamma*), which his brother in Bangkok had

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<sup>90</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 20.

<sup>91</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 69.

<sup>92</sup> Phutthacharanuson, pp. 22 – 23; *Prawat wat santiitham, amphoe muang, changwat chiang mai, thi raluk nai ngan chaloeng phra ubosot, phra chedi* (A history of Wat Santitham, Muang District, Chiang Mai Province, to commemorate the celebration of the hall and the pagoda) (1997).

<sup>93</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, pp. 80 – 81, 83.

sent him from Bangkok. The most impressive things that Chun found in this book were “to explain the meanings of the *dhamma* and to apply the *dhamma* in various many aspects”, especially “to understand Buddhism as science”<sup>94</sup>. Chun started subscribing to Buddhadasa’s journal, *Phutthasasana*, as a life member. This was about twelve years after Buddhadasa started his *dhamma* propagation in Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, and by this time he was already recognised as a young monk scholar among elder monks and lay intellectuals in Bangkok.

What was the difference that Chun found between conventional Buddhism in the north, the school of forest monks who belonged to Phra Achan Man, and Buddhadasa? According to his daughter, Phenchai Sirorot, who has been assisting the most in Chun’s *dhamma* propagation activities among his children, the Buddhism that was commonly practised in the north taught Chun to keep the precepts and to do good, meritorious acts. These teachings did not work for the overcoming of *dukkha* or suffering that Chun had in mind. Buddhadasa’s teaching was targeted to practise for the overcoming of suffering, which was exactly what Chun wanted. Although he respected Khruba Siwichai for his *barami* (charismatic perfect state) that attracted people to work for his project of building the road to the mountain Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai<sup>95</sup>, Chun was too busy with his own business when Siwichai was active. Phenchai remembered that Chun respected Siwichai as a *phra nak phatthana* (development monk), but was not much interested in his teachings<sup>96</sup>.

On the other hand, Chun found significance in the teachings of forest monks who were in the school of Phra Achan Man, and he continued his support for Sim throughout his life, but he considered Buddhadasa’s teachings were more suitable for people in contemporary society. Those forest monk teachers taught to seclude oneself from secular society in order to specialise in meditation by closing the eyes and by reciting *phuttho*, which means “the Buddha”, in order to concentrate on breathing in and out. Whereas, in the teaching of Buddhadasa, Phenchai explained that everyone can train his or her mind to be in the state of *sati*, or awareness, at any time and in any place

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<sup>94</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 83.

<sup>95</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 82.

<sup>96</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview.

right in the middle of worldly life<sup>97</sup>. In other words, what Buddhadasa extracted from the scriptures coincided with the needs of lay Buddhists who had to be responsible for their duties in secular life.

In order to support Buddhadasa's propagation of the *dhamma*, Chun basically imitated what Buddhadasa had been doing for fifteen years. After Chun visited Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh, and observed the activities of the Khana Thammathan in Chaiya, he renovated in 1947 an abandoned temple in Chiang Mai, Wat Umong. Wat Umong is estimated to have been built around 1380 – 1450<sup>98</sup>, which was during the developing and prosperous age of the Lanna Kingdom<sup>99</sup>. Wat Umong is known for its *umong*, or brick tunnel, which was made by King Ku Na (r. ca. 1355 – 1385) in order to dedicate it to a scholarly ascetic monk, Thera Chan (1360-1370? – 1445), to live in and do meditation practice there. According to one tradition, the monk, Thera Chan, read through the whole *Tipiṭaka* and commentaries on the *Vināyapiṭaka* within three and a half months, and was able to answer any kind of *dhamma* questions. However, Thera Chan preferred to wander in the forest so the king was unable to ask questions when he wanted. The King Ku Na built the tunnel for Thera Chan to settle down in and do his ascetic practice there<sup>100</sup>. The story of Thera Chan was paradigmatic for Chun to choose this temple in order to work for the contemporary scholarly ascetic monk, Buddhadasa and his group.

Also in 1947, Chun established a group of lay Buddhists for *dhamma* propagation named the Khana Phuttha Nikhom, as Buddhadasa and his brother had the Khana Thammathan in Chaiya. Chun also opened an office and a printing house for the Khana Phuttha Nikhom, for propagating the *dhamma* through publications. However, what the Khana Phuttha Nikhom needed the most was a monk leader, as Buddhadasa

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<sup>97</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Hans Penth, *History of Wat Umong* (Chiang Mai: Buddhnikom), p. 3. The first article in this booklet was reprinted from: Hans Penth, "A note on the history of Wat Umong Thera Jan (Chiang Mai), *The journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 62, Part 2 (July 1974). The booklet includes another article by the same author: Hans Penth, "Additional notes on Wat Umong" (February 1987).

<sup>99</sup> Hans Penth, *A brief history of Lan Na: civilizations of North Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994), pp. 11 – 22.

<sup>100</sup> *Prawat wat umong suan phuttha-tham* (A History of Wat Umong Suan Phuttha-tham) (Chiang Mai: Khana Phutthanikhom), pp. 15 – 20. The English and Thai language editions of the Khana Phutthanikhom's booklets on the history of Wat Umong do not have identical contents. The English edition gives a historian's academic account on the history of the origins of the temple, whereas the Thai edition is based on the tradition that local people have handed down from the past, as well as a



was in Suan Mokkh. Chun invited Buddhadasa in Chiang Mai in 1948, and asked him to stay there<sup>101</sup>. Buddhadasa was not able to accept this offer, but instead, he sent other monks from Suan Mokkh, including Phra Maha Phon Rattanasuan (1918 – 1993) and Phra Maha Chawiang Mitsiri. Chun further requested Buddhadasa to send Pathumuttara Bhikkhu, who wrote an article in *Phutthasasana*, which was “direct and easily understandable”. The article, “*phiksu kap kanriarai*” (A *bhikkhu* and begging), criticised monks who demanded lay people to support building their beautiful monasteries in return for merit<sup>102</sup>. Buddhadasa contacted the monk author of the article in Penang to ask him to co-operate in the work of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom in Chiang Mai. The monk finally arrived in Chiang Mai in April 1949, and introduced himself to Chun as Panyanantha Bhikkhu<sup>103</sup>. This was the first time that Panyanantha adopted his most famous pseudonym<sup>104</sup>. The *dhamma* propagation activities of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom became extremely popular in Chiang Mai because of the presence of Panyanantha Bhikkhu, a gifted oratory monk.

### Panyanantha Bhikkhu

Panyanantha Bhikkhu (1911 – )<sup>105</sup>, or Pan Sanecharoen before he was ordained, was from a well-to-do farmer’s family in Phatthalung Province in Southern Thailand. By the time of his arrival in Chiang Mai at the age of thirty-eight, Panyanantha had not had an ordinary ordained life. Pan attended secondary school up until the middle of the fourth year, which was quite an advanced level of education among his contemporaries, but he had to leave his school because of his father’s illness. After that, Pan worked in Phuket as a mine labourer. Pan preferred to spend his spare time with monks in a temple rather than visiting prostitutes, or smoking and drinking as other labourers often did. Pan was ordained as a novice at the age of eighteen in Ranong Province where he assisted an elder monk. He returned home to be ordained as a monk, Phra Pan

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translated article of Hans Pentz, the history of the Khana Phutthanikhom, and Buddhist sayings.

<sup>101</sup> *Prawat wat umong suan phuttha-tham*, p. 41.

<sup>102</sup> Pathumuttara Phikkhu, “Phikkhu kap Kan-riarai”, *Phutthasasana*, vol. 15 No. 3 – 4 (August – November 1947), pp. 155 –160.

<sup>103</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, pp. 94 – 95.

<sup>104</sup> Dr. Phra Maha Chanya Sutthiyano (ed.), *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha* (Life and work of Ven. Panyanantha) (Bangkok: Borisat Amarin Printing Group, 1991), p. 145.

<sup>105</sup> The following account of the biography of Panyanantha Bhikkhu is based on: Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*.

Pathumuttaro, when he was twenty in 1931. By early 1934 when Pan was studying for the ecclesiastical examinations of *nak tham* and Pali, and was training himself to be a *dhamma* preacher in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Lokanatha Bhikkhu, an Italian monk, came to Thailand to recruit monks and novices for world Buddhist mission<sup>106</sup>. Pan decided to join Lokanatha's world mission as a leader of ten monks from the South. Pan went on foot as far as Rangoon in Burma, where Lokanatha lost control of the group of Thai monks.

After his return from Burma, Pan moved to Songkhla province. While he was in Songkhla, Pan first read Buddhadasa's journal, and visited Buddhadasa together with Bunchuan to spend a rain retreat at Suan Mokkh<sup>107</sup>. Pan started studying Pali in Bangkok at the suggestion of Buddhadasa, who said, "If you are going to work for Buddhism to make more progress, you have to acquire Pali to be able to apply it in your work"<sup>108</sup>. Pan stayed at Wat Samphraya in Bangkok for five years until the end of 1941, and passed the third and fourth levels of the Pali ecclesiastical examinations. While he was studying Pali, Pan read a range of books, including those of Luang Wichitwathakan, King Vajiravudh's *Thetsana sua pa* (Preaching to the Wild Tiger Corps) and *Pluk chai sua pa* (Encouraging the Wild Tiger Corps), 500 stories of the *Jātaka*, some works of Si Burapha, Malai Chuphinit, and of Sot Kuramarohit. Because of his devoted reading of Luang Wichit's works on history, Pan was called "the historian" by his fellow monks<sup>109</sup>. Moreover, Pan attended and listened to the sermons of famous preaching monks, and public lectures by lay intellectuals at Samakkhayachan Samakhom, including the lectures of Luang Wichit<sup>110</sup>. This experience was essential for the future celebrity preacher. Pan drew on his skill and knowledge for his sermons, as well as his ability in oratory.

After the Asia-Pacific War started in December 1941, Pan decided to leave the war damage in Bangkok and evacuate to the South, to Phatthalung and Songkhla, but he found that the air raids were more severe in the South than in Bangkok. Eventually he was recommended to look after a temple in Perak, Malaysia, he decided to take this

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<sup>106</sup> About Lokanatha, see Chapter I, footnote 86.

<sup>107</sup> See more details in Chapter I, pp. 49 – 55.

<sup>108</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 108.

<sup>109</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 125.

<sup>110</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 126-127.

opportunity. On this occasion, Pan tried to teach himself English by reading an English Buddhist journal, *The Maha Bodhi*, by which journal Buddhadasa and his brother had also been inspired for a long time. However, at the Malaysian Chinese temple in Perak, monks were expected to do rituals, blessing ceremonies, fortune telling, and make amulets, and if they declined, then people spoke ill of them asking why they did not do these things although they had been ordained for a long time. After two years, Pan decided to move to Penang in order to study Chinese and to propagate the *dhamma* to Chinese people. In the more favourable environment in Penang, where people had more interests in the *dhamma*, Pan was to study English and Chinese, but he received a letter from Buddhadasa in 1948 inviting him to propagate the *dhamma* in Chiang Mai with Chao Chun Sirorot<sup>111</sup>. Pan took this opportunity to go to Chiang Mai after the rain retreat of 1948 together with his interpreter monk from Penang, Phra Wong Chanthanet, who later named himself Silanantha.

#### Propagation activities by the Khana Phuttha Nikhom: 1949-1959

The *dhamma* propagation by Buddhadasa's group in Chiang Mai started working full-scale when Chun and Panyanantha became partners. In the work of *dhamma* propagation, the devotion of lay Buddhists remains strong in terms of practical support only if they are able to express the *dhamma* themselves. On the other hand, the material and practical support by the laity is essential for a preaching monk if he wishes to spread the *dhamma* to the mass of people in society because a monk's possessions are restricted by the *vinaya*. As in the case of Thammathat and Buddhadasa, the *dhamma* propagation activities in Chiang Mai became most effective and fruitful when Chun's support and Panyanantha's radical sermons were combined. No matter how adventurous Phra Pan's past experiences and his gifted oratory, he could not become a nationally known preacher until he came to work with Chun in Chiang Mai as Panyanantha Bhikkhu.

After inviting Panyanantha to stay at Wat Umong, Chiang Mai, the Khana Phuttha Nikhom began to be able to follow the two major propagation methods of the Khana Thammathan: preaching and journal publication. First, Chun rented land and a

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<sup>111</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 129-139.

small building in the city centre of Chiang Mai in order to make it a place for Panyanantha to give his preaching, and for a library and printing house. Chun considered that Panyanantha needed a special preaching space of his own instead of borrowing the premises of existing temples, because he expected that abbots of ordinary temples would not accept Panyanantha who did not hold back his criticisms<sup>112</sup>. Also, this was an attempt to make Buddhist teaching more accessible for people outside the temples. There was no stringent etiquette to make people hesitant to go to the temple, but the message of Buddhism was available in order for lay people to apply it in their own lives. Panyanantha's style of preaching was symbolic of the new era of Buddhism which began to be propagated to the masses. Instead of sitting on the *thammat* (a traditional preaching seat for a monk) with *bailan* (a part of the scriptures written on palm leaf) in Pali to read slowly and solemnly, Panyanantha innovated by giving his preaching briskly by standing up without reading any notes, as lay lecturers do for their public speeches<sup>113</sup>. Panyanantha and his disciples believe that Panyanantha was the first monk who preached while standing up<sup>114</sup>.

People in Chiang Mai felt Panyanantha's standing preaching was unusual<sup>115</sup>, but his methods gained far more popularity than the traditional ones. After the first four or five occasions of his preaching, which was regularly twice a week on Sunday morning and *wan phra* evening, the temporary hall for seventy persons became unable to accommodate his audience. After two months, another temporary hall for a hundred and fifty persons collapsed because of too many people, and his audience grew to two thousand<sup>116</sup>. By the time of Panyanantha's arrival in Chiang Mai in 1949, the Central Thai language that Panyanantha used in his preaching was not a problem for the ordinary people in the north because of the penetration of the national education system<sup>117</sup>. The audience included not only the local people, but also Indian and Chinese businessmen, as well as high level government officials appointed from Bangkok, such

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<sup>112</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 96.

<sup>113</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 165.

<sup>114</sup> Panyanantha and Phra Ratchawisutthimori, an assistant monk of Panyanantha, interview, Nonthaburi, 7 October. They think that the first standing preaching of Panyanantha was at the train station of Nakhon Si Thammarat before leaving for Bangkok to join the world mission of Phra Lokanatha in 1934.

<sup>115</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview.

<sup>116</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 97.

<sup>117</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview.

as the governor of Chiang Mai Province and the director general of the fifth court region in the northern provinces<sup>118</sup>. It is said that on the day of Panyanantha's preaching, there were few people in the movie theatres<sup>119</sup>.

The tremendous popularity of Panyanantha's preaching was assisted by Chun's propagation techniques. Chun bought a loudspeaker and an electricity generator from Bangkok to prepare for Panyanantha's preaching, so that many people would be able to listen to him<sup>120</sup>. Chun also drove a publicity car around, which looked like the ones for movie advertising, in order to invite people to attend Panyanantha's preaching. These were all the first attempts to apply these means for the preaching of a monk in Chiang Mai<sup>121</sup>.

Apart from his style and propagation techniques, how was Panyanantha's message perceived by people? The content of Panyanantha's preaching is characterised as:

he changed from reading scriptures to expressing the *dhamma* by true knowledge; instead of speaking of hidden depths, he expressed touchable reality in order to lead to a revolution in everyday life; he clearly indicated many essential things, true Buddhism, without any supernatural magic<sup>122</sup>.

Because of his radical attitude toward supernaturalism, Buddhadasa named Panyanantha "nak patiwat saiyyasat" (the revolutionist of supernaturalism)<sup>123</sup>.

Another important characteristic of Panyanantha's preaching was to make critical remarks about powerful authorities without any hesitation. One example was his lecture at a general meeting of the Chao Khana Changwat and Chao Khana Amphoe monks, which was held in Chiang Mai. Elder monks of the Sangha came from Bangkok to attend, and Panyanantha was invited as a guest lecturer. Panyanantha's lecture was entitled, "*kho khit kan-phoei-phae*" (a thought on propagation). In this lecture, Panyanantha harshly criticised lazy monks at all levels. He said:

monks who are appointed to the position of propagation do not spread (*phoei-phae*) anything but a lie while sprawled out (*non phae*) in his *kuti* (a hut for a monk).

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<sup>118</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 97.

<sup>119</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview.

<sup>120</sup> "Mua than panyanantha phut thung chao chun sirorot" (When Ven. Panyanantha talked about Chao Chun Sirorot) (Interview with Panyanantha Bhikkhu by Dr. Phra Maha Chanya Sutthiyano on 2 February 1992), Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, pp. 190, 198.

<sup>121</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview.

<sup>122</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 165 – 166.

<sup>123</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 166.

When Panyanantha was lecturing, an elder monk with the title of Somdet stood up, approached and stared at Panyanantha in order to pressure him to stop speaking. However, Panyanantha did not stop but rather made his speech even stronger until the end. Next morning, the newspaper, *Chaw nua* (Northern people), reported this incident in detail with the headline, “*Than panya ao khon lek ti khanot hang nak rat*” (Ven. Panyanantha hits a sore point in the tail of king serpent with an iron hammer)<sup>124</sup>. This episode shows Panyanantha’s critical speech about the realities of otherwise untouchable authorities about which ordinary commoners are always unsatisfied but were prevented from criticising. People could only clap their hands when they listened to a speech as radical as Panyanantha’s.

Panyanantha’s popular sermons were published in booklets and in *Chaw phut* (Buddhist people), the monthly journal of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom, this was their second major means for propagating the *dhamma*. The journal was launched in May 1952 when Buddhadasa was invited in Chiang Mai. He suggested starting a journal in order for more people to be able to read Panyanantha’s sermons<sup>125</sup>. In the journal, Panyanantha used various pseudonyms to write different articles, just as Buddhadasa in the beginning did in his journal *Phutthasasana*. For short stories for children, he used the name, Panyasara; for the application of the *dhamma* to economics, politics, and society, his pseudonym was Thammaphani; and for the *dhamma* and his travel reportage, he chose the most well-known name, Bhikkhu Panyanantha<sup>126</sup>. The journal, *Chaw phut*, gained subscriptions from all over Thailand. The Khana Phuttha Nikhom distributed the journal both by selling it and by free distribution<sup>127</sup>.

The *dhamma* propagation activities of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom that Chun started with Panyanantha became so popular that the project was expanded to build a more solid and sophisticated public hall for giving *dhamma* lectures. The public hall was named the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai (the Buddhist place, Chiang Mai). The project to build the Phuttha Sathan began on 14 October 1951 by a joint general meeting of the Buddhist Association of Thailand’s Chiang Mai branch, the Khana Phuttha Nikhom, and the Young Buddhist Association’s Chiang Mai branch. The new building

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<sup>124</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>125</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 102.

<sup>126</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, p. 220.

complex included these three Buddhist organisation's offices, a big hall for *dhamma* lectures, a library, a museum, care facilities for aged people and orphans, a guesthouse, and charity project facilities<sup>128</sup>. The costly building of 110,000 baht was funded by donations from people who could afford only one baht for their share, as well as from the King, elder monks in the Sangha, foundations, rich officials and businessmen<sup>129</sup>. In February 1958, the main building opened, and the central committee for the establishment of the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai was dissolved to become the Mulanithi Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai (Foundation for the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai) that legally owns the estates and controls the funding for the Phuttha Sathan<sup>130</sup>.

These purposes and activities in the Phuttha Sathan were indeed the extension of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom in which Chun and Panyanantha were the main motivators. Sanya Dhammasakdi, who is one of the founders of the Buddhist Association of Thailand, and who moved to Chiang Mai because of appointment as the director general of the fifth judicial court region in April 1951, became one of the most committed persons to establish the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai. Sanya said:

Because this type of place that propagates the *dhamma* is not a temple, it can bring all kinds of ordinary people in without any hesitation. Also, the propagation has a new method so that it is not restricted by rules and customs [as in a temple] which would make people feel that they do not want to be restricted and thus not come to listen to the *dhamma*<sup>131</sup>.

Another member of the central committee for the establishment, Udom Bunyaprasop, who used to be the governor of Chiang Mai Province, called the Phuttha Sathan "a temple of lay people"<sup>132</sup>. These remarks indicate that the Phuttha Sathan embodied in itself the spread of the *dhamma* to lay people who belonged to a wide range of classes, ethnicities, and occupations, which gained co-operation and encouragement from the

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<sup>127</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 106.

<sup>128</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Kamnoet phuttha sathan chiang mai" (The birth of the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai), *Khana kammakan klang chat tang phuttha sathan chiang mai* (ed.), *Phuttha sathan chiang mai* (A commemoration volume for the establishment of the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai) (1958), pp. 11 – 17.

<sup>129</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Kamnoet phuttha sathan chiang mai", p. 13; "Rai phra nam – nam phu borichak sang phuttha sathan chiang mai" (The list of donors' names for the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai), *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, pp. 203 – 234.

<sup>130</sup> "Kham Thalaeng" (announcement), *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Phuttha sathan khu arai?" (What is the Phuttha Sathan?), *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, p. 52.

<sup>132</sup> Udom Bunyaprasop, "Kham rap saraphap" (Confession), *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, p. 31.

Nevertheless, in order to build a huge, enduring hall, the alliance of the civil and military bureaucrats, business people, and the King were more significant, and only a very few honoured the initiating role of Chun and the Khana Phuttha Nikhom in the commemoration book for the opening of the Phuttha Sathan. Perhaps, wealthier, more influential people than Chun became dominant in the costly project for the permanent building. In the commemoration book, an article contributed under the name “Chaw phuttha nikhom” (a person in the Phuttha Nikhom) related, “These days no one calls it the library of the Phuttha Nikhom, but the library of the Phuttha Sathan. Such things as the loudspeaker and other equipment for the public lecture, as well as the persons of the Phuttha Nikhom who took the very role that made people know of, and more people attend, also belong to the Phuttha Sathan. ... [When] the name of the Phuttha Nikhom has been absorbed and disappeared into the name of the Phuttha Sathan, perhaps there will still remain the very work that the Phuttha Nikhom has been doing [in the Phuttha Sathan]”<sup>134</sup>. Instead of the unwealthy Khana Phuttha Nikhom and Chun, the Asia Foundation, which manoeuvred to promote anti-communism in Thailand in connection with the CIA, donated an incomparable amount of money to the project of the Phuttha Sathan, and the *samnakngan thalaeng khao amerikan* (probably, USIS) donated many books to its library<sup>135</sup>. In the political situation of Thailand in the 1950s, the project of the Phuttha Sathan Chiang Mai could possibly be taken over for political purposes which intended to utilise and promote Buddhism as an anti-communist ideology<sup>136</sup>.

In 1960, Panyanantha was invited to be abbot of a newly built temple in Nonthaburi Province, Wat Chonlaprathan, which was dedicated by Mom Luang Chuchat Kamphu, the director of the Department of Irrigation. Chun did not oppose

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<sup>133</sup> Sanya Thammasak, “Phuttha sathan khu arai?”, p. 52. In the commemoration book, there are congratulatory speeches from the Supreme Patriarch and the Ecclesiastical Primate (*Sangkha nayok*), as well as an article contributed by the ecclesiastical head of the region 5 (*Chao khana truatkan phak 5*) that expressed his approved in the project of the Phuttha Sathan (Somdet Phra Wachirayanawong (the Supreme Patriarch), “Phra owat kham khwan”, pp. 5 – 8; Somdet Phra Wanrat (the Ecclesiastical Primate), “Kham khwan”, pp. 9 – 10; Phra Thammaratchanuwat, “Ruang kiao duai phuttha sathan chiang mai”, *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, pp. 18 – 27).

<sup>134</sup> Chao phuttha nikhom, “Phuttha nikhom kap phuttha sathan” (the Phuttha Nikhom and the Phuttha Sathan), *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, p. 66.

<sup>135</sup> “Rai phra nam – nam phu borichak sang phuttha sathan chiang mai”, *Phuttha sathan chiang mai*, p. 203; Sanya Thammasak, “Kamnoet phuttha sathan chiang mai”, p. 16.

<sup>136</sup> cf. Chapter V, especially see pp. 239 – 240.



Panyanantha's move from Chiang Mai, because it was more convenient for Panyanantha, who was already a national figure, to settle in Central Thailand near the capital<sup>137</sup>. After Panyanantha, the preaching monk of tremendous popularity, left for Wat Chonlaprathan, Wat Umong changed its role. When Panyanantha was in Chiang Mai, Wat Umong only functioned as accommodation for monks. All the preaching was given outside Wat Umong, and there were only a few people visiting the temple for merit-making and ceremonies, which are less significant in the teachings of Buddhadasa and Panyanantha. The later and current abbot of Wat Umong, Phra Khru Sukhanthasin started to give sermons in the northern dialect in the premises of Wat Umong during the rains retreat. According to Phra Khru Sukhanthasin, who is also from Phatthalung Province in the south, where Panyanantha was from, villagers do not like his sermon if it is not in the northern dialect<sup>138</sup>. The temple, which had been renovated for the leading *dhamma* preacher, is now localised.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the activities of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom have declined. The journal, *Chaw phut*, has continued to be published, the library in Wat Umong is neatly arranged, and most recently, the *Khai khunnatham*, or the camp for nurturing the virtues of schoolchildren, has been organised since 1991 by Dr. Phra Maha Chanya Sutthiyano<sup>139</sup>. The *dhamma* propagation was even extended by those monks and lay Buddhists who were funded by a scholarship of Chun to study and complete degrees in India, such monks as Silanantha Bhikkhu and Wiwekkanantha Bhikkhu, who went to teach Buddhism in Britain and America<sup>140</sup>. The present situation at Wat Umong Suan Phuttha-tham indicates that the activities of the Khana Phuttha Nikhom's *dhamma* propagation of the school of Suan Mokkh have taken root in the north, and are still expanding from it.

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<sup>137</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>138</sup> Phra Khru Sukhanthasin, interview, Chiang Mai, 15 March 1999.

<sup>139</sup> Phenchai Sirorot, interview; Dr. Phra Maha Chanya Sutthiyano, "Chao chun sirorot: phu mi lom haichai pen thamma" (Chao Chun Sirorot: a person who had a breathing of the *dhamma*), *Thammaphinanathanakan nai ngan chapanakit sop: chao chun sirorot* (a cremation volume for Chao Chun Sirorot) (1995), p. 14.

<sup>140</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit, kho khit lae ngan khong chao chun*, p. 107.

#### 4. Further propagation to the masses after the 1950s

Especially after the 1950s, the *dhamma* propagation of Buddhadasa and his disciples was assisted and promoted by many outside groups. As I have examined above, Buddhadasa first expressed his ideas mainly in the journals which he founded himself and with his brother, after 1940 his *dhamma* propagation was given support by the Buddhist Association of Thailand, and after 1947 by the Khana Phuttha Nikhom in Chiang Mai. In the case of the Buddhist Association, the Association did not have a purpose that specifically propagated Buddhadasa's preaching, but the opportunities that the Association gave to Buddhadasa were very significant for him to become known to the lay Buddhist elite in Bangkok. The Khana Phuttha Nikhom was established in order to spread the Buddhist *dhamma* that Buddhadasa and his fellow monks had been preaching. The Khana Phuttha Nikhom followed the ways the Khana Thammathan had been using in Chaiya, such as organising a place for the public *dhamma* lectures and a library in the centre of the city, and having a printing house of its own for publishing booklets and its journal. Although the Khana Phuttha Nikhom in Chiang Mai had a management independent of the Khana Thammathan in Chaiya except for occasional consultations with Buddhadasa, the Khana Phuttha Nikhom functioned almost as a branch of the Khana Thammathan in Chiang Mai. The Khana Phuttha Nikhom was the first and perhaps the most successful case following the style of what Buddhadasa and his brother had been doing in Chaiya. After the 1950s, there emerged more groups that assisted Buddhadasa in propagating the *dhamma* in various ways which were nevertheless the same as the Khana Thammathan had been doing, but from time to time also in co-operation with Suan Mokkh. After the 1950s through the efforts of those many groups, Buddhadasa's teaching became available at more locations, and found different places to be developed.

The assistance given to Buddhadasa's propagation can be classified into four categories: publishing books; giving public speeches and panel discussions; inviting or visiting Buddhadasa to a retreat or for lectures; and assisting the activities of Buddhadasa's disciple monks. The propagation efforts of book publication can be further sub-divided into at least three types: running a publisher and a bookshop; publishing lay supporters' own ideas that expanded on Buddhadasa's preaching; and

publishing for free distribution. The book propagation was spread further by individuals who bought a certain amount of Buddhadasa's and related books from those publishers in order to distribute them for free, most often for commemorative occasions.

In terms of chronological sequence, the first of these activities was in the 1950s and the 1960s a number of lay disciples of Buddhadasa established their own organisations to spread the *dhamma* taught by Buddhadasa. Some of the most important groups that were established during this period included the Suwichan Bookshop (opened in 1953), the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism in India (*Ongkan funfu phutthasasana nai prathet india*; established around 1958), the Suan Usom Foundation (established in 1958), the Group of the Sublime Life Mission (established in 1967), and the Thammabucha Bookshop (opened in 1969). It was also during this period that Buddhadasa was invited by many groups of government officials, student clubs, as well as other religious groups to give lectures and preach at their places. During this period, the propagation method of book publication was widely adopted by many of the above-mentioned groups. Also, from 1958 until 1973, public speeches and panel discussions on the *dhamma* were in general very active, especially at the Lan Asok (Asoke Courtyard) in Wat Mahathat in Bangkok. As for temple public speeches for Buddhadasa's *dhamma* propagation, important roles were taken by Pun Chongprasoet and Sawai Kaewsom as a part of the activities of the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism and the Sublime Life Mission.

From the late 1960s through to the early 1980s, Buddhadasa stressed issues in contemporary society to groups of people who came to Suan Mokkh to hear him preach and have training in *dhamma* practice. Around the mid-1970s in parallel with Buddhadasa's concerns, a group, which later started calling themselves "engaged Buddhists", became interested in Buddhadasa's preaching of Buddhism that could be applied to social issues. Those organisations in particular and groups under the advisement of Sulak Sivaraksa, such as the Komon Khimthong Foundation (established in 1971) and the editorial board of the journal, *Pacharayanan*, promoted Buddhadasa's social teachings in their publications. The group of engaged Buddhists also organised seminars and public panel discussions that were based on Buddhadasa's ideas on Buddhism and society, which they published in book form after some seminars.

After the 1980s, more publishers who put special emphasis on *dhamma* books

by Buddhadasa were established. In this period, Buddhadasa's *dhamma* books in fashionable layouts became available from more commercialised publishers through the book distribution network. Such a new type of *dhamma* book business included the Sukkhaphap Chai Publisher (established in 1982) and the Thammasapha Publisher, as well as the above-mentioned publishers who were established on Sulak Sivaraksa's advice. The publisher, Arun Witthaya, also distributes Buddhadasa's books on a comparatively smaller scale. Some old type of *dhamma* propagation groups, such as the Sublime Life Mission and the Suan Usom, still continue supplying booklets of Buddhadasa's preaching either at a low price or for free. Other groups of this old type were newly established in the late 1980s, including the Group for Dhamma Studies and Practice, and the series of *Phutthathat bannalai – dulayaphak anuson* (Buddhadasa's works – for the memory of [Phra] Dulayaphak; this series has been published by a daughter of Phra Dulayaphak, who was a judge friend of Buddhadasa). There are also some individual writers who were inspired by Buddhadasa to write their own books on the *dhamma*, such as Maj. Gen. Dej Tulavardhana, the author of the series of *Rian phutthasasana yang panyachon* (Studying Buddhism as an intellectual). In the 1990s new journals came out in order to follow on from and expand Buddhadasa's ideas, for example, *Dok mokkh* (*mokkh* blossoms), and *Panithan* (Pali: *pañidhāna*, strong determination).

After the late 1980s, when the brothers Buddhadasa and Thammathat became old, the Khana Thammathan, which had been legally registered as the Dhammadana Foundation (*Thammathan Mulanithi*) in 1953, shifted its leadership of propagation activities to Thammathat's youngest son, Metta Phanit, and other lay disciples. The contemporary Dhammadana Foundation has been supported by important members of some independent propagation organisations, such as Suan Usom, the Sublime Life Mission, the publishers Sukkhaphap Chai and former student Buddhist club members. Especially after the death of Buddhadasa in 1993, the new staff of the Dhammadana Foundation renewed the journal, *Phutthasasana*, in co-operation with young monks in Suan Mokkh and with Metta Phanit. Suan Mokkh also expanded its activities under the leadership of the new abbot, Phra Achan Pho Chanthasaro, and young monks and

*ubasika*, who organise both regular and occasional meditation retreats<sup>141</sup>.

Among all these important propagation groups and individuals for Buddhadasa's *dhamma* teachings, this section will focus on three, the publisher Suwichan, the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism, and the Sublime Life Mission Foundation<sup>142</sup>. In relation to the Sublime Life Mission's support, this section will further trace activities of monks in Suan Mokkh "branches" in the provinces and in Laos. By this focus, *dhamma* propagation through the book distribution of these three groups and public speeches in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Sublime Life Mission's further propagation activities until the present will be examined. Their activities embodied some part of the contemporary Buddhist public sphere in Thailand.

### The Suwichan Bookshop

The Suwichan Bookshop was the first publisher and bookshop in Bangkok that specifically dealt with Buddhadasa's books, and was independent from the Khana Thammathan in Chaiya. The bookshop was opened in 1953 by Sa'at Watcharaphai (1913 – 1987)<sup>143</sup>. Sa'at had had relatively successful educational and occupational careers amongst his contemporaries before opening Suwichan<sup>144</sup>. During his work at the Parliament Office, Sa'at read books by Buddhadasa, and with his friend at the Law School, Kiti Sihanon, visited Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh<sup>145</sup>. Sa'at decided to quit his work as an assistant director of the reception division, and opened the Suwichan Bookshop "in order to propagate Buddhism, especially the teachings and works of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu"<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>141</sup> See Chapter I, p. 48.

<sup>142</sup> Some other important groups will be discussed in other chapters on related topics, such as the group of Sulak Sivaraksa in Chapter VI.

<sup>143</sup> The following details about Sa'at Watcharaphai are based on: *Anuson nai ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop: nai sa'at watcharaphai* (Commemoration for the cremation: Mr. Sa'at Watcharaphai) (1987); Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 314-315, 539; Phra Pracha Pasannathammo and Santisuk Sophonsiri (eds.), *Phap chiwit 80 pi phutthathat phikkhu* (Pictorial biography of 80 years of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) (Bangkok: Mulanithi sathian koset – nakhaprathip and Samnakphim mulanithi komon khimthong, 1986), pp. 202, 208-209; and Suvimol Vajrabhaya (Suwimon Watcharaphai), the eldest daughter of Sa'at, interview, Bangkok, 29 August 2000.

<sup>144</sup> He began his primary education at Assumption School, completed the eighth grade in Wat Thepsirin High School and graduated from the Law School, which later became Thammasat University. After that, Sa'at worked for the ordinary commissioner of the library section and the commissioner of the secretary general of the Parliament Office from 1934 to 1947.

<sup>145</sup> Suvimol Vajrabhaya, interview.

<sup>146</sup> *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*.

As both Sa'at's wife and Buddhadasa wrote in Sa'at's cremation volume, the Suwichan Bookshop was not a business that sought a good profit, but "a kind of *dhamma* propagation in the form of retailing books"<sup>147</sup> because Sa'at had enough family fortune to support himself and his family<sup>148</sup>. Moreover, the bookshop functioned as a place for *sonthana tham* (*dhamma* conversation) between Sa'at, his friends at school and work, and customers<sup>149</sup>. The shop was in Samyot, near the Wangburapha area, where many shops dealing with books and educational tools were located. Because of this location, schoolteachers and book lovers could come across to the Suwichan. Among the customers were Fak na Songkhla, a famous lawyer defending the murder suspect of King Rama VIII; Kuang, then a Singaporean engineer and later ordained as Buddhadasa's disciple, Phra Kuang Muttiphattho; Haj Prayun Wathayanakun, the most devoted Muslim follower of Buddhadasa; and Arunwati Suwannakanit, then a school inspector and one of the founders of Suan Usom, the place for Buddhadasa's women disciples' *dhamma* practice<sup>150</sup>. These people were important lay disciples of Buddhadasa who exchanged ideas and built networks through conversations with Sa'at, who liked to talk with his customers<sup>151</sup>. In other words, the Suwichan functioned as a Buddhist public sphere for the lay disciples of Buddhadasa.

Not only did Sa'at give advice which books his customers should read, he also listened to requests from customers about what kind of stories should be published next time<sup>152</sup>. For publishing, Sa'at did proof reading by himself<sup>153</sup>, and advertised the books at his shop in leading magazines in Bangkok<sup>154</sup>. However, unlike Pun Chongprasoet, Sa'at did not put his comments or opinions into his publications of Buddhadasa's books, except for a few introductory notes<sup>155</sup>. Though his ideas were in his discussions with his customers, Sa'at let Buddhadasa take the role of preaching the *dhamma*, and he only

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<sup>147</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Anumothana" (Benediction), *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*.

<sup>148</sup> Suvimol Vajrabhaya, interview; Arunwati Suwannakanit, "Ngan phoei phrae phutthasasana ruam thawai than phra achan 'phutthathat phikkhu'" (Co-operative propagation activities to commemorate Venerable Master Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*.

<sup>149</sup> Manlika Watcharaphai (Sa'at's wife), untitled condolence, *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*; "Pho khong rao" (our father), *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*.

<sup>150</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lau wai...*, pp. 314-315, 539; Arunwati Suwannakanit, "Ngan phoei phrae phutthasasana ruam thawai...".

<sup>151</sup> Arunwati Suwannakanit, "Ngan phoei phrae phutthasasana ruam thawai...".

<sup>152</sup> Manlika Watcharaphai, untitled condolence, *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*.

<sup>153</sup> "Pho khong rao", *Anuson: nai sa'at watcharaphai*.

<sup>154</sup> Phra Pracha and Santisuk, *Phap chiwit 80 pi phutthathat phikkhu*, p. 202.

assisted the management of its propagation.

The Suwichan bookshop had to be closed in 1974 because of Sa'at's illness. A similar role of being a bookshop which specifically dealt with the books of Buddhadasa and his group was taken on by the Thammabucha bookshop, which was run by Wirot Siriat, the head of the Sublime Life Mission.

### The Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism

For popularising Buddhadasa's books with explanatory notes and essays on his works, the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism was very influential. The activities of the organisation was supported by the enthusiasm and uniquely critical thoughts of Pun Chongprasoet (1913? – 1980)<sup>156</sup>, who was the founder and in fact the only member of the organisation.

Pun also had a comparatively celebrated educational and occupational career. He also graduated from an elite high school, Wat Thepsirin, on him were conferred two degrees from the nation's best universities, Chulalongkorn and Thammasat, and he also qualified as a high-school teacher. Pun was among the first generation of students who received a full bachelors' degree at Chulalongkorn University in 1935, and among only 134 students who completed the law degree at Thammasat University in 1940<sup>157</sup>. In other words, Pun was one of the few people with access to the highest education that was available in Thailand at that time. After completing his education, Pun worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and near to the end of his career, he was the Secretary of the Royal Thai Embassy in India. Pun resigned from this position in 1957<sup>158</sup>, because

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<sup>155</sup> Suvimol Vajrabhaya, interview.

<sup>156</sup> The data on Pun's biography is fragmentary, and the year of his birth is uncertain. Wirot Siriat estimates that Pun was around sixty-five when he died in 1980, while Sitawat estimates he was around seventy-two. If Pun was about twenty-two when he received the bachelors' degree in 1935 at Faculty of Arts in Chulalongkorn University, he would have been born in 1913 (Wirot Siriat, interview, Bangkok, 12 March 1999; Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Nonthaburi, 30 April 1999).

<sup>157</sup> As Pun used to write in his signature, O. Bo., Po. Mo., and Tho. Bo., he had the degrees and qualification of *Aksongsat bandit* (Bachelor of Arts), *Prakattniyabat khru matthayom* (high-school teacher qualification), and *Thammasat bandit* (Bachelor of Law) (Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae* (Emptiness, empty mind, and the true, original mind) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana)). Although I have not been able to trace Pun's precise biography anywhere, these years of his graduation were located in the name list of students at Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University by Prof. Eiji Murashima. I am grateful for his supplying this information.

<sup>158</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Nae nam nangsua 'Khwa-mngom'ngai'" (Book recommendation, "Superstitious belief"), *Tai di kwa yu ru* (Is it better to die rather than to live?) (Samutprakan:

# สุญญตา-จิตว่าง-จิตเดิมแท้

ของ

ท่านพุทธทาส



ปราชญ์ใหญ่ในเมืองไทย  
คตินำลายพุทธศาสนา

ของ

ปุ่น จงประเสริฐ

(ไม่สงวนลิขสิทธิ์)

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Figure 2. A booklet by the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism. The Buddha image in the middle consists of some Thai script words, "Mai hen kae tua" (Not to be egotistical).



he disagreed with a government project to build a Thai temple in India<sup>159</sup>. He seems to have continued his job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the head of the Economic Division in the Department of the United Nations in April 1959<sup>160</sup>. After his retirement, Pun lived on a pension<sup>161</sup>, and devoted himself to the *dhamma* propagation activities of the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism in India, in which he was the only member.

The establishment of the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism in India derived from Pun's experience in India before he resigned from his position there in 1957. Pun was very disappointed with the fact that in India, where the Buddha had based his teaching of the *dhamma*, only a few people believe in Buddhism. Pun thought that Buddhism in India had been taken over by Muslims who were not very tolerant of other religions, and by Brahman scholars who had incorporated Buddhist philosophy into their system by defining the Buddha as an incarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu. However, what was more important than these, according to Pun, were the beliefs of the Indian Buddhists, especially the teachings and practices of monks. Pun explained that monks imported beliefs in *thewada* (deities) and *thepphachao* (gods) from Brahmanism, as well as associated rituals, and made Buddhists believe in *saiyasat* (supernaturalism) instead of the teaching of the Buddha. Pun argued that these monks were most responsible for the disappearance of Buddhism from India<sup>162</sup>. Pun's main concern was to criticise the elder monks who were intoxicated with wealth and the respect generated by belief in the supernatural in contemporary Buddhism, which he thought should be replaced by the true teaching of the Buddha.

Pun learnt of Buddhadasa's preaching by January 1956, when Buddhadasa travelled in India with the group of Chao Chun Sirorot from October 1955 onwards. During Buddhadasa's stay in India, Pun met him and was photographed with him<sup>163</sup>. Before April 1959, Pun established the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism in India, and printed 50,000 copies of books on "true Buddhism" in order to distribute it

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Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1964), p. 7.

<sup>159</sup> Sawai Kaewsom, interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999.

<sup>160</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Mahorasop thang winyan" (Amusement for the soul), Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Khu mu manut* (A handbook for humankind) (Bangkok: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1959), p. 171.

<sup>161</sup> Sawai Kaewsom and his friend, interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999.

<sup>162</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Nae nam nangsua 'Khwaam ngom'ngai'", pp. 7 – 9.

<sup>163</sup> Phra Pracha and Santisuk (ed.), *Phap chiwit 80 pi phutthathat phikkhu*, p. 216.

for free to people in India and in Thailand. The books Pun published included English works, such as *Through light to peace* and *Golden drops*, and Thai works, such as *Khong khwan*, *Khong fak nak-phawana*, and a work of Buddhadasa in an abridged edition, *Khumsap chak phra ot chabap yo* (A treasure trove from the Buddha's words: abridged edition)<sup>164</sup>. Pun's Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism in India either distributed books for free, or sold them at cost price<sup>165</sup> in bookshops that specialised in Buddhism, such as Suwichan<sup>166</sup> and Mahamakut Buddhist University<sup>167</sup>, or he received orders to print his publications to be distributed at celebrations for birthdays, the receiving of ecclesiastical titles, for ordination, for *katin*, or at cremation ceremonies<sup>168</sup>.

In 1957, the 2500th year, or the middle of the Buddhist Era, Pun was temporarily ordained as a monk for four months, and spent the rains retreat in Suan Mokkh in order to celebrate the year 2500. During his stay at Suan Mokkh, Pun summarised, with advice from Buddhadasa, Buddhadasa's preaching for the assistant judges in May 1956, which was entitled, *Lak phra phutthasasana* (The principles of Buddhism). Pun published his summary as *Khu mu manut* (A handbook for humankind) in the name of Buddhadasa in the following year, 1958<sup>169</sup>. One of Buddhadasa's best-known works, *Khu mu manut*<sup>170</sup>, was in fact a summary by Pun Chongprasoet, in

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<sup>164</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Kham kho rong" (A request), Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Khu mu manut*, p. 169. I am not sure who were the authors of these works that Pun mentioned. *Khumsap chak phra ot* is a work by Buddhadasa, but the abridged edition was most possibly summarised by Pun.

<sup>165</sup> Pun found out that people often did not find any value if his books were free. Thus, he later decided to sell his books at cost price (Pun Chongprasoet, "Kham kho rong", p. 170).

<sup>166</sup> Sawai said that Pun asked to sell his publications at Suwichan Bookshop (Sawai Kaewsom, interview, 21 March 1999).

<sup>167</sup> Wirot wrote that he bought Buddhadasa's books that were published from the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism at the bookshop of the Mahamakut Buddhist University in 1958 (Wirot Siriat, "Tai di kwa yu?" (Better to die rather than to live?), *Tai di kwa yu ru*, p. 5).

<sup>168</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Kham kho rong", p. 168.

<sup>169</sup> Although the volume of *Khu mu manut* that I referred to was printed in April 1959, the book was very probably first published in 1958. This is because the forwards by Buddhadasa and Pun are dated January 1958, and Wirot Siriat, who was deeply impressed by the book, remembers that he read *Khu mu manut* at the end of 1958 (Wirot Siriat, a co-worker of Pun for the *dhamma* propagation, interview, Bangkok, 12 March 1999).

<sup>170</sup> The English edition, *A handbook for humankind*, and translations into other languages are based on Pun's summary instead of Buddhadasa's own preaching. However, in 1988, the Thammasapha Publisher published a book, *Khu mu manut chabap sombun* (A handbook for humankind: complete edition), which was Buddhadasa's whole unsummarised preaching to the assistant judges in 1956, even though the title, *Khu mu manut*, was originally given by Pun to his summary. Thammasapha's *Khu mu manut chabap sombun* is in turn identical to *Lak phra phutthasasana*, which was published from the Khana Thammathan, and is still published from Sukkhaphap Chai (Phutthathat Inthapanyo, *Khu mu manut chabap sombun* (Bangkok: Thammasapha, 1988, 1992); Phra Ariyananthamuni (Phutthathat Inthapanyo), *Lak phra phutthasasana: oprom phuchuai phuphipaksa run raek, pho. so.*

which Pun simplified the Buddhist technical terms in Pali and their formulaic Thai translations into plain language. Buddhadasa agreed with Pun's summary, as well as his intention to begin *dhamma* propagation activities. In the congratulatory forward to *Khu mu manut*, Buddhadasa wrote:

As far as I have examined the intention and practice, I would like to approve the activities of the people who assist propagating the *dhamma* as I have explained through free distribution, by funds that are donated from people and groups with faith, instead of profit seeking<sup>171</sup>.

Many people became interested in Buddhadasa's preaching through Pun's summary, *Khu mu manut*. Among the earliest readers was Wirot Siriat, who could overcome his mental disorder because of it, and he devoted the rest of his life to propagation of the *dhamma*. A reason of the popularity of *Khu mu manut* was perhaps because it was most suitable as an introduction, and is the least radical among the publications from the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism.

The unique character of Pun's publications of Buddhadasa's works was his commentary notes on articles that would authorise and support his own opinions. For example, *Tamra du phra lae winai khong phiksu* (A field-guide to monks and their precepts), another popular publication of the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism, was a work of Buddhadasa edited and commented on by Pun. In the beginning of the book, Pun put a part of the *Thetsana sua pa* (Preaching to the Wild Tiger Corps) by King Vajiravudh, who criticised monks who intend to gain offerings for a living, and argued that the only appropriate medicine for monks is for lay people to select monks worthy of respect<sup>172</sup>. After presenting the argument of King Vajiravudh as an authorised critique of unpraiseworthy monks, Pun wrote in his introduction that there are good texts in the *Tipitaka* that teach us how to distinguish monks who are worthy of support. The texts, which were originally translated from Pali and edited as *Khum sap chak phra ot* (A treasure trove from the Buddha's words) by Buddhadasa, included for

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2499 (The Principles of Buddhism: preaching for the assistant judges in the first generation, 1956) (Bangkok: Sukkaphap Chai, 1990)).

<sup>171</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Anumothana" (Benediction), Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Khu mu manut* (Bangkok: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1959), p. ko.

<sup>172</sup> "Phra ratcha prarop khong phra bat somdet phra mongkut klao chao yu hua (Khat ma chak bot phra ratcha nipon kan thi 9, *thetsana sua pa*)" (A statement by King Vajiravudh (selected from his writing in chapter 9, Preaching to the Wild Tiger Corps)), Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Tamra du phra lae winai khong phiksu* (originally published from: Bangkok: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1959; the volume referred here was published from: Bangkok: Thammasapha, 1994).

instance, Buddha's preaching that indicated eight causes that make monks deteriorate who have not yet completed their practice to achieve *nibbāna*. The eight causes were: 1) Being a person who is satisfied with the work of construction; 2) Being a person who is satisfied with chatting; 3) Being a person who is satisfied with sleeping; 4) Being a person who is satisfied with making comrades; 5) Being a person who does not control their eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; 6) Being a person who does not know the limit in eating; 7) Being a person who is satisfied with an act that causes bodily sensation; 8) Being a person who is satisfied with expanding activities that take a long time<sup>173</sup>. Even though this story was cited from the classical Buddhist text, no one who ever lived in Thailand can help recalling monks living in their neighbourhood. It was as a kind of caution to his fellow monks when Buddhadasa, a monk, referred to this story; but it turned out to be very radical to the ordained when a lay believer, Pun, started propagating such stories.

Pun's activities distributing *dhamma* books of this kind were certainly insulting for many monks. In 1978 Pun even started sending his *dhamma* books, including many radical publications, to elder administrative monks, such as ecclesiastical heads of provinces, *amphoe* (district), and *tambon* (an administrative group of villages), all over Thailand as New Year's greetings. Pun rationalised his act by saying that although his organisation had published and distributed forty-five books to promote *lokuttara-dhamma*, ordinary monks did not read the truth that would decrease their income. However, if monks and teachers misunderstood Buddhism as Brahmanism or animism, Pun envisaged that the teachings of the Buddha would be destroyed. Thus, Pun decided to distribute his publications to every high school all over Thailand<sup>174</sup>. His act was challenging.

Pun's radical *dhamma* propagation was not only by book distributions. Pun explained the *dhamma* by showing slides of the religious situations in India. Pun called this "a new method to demonstrate Buddhism"<sup>175</sup>. Apart from showing the historical

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<sup>173</sup> "Phiksu o e" (An idle/inactive/inefficient monk), Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Tamra du phra lae winai khong phiksu*, p. 12.

<sup>174</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Phuttha phot: kan hai thamma pen than yom chana kan hai than thang puang" (The Buddha's saying: giving the *dhamma* is the alms that would win any kind of alms), Phutthathat, *Thamma thi khrai khan mai dai* (The *dhamma* that no one can oppose) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana).

<sup>175</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Mahorasop thang winyan", p. 171.

ruins of Buddhism, Pun's slides showed superstitious religious beliefs and practices in India<sup>176</sup>, where Buddhism had almost totally disappeared. According to one of the audience who attended, Pun showed a picture of the *linga* which Hindus worship, and explained that the Thai should not be as "superstitious" as them<sup>177</sup>. For Pun, the "superstitious" beliefs and rituals of Hindu origin had been incorporated into the actual practices of Thai Buddhists, and have been a significant ideological justification for donations. Those slides, which would offend "superstitious" ritual caretakers, were brought by Pun to temples and schools, in other words, public places for everyone to enter, in order to show them to many people who passed by<sup>178</sup>.

Pun's activities were very radical and insulting to monks, but he was given some credit. For one thing, Pun was helped by his elite occupational career. Phra Sithawat, then a young novice and monk studying at Wat Mahathat, believed that he would never be arrested for radical words because Pun must have been respected for his work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Pun was once even allowed to talk on *tamnak* at Wat Mahathat, which was an honourable platform on which to give preaching<sup>179</sup>. Moreover, Pun's intentions and opinions were recognised by some progressive monks. Although Phra Sithawat had to keep it a secret that he helped Pun to show slides, he liked Pun's determined attitude for the sake of the true teaching of the Buddha. Even the then abbot of Wat Mahathat, Chao Khun Phra Phimolatham, praised and promoted Pun's activities in his personal capacity. Phra Phimolatham said, according to Phra Sithawat, "There should be such a person as Pun. Then Buddhism will be clean and pure". However, the abbot could not allow Pun to do everything that he wanted in the temple, because Pun became a problem with other elder monks. Pun was finally almost prohibited from entering the premises of Wat Mahathat<sup>180</sup>.

Although Pun picked up radical aspects of Buddhadasa's works for his

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<sup>176</sup> Pun listed the titles of his slides as: "Sangwetchaniyasathan" (Four holy places of Buddhism: the places of birth, enlightenment, first preaching, and final *nibbana* of the Buddha), "Thewalok" (The world of gods), "Rusi chi pluai" (Naked ascetics), "Khantha kuti Phra Phuttha Chao" (The Buddha's scented room), "Phutthakhaya" (Bodh Gaya), "Saranatha" (Sarnath), "Nalantha" (Nalanda), and "Pa himmaphan" (Himavnt Forest, or a forest in the Himalayas) (Pun Chongprasoet, "Mahorasop thang winyan", p. 171).

<sup>177</sup> A friend of Sawai Kaewsom, who interrupted my interview with Sawai, a comment, Bangkok, 21 March 1999.

<sup>178</sup> A friend of Sawai Kaewsom, a comment.

<sup>179</sup> Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Bangkok, 30 April 1999.

<sup>180</sup> Phra Sithawat, interview.

*dhamma* propagation activities, he was supported by many people who donated money to his publications. What did actually attract people to Pun, as well as to Buddhadasa through Pun's activities? One of the answers was perhaps a feeling of fun in hearing a radical criticism for a corrupted authority from a just viewpoint that is supported by scriptural authenticity as explored by Buddhadasa. With a religious truthfulness, Pun spoke for the common people who were usually unable to confront their superiors by speaking up. Pun functioned as a voice of the people in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand.

#### The Lan Asok: a place for Buddhist discussions, and Sawai Kaewsom

The Lan Asok is a courtyard located in the premises of Wat Mahathat. Through the gate of the temple facing toward the Tha Phra Chan, nowadays we find a car park between the building of the Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University on the right hand side, and that of the Aphitham Chotika Witthalayai on the left hand side. Although the premises now look quite narrow because of the crowd of cars, there are *asoka* trees that give shade from strong sunlight. Under them, stone benches are placed to sit on, and also some traders sell drinks and fruits. People, especially book lovers, remember that this place used to have many old book traders who spread their wares on the ground and sold at very low prices every weekend and *wan phra* at least until the end of the 1980s. The din and bustle then resembled the present day weekend market in Chattuchak. This place is called the Lan Asok, which used to be a space for talk and discussion of Buddhist matters by commoners in Bangkok.

According to Phon Rattanasuan, one of the early monk disciples of Buddhadasa, who was then a popular lay lecturer at Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University and Buddhist Sunday School of Wat Mahathat, people used to visit the temple hall to listen to preaching and practise meditation, but not Lan Asok before 1956<sup>181</sup>. In December 1956, Phon started his lectures on the *dhamma* for schoolchildren on Sunday and during school holidays at a building, which was later renovated as the Phanaek Thamma Wichai (*dhamma* research division), it faces on to the Lan Asok.

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<sup>181</sup> *Chiwit lae phon ngan khong achan phon rattanasuan* (Life and works of Achan Phon Rattanasuan) (Bangkok: Rongphim winyan, 1993), p. 14.

After a while, Phon's lectures became so popular that the classroom became unable to accommodate his audience, including adults as well as children. For listeners outside the building, Pun Chongprasoet, who was a regular attendant of Phon's lecture, donated stone benches and loudspeakers<sup>182</sup>. Also around 1958, some political orators who were driven out of the Sanam Luang, which is located just across the road from Wat Mahathat, moved to the Lan Asok by changing their topic from politics to the *dhamma*<sup>183</sup>. Furthermore, Abhidhamma study was expanding, especially after two Burmese monks were invited from Burma to stay in Wat Mahathat and Wat Rakhang in 1952<sup>184</sup>, and after a school that taught the Abhidhamma opened at Wat Mahathat in 1959<sup>185</sup>. In the late 1950s, when people started to gather, traders started selling food in the temple courtyard, and the Lan Asok became a place like *talat nat*, or a market that opens regularly on weekend<sup>186</sup>.

In the Lan Asok, there were various *dhamma* preachers who represented different schools of Buddhist thought giving speeches, answering questions from people, discussing and talking. Perhaps the most popular teachers at the Lan Asok during that time were Sawai Kaewsom, a socialist and lay disciple of Buddhadasa, Naep Mahaniranon, a female lay teacher of Abhidhamma, and Sathian Phothinantha, a scholar of Mahayana Buddhism. Also, there were lectures in the Phanaek Thamma Wichai building by Phon Rattanasuan, an early disciple of Buddhadasa, but who later developed his own idea of the supernatural existence of *viññāṇa* (Thai: *winyan*) independently from Buddhadasa's influence. In the Phanaek Thamma Wichai, there were also lectures by Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, who was a very popular monk preacher of Abhidhamma, also a promoter of anti-communism, and a harsh opponent of Buddhadasa. Among their audience, there were future famous teachers of Buddhism, such as the present day Samana Phothirak at the Santi Asoke, Suchat Kosonkitiwong at the Samnak Pu Sawan, Kovit Khemanantha and Phra Phayom Kalayano, famous

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<sup>182</sup> *Chiwit lae phon ngan khong achan phon rattanasuan*, pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>183</sup> Sawai Kaewsom, interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999.

<sup>184</sup> Phra Phimolatham, "Anuson khun phra thipparinya" (Commemoration for Phra Thipparinya), *Anuson ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop: phra thipparinya (thup klamphasut)* (Commemoration of Phra Thipparinya's cremation) (21 May 1977), pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>185</sup> Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview, Chonburi, 29 April 1999.

<sup>186</sup> *Chiwit lae phon ngan khong achan phon rattanasuan*, p. 14.

disciples of Buddhadasa<sup>187</sup>. The audience included many more monks and lay people without big names, and they discussed with, and put questions to, those teachers. The Lan Asok truly functioned as a stage for town commoners to exchange their opinions about the *dhamma*, a place of the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand in the late twentieth century.

For the study of *dhamma* propagation activities that belonged to Buddhadasa's school, one of the most important persons at the Lan Asok was Sawai Kaewsom (1928 – )<sup>188</sup>. Sawai was from Phatthalung Province in the South, he graduated from Wat Benchamabophit High School and the Navy School for non-commissioned officer, and started his work as a chief petty officer of the navy in 1951. If compared with the high education and elite job career of Pun Chongprasoet, Sawai belonged to a more ordinary commoner's class, amongst whom he had a relatively high education for his generation.

Sawai's intellectual concern started with political ideology, especially Marxism. Through his experience as a soldier sent to the Korean War in 1952-53, Sawai thought that the war was promoted by the Americans who wanted to sell their weapons left over after World War II. Because of this concern, Sawai studied Marxism and political ideologies by reading the books of Thai Marxists, such as Supha Sirimanon, Kulap Saipradit and Samak Burawat. Although as a navy officer Sawai was not allowed to take part in any political movement, such as the Peace Committee, he believed that he had a right to express his opinions. Sawai often spoke of politics among his navy colleagues, and went to the Sanam Luang for political oration to promote socialism. Finally, he was investigated as a communist suspect by his commander and recommended to resign from the navy, be ordained and stay out of politics. After three months of ordination without much concern with Buddhism, Sawai started to work for an oil company, and continued his public speech at Sanam Luang.

Some time after the take-over by Sarit Thanarat's anti-communist military dictatorship in October 1958, political assemblies and speeches were banned, and Sawai

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<sup>187</sup> Sawai Kaewsom, interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999, 22 August 2000; Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview, Chonburi, 29 April 1999; Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Nonthaburi, 30 April 1999; Wannasit Waithayasewi, interview, Bangkok, 3 May 1999; Samana Phothisak, interview, Nakhon Phathom, 6 May 1999.

<sup>188</sup> The following story about Sawai is based on interviews with him on 21 March 1999 and 22 August 2000.



started going to the Lan Asok in Wat Mahathat. Since the abbot prohibited political speech in the premise of the temple, Sawai changed his topic of speech from politics to Buddhism. In Wat Mahathat, Sawai found a book of Buddhadasa, *Phasa-khon – Phasa-tham* (Human language and *dhamma* language), which was distributed by Wirot Sirit. Through Buddhadasa's teaching, Sawai found out that conventional Buddhism in Thailand was intermingled with Brahmanism, which made Thai Buddhism "superstitious". Sawai read books of Buddhadasa, and applied his ideas to his speech as about and discussion of Buddhism in the Lan Asok.

In addition to Buddhadasa's ideas, Sawai studied and applied the Abhidhamma theory in his explanations of the *dhamma*. Although there were several Abhidhamma teachers in Wat Mahathat, including Phra Satthamma Chotika Thammachariya and Phra Techin Thammachariya from Burma, Sawai did not have any lessons from these monk teachers. There was even a person who offered to pay for Sawai's tuition in the Abhidhamma, but Sawai did not like to memorise the details of the Abhidhamma theory that would made him 'crazy' (*ba*). Instead, Sawai listened to and discussed with those who had studied Abhidhamma in order to explain his idea of *lokuttara-dhamma* better. Although he applied the Abhidhamma, to which many teachers who opposed Buddhadasa belonged, both the basic ideas and associates of Sawai's *dhamma* propagation came from Buddhadasa's school of thought.

There are at least two important characteristics in Sawai's ideas of true Buddhism based on Buddhadasa's thought. One is his denial of the idea of *viññāna* as a soul that wanders and enters into another life after the death of an individual. Sawai understands that *viññāna* is a consciousness that arises when a human being came to be, and disappears when the person dies. The other idea is his promotion of the idea of reaching the level of the *ariya puggala*, who were in the flow to achieve complete *nibbāna*. Sawai explained that *nibbāna* means extinction of *upadāna* (clinging to existence). He also explains what *upadāna* is, and how to extinguish it in order to achieve *nibbāna*, sometimes with the assistance of the Abhidhamma theory. These basic ideas were commonly agreed to with Buddhadasa's other lay disciples, such as Pun Chongprasoet and Wirot Sirit. They often co-operated to propagate the *dhamma* through public discussion sessions at various temple premises, and public lectures for teachers at schools. However, among the other disciples of Buddhadasa, Sawai and Pun took an

extreme position in their understanding of Buddhadasa's ideas.

Every Saturday, Sunday and public holiday, Sawai came to discuss the *dhamma* in the Lan Asok, and he became a very influential teacher there. Even though he did not have any degrees, he could explain the *dhamma* better than many other people who came to talk with him. Sawai said that to learn the nature and life is neither to study textbooks nor to enrol for a doctoral degree. Many monks, perhaps including those who were studying at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, felt ashamed listening to the speech of Sawai since they had plans that they might disrobe in the future, most likely after completing their degrees. Kovit Khemanantha, who used to study at Sinlapakorn University, and who was to become one of the most famous disciples of Buddhadasa, confessed to Sawai that he decided to be ordained as a monk because of listening to the speeches of Sawai. A friend of Sawai said that many people could understand Buddhadasa's teaching by listening to Sawai, although they did not understand it by reading Buddhadasa's books<sup>189</sup>. Sawai's speech was supported by his audience in the Lan Asok, who bought him a loudspeaker and other means.

Sawai's speech in the Lan Asok was so popular, and the monk students at Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University, which is located beside the Lan Asok, did not listen to the lectures in the classroom, but preferred to attend Sawai's talk. Thus, the then University's vice-chancellor pressured the abbot of Wat Mahathat not to allow Sawai to give his speeches in the Lan Asok. On 14 October 1973, the day of the student uprising that overthrew the military dictatorship, Sawai was prohibited from giving his speech at the Lan Asok in Wat Mahathat, and moved to a place beside the main auditorium of Thammasat University, which is located next to Wat Mahathat<sup>190</sup>.

Between 14 October and 6 October 1976, Sawai's public speeches and discussions involved not only Buddhism, but sometimes politics. This time, according to Sawai himself, a student of Marxism before 1958, he took the position of a Buddhist, and argued that his enemy was *kilesa*, not any kind of person. After the 14 October uprising, Sawai was often criticised as *patikiriya*, or a reactionist, by leftist students at Thammasat, a centre of radical student activism. However, one of his political speech

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<sup>189</sup> A man who came to talk when I was interviewing Sawai at Thamma Sathan, a place of today's *dhamma* talk behind the main library of Chulalongkorn University, on 21 March 1999.

<sup>190</sup> Sawai Kaewsom, interview, 21 March 1999.

during this time, “Khrai? khu phu-ko-kanrai”<sup>191</sup> (Who is a terrorist?) presented a radical view that opposed American imperialism and the rightist Thais’ labelling of any disagreeable persons as “a communist”. Sawai defined what kinds of things a terrorist does, and concluded that those who had the characteristics of “a terrorist” were not those who were called “a communist”, but in fact American imperialism. In his argument, Sawai supported the ideology of communism of the Communist Party although he did not have any position in the Communist Party of Thailand. Sawai was labelled as ‘a leftist’ by most ordinary pious Buddhists, but his Buddhist perspectives were considered as “rightist” by radical students. This was the position of progressive Buddhists who were concerned with social issues in the 1970s.

Sawai’s discussions on Marxism and Buddhism continued into the 1980s, especially when he was introduced to Prasoet Sapsunthon by his friends. Prasoet was an old friend of Buddhadasa, and was once a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Thailand, but after 1959 he became an advisor of the military to teach the strategies of communists in order to apply them for counter insurgency<sup>192</sup>. Sawai said that both Prasoet and Sawai agreed that even the highest teaching of Marxism does not reach the highest teaching of the Buddha; by becoming a Buddhist, [a Marxist] can reach the summit. They understood that Marxism only teaches an aspect of materiality, and considers that people will be happy and good persons if their material environment, such as food and possessions, becomes better. However, those who are affluent with plenty of food, shelter, and cloth, are not necessarily happy and morally good, because they also have *avijjā* (ignorance) and *kilesa* (defilements). Corresponding to the claims in the works of Buddhadasa and Pun Chongprasoet, Sawai also argued that we do not need materials more than are sufficient to cover basic needs, but the pure mind that has overcome defilements can save the world. Sawai and Prasoet further agreed that communism cannot survive without incorporating Buddhism; and in fact, communism without Buddhism was in vain<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>191</sup> Sawai Kaewsom, “Krai? khu phu-ko-kanrai”, Kaptan Samut (pseudonym of Samak Burawat), *Phutthit phachoen na kap kommiunit* (Buddhism in the face of communism) (Klum yaowachon itsara, 1974), pp. 81 – 94. According to Sawai, this book was published by a group of students at Thammasat University (Sawai, interview, 22 August 2000).

<sup>192</sup> About Prasoet Sapsunthon, see Chapter V, pp. 224 – 230.

<sup>193</sup> Sawai, interview, 21 March 1999.

This discussion of Sawai and Prasoet suggests how Thai intellectuals or *achan* (teachers) in town commoners' discussion circles elaborated their understandings in conflicting, but equally suggestive ideologies. Questions about and interest in Marxism were not simply the domain of radical students and those related to the Communist Party. Questions about Buddhism were not exclusively the domain of monks and pious regular temple visitors. The discussions and experiences of political and Buddhist ideologies in their circle were very significant events in the public sphere of Thailand in the late twentieth century.

Sawai stopped going to Thammasat University to give public speeches and take part in discussions after the 6 October 1976, when the military returned to government with the massacre at Thammasat, and restrictions on political speech and activity were made by reactionary governments. After that, Sawai was invited to teach for the projects of the Foundation for Sublime Life Mission and by others, and he also visited schools and colleges to give him an opportunity to teach *lokuttara dhamma*. The public discussions in the Lan Asok continued even after Sawai left in 1973, but Achan Naep Mahaniranon, the other popular teacher in the Lan Asok, stopped going there in 1979 for reasons of ill-health. Perhaps, the function of the Lan Asok as a public space of Buddhist discussions by town commoners had to move to other places with other teachers and followers. Now, the activities of the Foundation for Sublime Life Mission were expanding and becoming significant, particularly as the *dhamma* propagation of Buddhadasa's group, over the last two or three decades.

#### The activities of the Sublime Life Mission

The Sublime Life Mission, or the *Mulanithi phoei phae chiwit prasoet* (abbreviation in Thai, Pho. Cho. Po.), is one of the most developed *dhamma* propagation groups of Buddhadasa outside Suan Mokkh. Compared with the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism, which had in fact only one member, the Sublime Life Mission established a plurality of members for its management committee, and conducts a wider range of activities. The Sublime Life Mission actually followed and co-operated with the activities of Pun in the beginning, took over some works of Pun after his death in 1980, and expanded *dhamma* propagation activities with other lay disciples of Buddhadasa, such as Sawai and Somsong Punyarit.

The Sublime Life Mission was founded by Wirot Sirit (1921 – )<sup>194</sup>. Wirot also had sound educational and work experience before he started his *dhamma* propagation activities. He graduated from Thammasat University in 1946, and started working for a legal office as a lawyer in 1947. However, he could not find a meaning in his life that was nothing but eating, working, wandering, being intoxicated with sensual pleasures, and sleeping every day. Wirot felt that it would be better to die if he had to endure sufferings in his life solely in order to live eating and sleeping. Wirot developed a mental disorder, and looked for an answer to questions such as: why were we born, for what purpose were we born, and why do we have life today? People told Wirot that he made a problem out of a non-problem, and called him crazy. However, Wirot did not look for his answers in a religious teaching, because he thought that life is possible without relating it to a religion, and any relation with a religion would give him unnecessary burdens and expenses<sup>195</sup>.

At the end of 1958 Wirot came across a book by Pun Chongprasoet, *Khu mu manut*, or *A handbook for humankind*. Wirot wrote that he would not have read it if he had known the book was a religious teaching, but he read it because he was interested in the life of human beings<sup>196</sup>. This was the book that eventually answered his questions.

How did *Khu mu manut* answer Wirot? If we read the book with his questions in mind, the following passages are illuminating.

Buddhism indicates that [desires] ‘to get something’ and ‘to become something’ are only transient things of this world, and exist by the power of ignorance (*avijjā*), because when we speak of the truth at the absolute and highest level, [we] cannot become anything. For what reasons? It is because both a person who gets something and the thing that is got are impermanent, suffering, and not belonging to anybody. ... Desire arises because the person does not know that nothing is worth wanting. It is also because wrong assumptions have become attached to us as instincts from the time when we were in the womb. From the time of being a child, we feel that we want, and know that we will behave in accordance with the desire. Then, some kind of effect arises; the effect sometimes corresponds with the desire, sometimes does not. If the effect corresponded with the desire, we want it more. If the effect did not correspond with the desire, we continue to struggle in other ways until we can get a desirable result. When we do something, it generates some kind of effect again, and circulates the cycle of defilement. Such a cycle of an act and its effect ([in Pali] *kamma* and *vipāka*) is called *vaṭṭa saṃsāra* ... **We have to bear suffering in this very cycle. If we are able to exit from this cycle, it is the overcoming of suffering for sure.** Regardless of being a poor beggar, a millionaire, a king, an emperor, a brahman, or whatever, all the beings who are in this cycle have to have some kind

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<sup>194</sup> The following story about Wirot’s life is based on an interview on 12 March 1999, and his article, “Tai di kwa yu?”, in a booklet, *Tai di kwa yu ru* (Is it better to die rather than to live?) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1964).

<sup>195</sup> Wirot Sirit, “Tai di kwa yu?”, pp. 3-4.

<sup>196</sup> Wirot Sirit, “Tai di kwa yu?”, p. 4.

of suffering, which is suitable to the person's desire. Therefore, we can say that this *vaṭṭa saṃsāra* is filled with huge sufferings. *Sīla dhamma* [morality] and *cariya dhamma* [proper conduct] are incapable of solving this problem. Thus, we have to rely on true Buddhism, which is a higher-level principle of the *dhamma* that can be applied to this problem in particular. We can see that suffering is derived from desire, the Buddha placed desire as the second item of the four noble truths as the cause of suffering<sup>197</sup>.

In other words, Pun's summary of Buddhadasa's preaching indicated that to satisfy human desires, such as eating, sleeping, and seeking sensual comfort, does not ultimately make a person happy. Rather, it is a part of the cycle of suffering in human life. There is a different way to overcome suffering. The book indicated that this is in fact the teaching of true Buddhism. The true Buddhism is even different from the Buddhism that Thai people are familiar with, such as moral and proper conduct, which ordinary monks teach at temples. What Wirot had to seek after was the true Buddhism that he had never expected in conventional Buddhism, and he wrote as an answer to his questions of life, "we were only born in order to find non-suffering"<sup>198</sup>. This surprise that Wirot found in "true" Buddhism would in fact be the feeling that Thai people in general found in Buddhadasa's preaching.

After Wirot had inquired into Buddhadasa's works that had been published by the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism, and met Pun, he was motivated to propagate the Buddhism that people had not been exposed to. At first, Wirot started propagating the *dhamma*, especially the preaching of Buddhadasa, who taught the way of overcoming suffering, by offering to co-operate with Pun's activities, such as publishing books, showing slides and organising lectures at various temples<sup>199</sup>.

Around 1967, Wirot established his own group with his friends, "Khana phoei phrae wittikan damnoen chiwit an prasoet" (The group that propagates the way of sublime life), which was so named on advice from Buddhadasa, and abbreviated as the Khana Pho. Cho. Po (The group of the Sublime Life Mission). Perhaps the first and most important work in the beginning of the group of the Sublime Life Mission was the publication of the series of Buddhadasa's sermons in booklet form, *Ekkasan chut mong dan nai* (The series of documents looking inside). The name of the series was taken from the phrase "*kan-mong sing thang puang nai dan nai*", which Wirot liked in

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<sup>197</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Khu mu manut*, pp. 35 – 38. The passage in bold here is in larger font in Pun's original text.

<sup>198</sup> Wirot Siriat, "Tai di kwa yu", p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> Wirot, interview, 12 March 1999.



# ภาษาคน ภาษาธรรม

ของ  
พุทธทาสภิกขุ

เพื่อให้ทุกชีวิตได้พบกับ  
วิธีการดำเนินชีวิตอันประเสริฐ

Figure 3. An issue of *Ekkasan chut mong dan nai* (The series of documents looking inside) of the Sublime Life Mission.

The Attached poem says: “Know yourself. This phrase means that you can seek and find a jewel inside yourself. Why do you look for it outside yourself? It is a waste of time. A lotus is in our self. Don’t be a fool. In the lotus, there is the finest gem for a human being to seek and find. Enlightenment or knowledge of any kind of thing, all comes from the knowledge of yourself”.

Buddhadasa's preaching to the Buddhist club students at Chulalongkorn University, *Thamma khu chiwit* (The *dhamma*, a companion of life). Wirot installed a picture, "Chong ruchak tua eng" (Know yourself!)<sup>200</sup>, at the Spiritual amusement theatre in Suan Mokkh. In the picture, a person is jumping into a lotus flower inside the self. Wirot realised that looking inside is nothing but *vipassanā* meditation<sup>201</sup>. The group of the Sublime Life Mission published the series' first issue, *Phasa-khon – Phasa-tham* (Human language and Dhamma language) around 1967<sup>202</sup>, and altogether one million copies of the sixty-six stories of Buddhadasa in this series have appeared both for sale and for free distribution.

*Dhamma* book propagation by the Sublime Life Mission took over the method of Pun's Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism. According to a report in the first print of the second issue of the series, *Ekkasan chut mong dan nai*, 10,000 volumes of *Phasa-khon – phasa-tham*, the first issue of the series, was published by public donation. The Sublime Life Mission spent 6,000 baht for printing, and 750 baht for shipping. Among the 10,000 copies, the Sublime Life Mission donated 5,000 to Suan Mokkh for distribution to visitors, to monks in general, and to libraries. The Sublime Life Mission also encouraged people to buy their publications to distribute on occasions such as ordination ceremonies, cremations, festivals, celebrations for house building, *katin*, and for donations to libraries<sup>203</sup>.

The *dhamma* book distributions of the group of the Sublime Life Mission were further supported by the opening of its bookshop, Thammabucha, in 1969. This was when the illness of Sa'at Watcharaphai, the owner of the Suwichan Bookshop, became serious, and the group of the Sublime Life Mission took over the role of a bookshop that specifically dealt with low price publications on Buddhism as explained by the group of

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<sup>200</sup> There is a poem attached to the picture. See figure 3 and its caption.

<sup>201</sup> Wirot, interview, 12 March 1999.

<sup>202</sup> The first print of the second volume, *Ekkasan chut mong dan nai andap 2: ruang phai khong phutthasasana khong phutthathat phikkhu* (The series of documents looking inside No. 2: Danger to Buddhism by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), does not give the year of its publication. However, it should be sometime after late 1966, because Buddhadasa's sermon was given on 23 January 1966. This book was printed in 100,000 copies. For another example, the second print of the seventh volume, *Tham bun sam baep* (Three kinds of merit making), was printed in 500,000 copies in 1968. These examples of the early printings indicate that the Sublime Life Mission vigorously published many copies of Buddhadasa within a very short period.

<sup>203</sup> Khana phoei phrae Phuttha-tham (The *dhamma* propagation group), "Krap rian than phu borichak" (A report for the donors), *Phai khong phutthasasana*.



Buddhadasa. Through the *dhamma* book distributions of the group of the Sublime Life Mission, the influential *dhamma* orator, Sawai Kaewsom, first read a work by Buddhadasa, *Phasa-khon – phasa-tham*. In addition, a number of student activists also investigated Buddhadasa's Buddhist thought. For instance, Pracha Hutaniwat read Buddhadasa's book, *Chit wang* (Empty mind), which was summarised by Pun Chongprasoet, for the first time, and bought copies of each of the books of Buddhadasa at the Thammabucha bookshop<sup>204</sup>. Another former student activist, Weng Tochirakan, helped Wirot to transcribe a sermon of Buddhadasa in order to publish it as a book<sup>205</sup>. These examples suggest that the *dhamma* propagation activities of the group of the Sublime Life Mission certainly brought the teachings of Buddhadasa and Buddhism to those who were less familiar with temple activities, such as keeping the eight precepts, meditation, and listening to monks' sermons.

The group of the Sublime Life Mission incorporated people who were interested in and ready to devote themselves to work for *dhamma* propagation even in the provinces. They established the Centre for the Mission of the Way of Sublime Life (*Sun phoei phrae wittikan damnoen chiwit an pen prasoet*) in 1975. Also in 1975, they decided to legally register a foundation in order to make their organisation permanent, and make it easier to co-operate with government and other organisations. They were allowed to register as the Foundation for the Sublime Life Mission (*Mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet*) by the Department of Religious Affairs and the Bangkok Metropolitan Office<sup>206</sup>.

After 1975 through to the early 1980s, the Sublime Life Mission had two major activities: a training programme for monks and novices to become preachers, and a preaching project for schoolteachers who taught *sila dhamma* (morality). For the former programme, the Sublime Life Mission established the Suan Idappaccayataram (The garden of conditional arising) in Saraburi Province<sup>207</sup>. For the latter, the Sublime Life

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<sup>204</sup> Pracha Hutaniwat, interview, Bangkok, 1 May 1999. About Pracha's student activism and works as an engaged Buddhist, see Chapter VI.

<sup>205</sup> Weng Tochirakan, interview, Bangkok, 31 August 1999. About Weng's experience as a student activist, see Chapter VI.

<sup>206</sup> "Thalaengkan mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet" (An announcement of the Foundation for the Sublime Life Mission), *Thalaengkan trasan mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet (pho. cho. po.) chabap pho. so. 2522* (An announcement document of the Foundation for the Sublime Life Mission, 1979 edition), pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>207</sup> "Thalaengkan mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet", p. 5.

Mission worked most extensively in co-operation with the Ministry of Education<sup>208</sup>, where, in the late 1970s, Buddhadasa's lay disciples had responsible positions.

In the late 1970s<sup>209</sup>, the Ministry of Education examined reform of the curriculum of school education, especially in Buddhism. According to Somsong Punyarit, a teacher at Samsen Witthayalai School and the head of the reform committee for the subject of morality, there was an uncertainty during that time whether the Buddha actually existed or not, and the Ministry had to make students have faith in the Buddha<sup>210</sup>. Somsong said that the generation of students after the 14 October uprising received influence from the leftist ideologies that downgraded religion. Perhaps the governments after the 6 October reactionary coup intended to restore young people's faith in Buddhism, one of the three nationalist symbols considered as the national values opposed to communist ideologies. Contrary to Buddhadasa's anti-establishment image and suspicions of him being a communist, Buddhadasa's lay disciples were trusted and appointed to the role of reinforcing faith and practice in Buddhism under reactionary governments.

The then director of the Department of Research and Information, Ekkawit na Thalang, had been ordained as a monk at Suan Mokkh for a rains retreat after completing his doctoral degree in the United States. Ekkawit himself had faith in Buddhadasa, and also had encouragement from his father, Phraya Amonritthamrong, who had supported Buddhadasa's propagation tour in the South as an official of the Ministry of Interior<sup>211</sup>. For the purpose of reform in the curriculum, Ekkawit said that pupils should learn *dhmma* that they can practise in their everyday life instead of

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<sup>208</sup> "Thalaengkan mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet", pp. 5 – 12.

<sup>209</sup> Ekkawit said that in 1975 the curriculum reform started, in 1977 it became a plan for education, in 1978 the reform was done, and in 1979 the new curriculum started to be carried out (Ekkawit na Thalang, interview, Bangkok, 20 March 1999). While, Somsong Punyarit said that the Minister of Education, Pinyo Sathon, in the cabinet of Thanin Kraiwichian (22 October 1976 – 19 October 1977) started considering the reform of the curriculum of Buddhism (Somsong Punyarit, interview, Bangkok, 22 March 1999). The information from these two persons does not agree on the starting year of the reform consideration. However, both said that there was a group of people in the Ministry of Education, who thought that the existing curriculum of Buddhism, which forced pupils to memorise items, should be replaced with the one that could actually be practised.

<sup>210</sup> Somsong Punyarit, interview.

<sup>211</sup> Ekkawit na Thalang, interview. About Phraya Amonritthamrong, see *100 pi anuson amonritthamrong* (Centenary of Amonritthamrong) (Khana luk lan phim pen thi raluk nai ngan tham bun chalong khrop rop 100 pi wan khelai wan koet phraya amonritthamrong (phrom na thalang), 28 February 1993) (The group of children and grandchildren publish for commemoration on the occasion of the merit making ceremony of the approaching 100 years since his birth).

memorising detailed items, such as the four noble truths and the noble eight-fold path<sup>212</sup>. Ekkawit wanted pupils to be able, for example, to return a lost article to its owner, by studying the principle of honesty.

For the subject of *sīla dhamma*, or morality, another lay disciple of Buddhadasa, Somsong Punyarit, was appointed as the head of the curriculum reform committee by a recommendation of the sub-director of the Academic Division, who used to be Somsong's boss at a school in Ubon. Somsong said that although she did not have a very high position in the Ministry, she was chosen as the head because the Ministry appreciated her achievement in her school in 1975. Among all the high schools in Thailand, Somsong installed in her school the first *hong phra* (a room for the Buddha image), where students voluntarily came to meditate every morning<sup>213</sup>. As the head of the committee, Somsong selected nine members for the committee, including Wirot Siriat, Kovit Khemanantha, Nikhom Chetchaoenrak, and Arunwati Suwannakanit, who were all disciples of Buddhadasa. In the previous curriculum, the fourth and fifth year students in the secondary school had to memorise the history of the Buddha, the ceremonies to make merit, such as for celebrating a birthday and building a new house, and thirty-eight items in the *Maṅgala sutta*. The old curriculum was replaced by the committee with one to teach students to practise true Buddhism that teaches to destroy defilements. In this reform, Somsong said that Buddhadasa's teaching was absorbed in her mind in order to apply it to the new curriculum<sup>214</sup>.

After the new curriculum was drafted, the Department of Formal Education held a seminar in 1977 for the teachers of morality to know how to teach the subject in accordance with the reformed plan. A hundred teachers attended the seminar, and a number of them said that they did not know how to teach students to practise *sīla dhamma* in their daily life rather than just theory. The curriculum reform committee amended their plan, but there were still many teachers who wanted guidance. The teachers' council in many districts and provinces asked the Sublime Life Mission to organise a training programme for *sīla dhamma* teachers from 1978. In 1978-1979, the Sublime Life Mission toured all over Thailand to give instructions in *sīla dhamma* and Thai etiquette at

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<sup>212</sup> Ekkawit na Thalang, interview.

<sup>213</sup> Somsong Punyarit, interview.

<sup>214</sup> Somsong Punyarit, interview.

50 – 60 places for a total of 5,000 – 6,000 teachers. For this series of seminars for *sila dhamma* teachers, the Sublime Life Mission invited both ordained and lay disciples of Buddhadasa who were capable of giving preaching, such people as Phra Worasak Worathammo, Phra Phayom Kalayano, Phra Maha Prathip Uttamapanyo, Phra Kovit Khemanantha, Sawai Kaewsom, and Somsong Punyarit. In each seminar, 100 – 200 teachers attended<sup>215</sup>.

For this series of seminars, the Sublime Life Mission had to support themselves by their own funds. Each seminar cost 500 – 3,000 baht, including the cost of petrol, food, accommodation, and printing, and they had to call for public donations in order to continue this activity. They explained that the government also relied on their activities, because other groups were unable to gain as much co-operation from monks and novices to teach *sila dhamma* as the Sublime Life Mission. They suggested three kinds of donations to their Foundation. A donor might, first, make a regular monthly donation, or occasional donations; second, they might make savings in their own name (minimum 500 baht), and donate the interest to the Foundation; and third, they might contribute 30 baht per year by subscribing to the Foundation's quarterly newsletter, *Siang pluk* (A voice of encouragement)<sup>216</sup>. However, the training programme for the *sila dhamma* teachers only lasted until 1982.

In 1982 the reformed curriculum was changed again. In the new curriculum, students once again had to memorise items of Buddhist theory. The 1982 curriculum reform committee was headed by Professor Sumon Amonwivat from Chulalongkorn University, and the committee members included Somsong, P. A. Payutto Bhikkhu, Suchin Borihanwannaket (a preacher on Abhidhamma), and Ravi Bhavilai (who teaches science at Chulalongkorn University, and is a student of both Abhidhamma and Buddhadasa). At the first meeting, when Sumon submitted an idea to reform the style of memorising on the advice of Suchip Punyanuphap, an influential teacher at Mahamakut Buddhist University, Somsong opposed his plan. However, P. A. Payutto, a highly respected academic monk, disagreed with Somsong very politely. Somsong did not go to the committee meeting afterwards, because she was caught up in an accident<sup>217</sup>.

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<sup>215</sup> "Thalaengkon mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet", pp. 6 – 9.

<sup>216</sup> "Thalaengkon mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet", pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>217</sup> Somsong Punyarit, interview.

Perhaps, this was the end of the influence of Buddhadasa's group on the Ministry of Education.

Wirot should have felt very disappointed with his work for *sila dhamma* seminars. He said that his activities during the first thirty years until the late 1980s did not meet his expectations<sup>218</sup>. A friend of Sawai Kaewsom who attended my interview with Sawai also said that the seminars of *sila dhamma* could not evaluate any real effects or changes in actual life<sup>219</sup>. Through this experience, Wirot sought a way to find a more visibly effective promotion of the *dhamma* in each person's life.

In 1990, Wirot became interested in "village bank", a rural village development activity of Chamnong Somprasong, by reading a newspaper column. The column, *Chalam khiaw*, in the daily newspaper, *Thai rat*, on 11 September 1990 reported that each rural village had a debt of 2,000,000 baht, and in sum farmers in Thailand owed 120,000,000,000 baht. The government proposed to resolve the debt, but Associate Professor Chamnong Somprasong at Kasetsart University said that he did not totally agree with the idea because it would not help farmers avoid debt in the future. In the article, Chamnong proposed his idea of *kong thun muban* (village fund), a financial institution of villagers. He recommended villagers save some money in a common village fund, which is used for villagers as *thanakhan muban* or *sahakon* (a co-operative). Chamnong had already tested it in four villages in North-eastern Thailand, and had a good result, because villagers were able to absolve their high interest payments and debts through the common fund. Chamnong further proposed that the government should financially assist the village fund<sup>220</sup>.

Wirot became interested in Chamnong's idea, and with fellow monks visited the villages where Chamnong was testing his project. When Wirot visited the villages, Chamnong said that the village bank could be sustainable with *khunnatham* (moral principles). Because of this conversation, Wirot started to think of mutual support between the propagation of the *dhamma* and the village bank project<sup>221</sup>. Wirot thought

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<sup>218</sup> Wirot Siriart, interview, 12 March 1999.

<sup>219</sup> A friend of Sawai at Sawai's interview, 21 March 1999.

<sup>220</sup> Mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet, "Thoi thalaeng" (Preface), Phairot Sisakunwong, Charoen Sisaeng, and Chamnong Somprasong, *Khu mu banchi thanakhan muban* (A handbook for village bank accounting) (Bangkok: Mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet, 1994), pp. 4 – 5. The newspaper column in *Thai Rat* newspaper was cited in it.

<sup>221</sup> Wirot Siriart, interview, 12 March 1999.

that the village bank could assist people by developing three aspects: the mind, society, and economics. Wirot explained:

... when a villager made a debt, he/she has to learn thriftiness and patience. ... In order to be thrifty and patient, the villager should control his/her mind to a certain degree. The important moral principle of Buddhism is to control the mind, which should not follow desire, and the self which drifts to the things that tempt the person's self. To follow the self is to follow defilement. There are lust, anger, ignorance and so on, which are the cause for '*khwam-hen-kae-tua*' (egoism) to arise. After all, we comprehend the core of the issue that, in order to resolve the debt of villagers, we have to let them practise the *dhamma*, or in other words, let them leave vice, do good, and make their minds pure (by leaving egoism). This is the way to reduce egoism until we consider the benefit of the whole [society] above that of the self<sup>222</sup>.

Although Buddhadasa did not commit to any activity of rural development or village bank, Wirot said that the *dhamma* he applied to such activities was all derived from Buddhadasa's preaching<sup>223</sup>. Wirot moved from the ideal principles of Buddhadasa to the actual betterment of socio-economic life. On this common basis, the Sublime Life Mission started assisting the village bank project.

In terms of management, the village bank is a financial institution that is based on the shares and deposits of the members of a village. It functions in a small-scale village economy ranging from ten baht to several thousand baht. Just as banks in general, the village bank also finances villagers and takes interests from those who have a loan, and the interest is distributed to the members as interest on shares and deposits, and also as life, health, and harvest insurance. Further income from the management of the village bank is used as a common fund for village development, for supporting religion, for children's education, for the elderly and for handicapped people. In particular, schoolteachers are supposed to give advice on the bank's management, accounting procedures, and the position of secretary, and monks are to teach thriftiness and patience, and to indicate the four vices in *apayamukha* (drinking, gambling, visiting prostitutes, and keeping bad company) and extravagant ceremonies which cause villagers to become poor<sup>224</sup>.

Not only the Sublime Life Mission, but many similar kinds of village banks or co-operative activities, supported by various religious groups, have spread widely throughout Thailand. For example, Phra Achan Subin Panito in Trat Province, learnt of

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<sup>222</sup> Mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet, "Thoi thalaeng", p. 5.

<sup>223</sup> Wirot Sirit, interview, 12 March 1999.

<sup>224</sup> Phairot, Charoen, and Chamnong, *Khu mu banchi thanakhan mu ban*, pp. 9 – 12.

the idea of village co-operatives in the late 1980s, when he was doing *dhutaṅga* ascetic practice in the South. He was in contact with villagers who had economic problems and some local teachers who were testing the method of co-operatives<sup>225</sup>. Subin had once stayed with Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh before he started his activities, and he said that he was influenced by Buddhadasa's preaching for the basis of his activities. Subin has contact with the Sublime Life Mission and with other disciple monks of Buddhadasa, however he comes from different origins and uses a slightly different method from the village bank of the Sublime Life Mission.

Not only groups influenced by Buddhadasa, various other religious people also struck upon this method as a way to work for society. A Catholic priest, Bunluan Mansap, who is now a bishop, has had a "credit union" project, or a kind of co-operative, at the Soon Klang Thewa (Centre of the angel) in an urban poor community in Bangkok since the 1960s<sup>226</sup>. Based on his idea of religion's utility for society, Bunluan had contact with a famous development monk, Luang Pho Nan in Surin Province, and also Sulak Sivaraksa, a lay co-ordinator for monks' rural development activities<sup>227</sup>. Through the Sekhiyatham, the networking of development monks by Sulak's NGO, many monks attended an instructional seminar and then applied the method of co-operatives in their village. Apart from the groups under Catholic influence and that of Sulak, there are many other Buddhist groups which have applied a variation of the village bank or co-operative method. Especially, the Buddhist communities that the Santi Asok established in provinces have recently paid attention to this. Samana Phothirak said that when many lay people came to live together with him and the group, he needed a system of community – that was, what he named *rabop bunniyom* ("meritism system"), in which co-operatives have a significant function<sup>228</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> Phra Subin Panito, interview, Trat, 21 August 1999.

<sup>226</sup> Bishop Bunluan Mansap, interview, Ubon Ratchathani, 26 December 1999. The activities of the 'credit union' expanded all over Thailand, and the Thai government admitted it as a co-operative in 1979. In 1979, the members of the credit union were ninety-one. The Soon Klang Thewa is now the centre of the Credit Union League of Thailand (Pethai Pathumchantararat et. al. at the Soon Klang Thewa Credit Union Cooperative Limited, interview, Bangkok, 28 December 1999).

<sup>227</sup> So. Siwarak (Sulak Sivaraksa), *Chuang lang haeng chiwit* (A later part of [my] life) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Khlet Thai, 1997), pp. 222-223.

<sup>228</sup> Samana Phothirak, interview, Nakhon Phathom, 6 May 1999. About the Buddhist community of the Santi Asok group, see Sombat Chanthraong, *Rai'ngan kansuksa ruang chumchon pathom asok, kansuksa phuttha yuthopia* (A report on the Pathom Asok community, a study of a Buddhist utopia) (Bangkok: the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, 1988).

Although all these groups were not directly connected with the ideologies of communism, socialism, and co-operatives, they would have been criticised as “idealism, useless for social revolution” by the radicalised students, in the same way as Buddhadasa’s groups of *dhamma* propagation were criticised. Buddhadasa’s preaching taught the overcoming of suffering through a training of the mind, this was expanded to a reform of economic life, guided by an insightful mind that can distinguish the causes of suffering. This is a significant development from Buddhadasa’s work by his disciples’ efforts at propagation, it is also significant for Buddhism in Thailand in the last decades of the twentieth century.

#### “Branch” temples of Suan Mokkh and the Sublime Life Mission

The activities of the present Sublime Life Mission include correspondence with and support for Buddhadasa’s disciple monks who have established their own temples in provinces in order to spread and pass on the teaching in the different regions of Thailand. After hearing the preaching of Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh for a while, some of his disciple monks went back to their home villages or home provinces, and founded their own temples as a “branch” of Suan Mokkh Chaiya. Although Buddhadasa said that Suan Mokkh Chaiya does not have any such branches<sup>229</sup>, perhaps like Luang Pho Cha Suphattho’s Wat Nongpaphong, hundreds of which have expanded all over Thailand and overseas<sup>230</sup>, some of Buddhadasa’s disciples call their temple “Suan Mokkh” in their region. For instance, Phra Maha Khachit Siriwattho (1947 – ), who stayed in Suan Mokkh Chaiya during 1970 – 1973, named his temple in Chiang Rai Province, Wat

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<sup>229</sup> Metta Phanit, interview.

<sup>230</sup> The branches of Wat Nongpaphong, or of Luang Pho Cha, were nearly 200 by December 1998 (Khemachit Bhikkhu, the abbot of the Wat Pa Wiwek, which is the seventh branch of the Wat Nongpaphong, interview, 15 December 1998). Its branches include some foreigner disciple monks of Luang Pho Cha in Thailand, such as Wat Pa Nanachat (International forest temple) in Ubon Ratchathani Province (the 19th branch), and the Japanese abbot, Phra Mitsuo Khawesako’s temple, Wat Sananthawanaram in Kanchanaburi Province (the 117th branch). The overseas branches of Wat Nongpaphong (up to 1989) included four temples in England, one in Australia, one in New Zealand, one in Switzerland, and one in Italy built (Phra Mitsuo Khawesako, interview, Kanchanaburi, 25 December 1998; Khana luksit (A group of disciples), *Rom ngao wat nongpaphong* (Shadow of the Wat Nongpaphong) (1989), pp. 71 – 77). For a study on Luang Pho Cha and his expanding branches, see Khanungnit Chanthabut, *Sathana lae botbat khong phra phutthasasana nai prathet thai* (The situation and the role of Buddhism in Thailand) (Bangkok: Klum prasan’ngan sasana phua sangkhom, 1989), pp. 128-147.



Worakittanon Suan Mokkh Chiang Rai<sup>231</sup>. In the North-eastern region, there is Wat Santiwanaram Suan Mokkh Lan Tham of Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani (1942 – ), who stayed in Suan Mokkh Chaiya in 1967-1969<sup>232</sup>, and also Thamma Sathan Suan Mokkh Isan Wat Khoksila of Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon (1960 – ), who spent a rains retreat in Suan Mokkh Chaiya in 1986<sup>233</sup>. These temples have some buildings and structures that imitate the ones in Suan Mokkh Chaiya, such as the Bot Thammachat (Hall of nature), Sa Narikae (Coconut tree pond), Lan Hin Khong (A gathering place with the semi-circle of stones), in order to exemplify the *dhamma* that Buddhadasa taught in Suan Mokkh<sup>234</sup>.

Unlike the branches of Wat Nongpaphong, which have a general meeting twice a year<sup>235</sup>, the relationship of the Suan Mokkh “branches” with Suan Mokkh Chaiya is only a “spiritual connection”<sup>236</sup>. The abbots of the “branches” of Suan Mokkh interact with each other personally or at Buddhadasa related gatherings, sometimes at Suan Mokkh Chaiya, other times at activities of the Sublime Life Mission. The relationship with the Sublime Life Mission is only personal and occasional, for example, when they need to find a lay supporter who has faith in Buddhadasa and can afford to buy land<sup>237</sup>. Otherwise, each “branch” has its own preaching programmes for lay groups most of the time. Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani said that the branches and regional centres also exist in the North and South, but the Northeast has the largest numbers of branch temples. Suan Mokkh Lan Tham in Udon Thani Province takes on the role of the North-eastern regional centre of the Sublime Life Mission. Every year for the past eleven years at Suan Mokkh Lan Tham the abbot has preached to 20 – 50 monks and novices in his temple for four months (three months for the *dhamma* practice, and a month for scriptural study). In the temples, which are linked to the Sublime Life Mission, the Sublime Life Mission’s project of the village bank is not compulsory, and

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<sup>231</sup> Phra Maha Khachit Siriwattho, interview, Chiang Rai, 16 March 1999.

<sup>232</sup> Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview, Udon Thani, 24 December 1999.

<sup>233</sup> Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon, interview, Sakon Nakhon, 24 December 1999.

<sup>234</sup> Phra Maha Khachit, interview.

<sup>235</sup> Khemachit Bhikkhu, interview.

<sup>236</sup> Phra Maha Khachit, interview.

<sup>237</sup> Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon, interview. The cost of the land of Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon’s temple was covered by a lay follower who was introduced by Phra Sithawat, a committee member of the Sublime Life Mission, with whom Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon became familiar at a meditation retreat in Suan Mokkh Chaiya.

the propagation of the *dhamma* that Buddhadasa explained is most emphasised<sup>238</sup>.

The extensions of Suan Mokkh and the Sublime Life Mission into the provinces indicate that Buddhadasa's thoughts on Buddhism are accepted by people in rural areas beyond the level of well-educated intellectuals who conduct their life and activities in Bangkok. Those abbot monks in provincial 'branches' of Suan Mokkh are not necessarily educated at a high level. All the above-mentioned three monks who established regional Suan Mokkh centres are from well-to-do farmer's families, and have completed the third year of secondary school. After completing formal education, Phra Maha Khachit was ordained as a novice in a temple in his hometown at the age of fifteen, and completed ecclesiastical education up until the third level of the Pali examination in Bangkok. In order to deepen his understanding in Buddhism, Phra Maha Khachit studied with Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu in 1969 as a novice at his Djitthabhawan College, which is a project for monks and novices to have wider education, and he stayed with Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh as a monk for four years<sup>239</sup>. Both Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani and Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon helped with their parents' farming until they were ordained at the age of twenty and twenty-two respectively. In the case of Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, he was influenced by his ordained elder brother in Nong Khai, who, even before his ordination, sent him books on the *dhamma* including those of Buddhadasa<sup>240</sup>. Whereas, Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon first knew of Buddhadasa when he met a teacher monk from his temple, who had been to Suan Mokkh<sup>241</sup>. Both of them, though there is eighteen years' difference in their ages, preferred Buddhadasa to the forest monks in the Northeast, who belonged to Phra Achan Man Phurithatto. Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani said that Buddhadasa explained the *dhamma* very deeply and widely, whereas the teachings of Phra Achan Man and his disciples indicated only basic principles and their meditation method, *phuttho*<sup>242</sup>. Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon thinks that people respect those Thammayut forest monks as *phu-wiset*, or extraordinary, magical persons, but they are not very much interested in their teachings. He prefers to teach the *dhamma* that Buddhadasa clarified rather than rituals involving the

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<sup>238</sup> Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview.

<sup>239</sup> Phra Maha Khachit, interview.

<sup>240</sup> Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview.

<sup>241</sup> Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon, interview.

<sup>242</sup> Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview.

supernatural<sup>243</sup>. Their preaching of Buddhadasa's non-supernatural Buddhism has been received with a certain respect by local people, for example villagers co-operated in the building of the temple with free labour because of their faith<sup>244</sup>. Through the propagation activities of these monks in the provinces, Buddhadasa's teaching is spreading among the populace with less educational background.

### The Propagation Activities of Buddhadasa's group in Laos

Buddhadasa's influence has spread beyond the Mekong River in Laos. Phra Phum Detchawongsa (1931 – )<sup>245</sup> at Wat Pa Wimok in Vientiane considers that his temple is a “branch” of Suan Mokkh in Laos. Phum explained that the Pali word in the name of his temple, *vimokkha*, means deliverance or emancipation, and has the same root of the word, *mokkha*, which is used in Suan Mokkh. In fact, Phum is not only one of the most capable preachers in Vientiane, but also the sole propagator of Buddhadasa's school of Buddhism in Laos.

The career of Phum suggests that he is relatively well educated and used to be in a socially respectable job in Laos. In 1954 after graduating from a French founded high school in Savannakhet, his home province, Phum worked for the Treasurer for a year, and moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Phum worked as a diplomat in Thailand in 1960 – 64, and in the United Kingdom in 1971 – 75 before the revolution in Laos. Phum continued his work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even after the 1975 change of regime in Laos, until he was ordained as a monk in 1985, when he perhaps reached the age of retirement from his job.

Phum's interest in Buddhism started when he returned from his job in Thailand. Through the preaching and *vipassanā* training of Phra Achan Maha Pan Anantho (? – 1968) at Wat Sokpaluang, which was in the neighbourhood of Phum's house in Vientiane. Pan had passed a Pali ecclesiastical examination in Thailand to qualify for the title of “Maha”, and he also studied *vipassanā* meditation in the school of Abhidhamma in Thailand. Pan had connections with leading progressive monks in

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<sup>243</sup> Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon, interview.

<sup>244</sup> The Suan Mokkh Isan Lan Tham was built by free labour co-operation by surrounding villagers. (Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview.)

<sup>245</sup> The following stories on Phum's life and activities are based on an interview with the author, Vientiane, 28 March 2000.

Thailand, such as Phra Phimolatham (At Atsapho) and Panyanantha Bhikkhu, and invited these monks and brought their books on Buddhism from Thailand. In 1965, Pan invited Panyanantha to preach in Laos, and Phum first knew of Buddhadasa through the sermons of Panyanantha. Moreover, a monk and a lay group of Wat Umong in Chiang Mai came to Vientiane to do a *katin* ceremony around the same period before the revolution in Laos, and Phum received books of Buddhadasa that they distributed for the ceremony. Among those books, Phum found *Khu mu manut*, which was summarised by Pun Chongprasoet, most impressive. After that, Phum pursued Buddhadasa's teaching by reading books, and he visited Buddhadasa in Suan Mokkh for the first time in 1971 with Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, who used to be in Nong Khai, which is just across the Mekong River from Vientiane. Since the death of Pan, his teacher, Phum took over teaching *vipassanā* and explained Buddhadasa's teachings at Wat Sokpaluang every Sunday afternoon, when he had a holiday from his job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

After his return from his job appointment in London in 1975, Phum continued his preaching at Wat Sokpaluang, even after the change of regime in Laos, where the communist party overthrew the royalist one. Phum said that everyone was scared to be involved in religious activities under the communist regime, but he did not give up teaching the *dhamma* that he learnt from Buddhadasa's works. In fact, the communist government did not prohibit Phum's activities, although Phum agreed that the government did not find much significance in people's culture, including religious beliefs and activities, for the first ten years after the revolution.

In 1985, after he was ordained as a monk, Phum was told to answer an interview from a group of Japanese journalists who raised the question of religion under the socialist regime. Since those Japanese journalists asked whether the *vipassanā* meditation school existed in communist Laos or not, Phum, one of the most capable *vipassanā* teacher in Vientiane, answered that there was *vipassanā* and Buddhist religion existed in Laos. Phum explained to them that religion is the truth (Lao: *man pen khwam-ching, man pen satchatham*), and everyone wants to know the truth whatever the political regime is. Phum has kept teaching meditation before and after the change of political regime, its aim is to control the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, which are the doors where suffering can arise.

Many questions arise regarding the ideological and political positions of Phum and Buddhadasa's teaching which Phum propagated under the socialist regime of Laos. Does the *dhamma* taught by Buddhadasa have a specially recognised position in socialist Laos, as some people believe<sup>246</sup>? As well as other Thai monks, Buddhadasa's groups of monks are not allowed to preach in Laos, but the government does not prohibit that Lao monks teach Buddhist thoughts that they have learnt from Thailand, including the schools of Buddhadasa and *Abhidhamma*. There is also no need for special permission to distribute Buddhadasa's books in Thai in Laos, because any books on Buddhism can be imported from Thailand to be distributed in Laos, although newspapers and books that are concerned with politics and ideologies were prohibited. Since printing books costs much more in Laos, and also Lao people have no problems reading Thai script, Phum mostly brings Buddhadasa's books in Thai from Thailand rather than translating and publishing them in Lao, except for two: *Tham bun 3 baep* (Three kinds of merit making) and *Pawarana*<sup>247</sup>. In fact, Panyanantha Bhikkhu, an important fellow monk of Buddhadasa, came several times to preach in Laos under the royalist regime in the late 1960s, including one invitation from the monarchy of Laos, who contacted Panyanantha through the USIS, an anti-communist agency of the United States in Thailand. At the time of his sermon, Panyanantha preached to the Lao people to unite in order to save the nation. The content of his message can be compared with that of nationalist right wing mass organisations in late 1970s Thailand<sup>248</sup>. However, Panyanantha was invited to Laos again in 1983 under the socialist regime, when Laos held a peace conference of Asian Buddhists, in which Panyanantha was the representative of Thailand<sup>249</sup>. These invitations of Panyanantha suggest that Panyanantha, a famous monk preacher, was wanted by both camps, and he played a predictable and anticipated role at both occasions.

What about Buddhadasa's proposal of Dhammic Socialism (*thammika*

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<sup>246</sup> For example, Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani said that exceptionally books of Buddhadasa and Panyanantha were allowed to be brought into Laos from Thailand even after the revolution. Phra Achan Bunchan Tetchathammo at Wat Ong Tu, a historical temple in Vientiane, confirmed Phra Khru Phisan's information, and explained the reason being that their teaching of Buddhism indicated the core of the *dhamma* (Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview; Phra Bunchan Tetchathammo, interview, Vientiane, 27 March 2000).

<sup>247</sup> Phum Detchawongsa Bhikkhu, interview.

<sup>248</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae Ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 385-386.

<sup>249</sup> Phra Maha Chanya, *Chiwit lae Ngan khong than panyanantha*, pp. 386-387.

*sangkhomniyom*)? Has Dhammic Socialism ever been utilised in the propaganda of the Lao socialist regime? According to Phum, the only capable preacher of Buddhadasa to teach the *dhamma* in Laos, the answer is no. In the personal view of Phum, the government allowed Buddhism to stay under their regime as a popular belief, but the government officials “followed [the tenet of] Karl Marx”<sup>250</sup> as their principle policy. Although Phum was not prohibited to teach Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism, Phum found it difficult for people to understand the message. Phum did not propose the concept of Dhammic Socialism to the government officials because he considered that it would become too political. Phum only liked this concept personally, and once intended to name his temple “Wat Thammika Sangkhomniyom” (Temple of Dhammic Socialism) sometimes in the early 1990s. Phum gained permission from Buddhadasa to use it as his temple’s name, however, when he returned Vientiane, Laos had got rid of “sangkhomniyom” (socialism) from the country’s official name and from government propaganda<sup>251</sup> so Phum abandoned his plan to change his temple’s name.

What about Phum’s ideological position under the socialist regime? As a monk who was ordained only at an advanced age, Phum does not have any administrative appointment in the Organisation of the Fellowship of Buddhism in Laos (Lao: *Ongkan phutthasasana samphan haeng prathet lao*), which is the equivalent to the Sangha in Thailand. As a respected preacher to the people, Phum was once given opportunities to teach the *dhamma* on state television and radio for a year sometime around 1998, because he was expected to assume a role promoting Lao cultural values when the Lao government began to recognise their significance alongside Marxist ideology. This approximately coincided with the time of Phum’s ordination in 1985. However, Phum quit this work because people, especially those who were in the government, did not understand his sermons. Phum considered that his sermon based on Buddhadasa went further than the ceremonial sermon that the government wanted. These episodes indicate that Phum’s preaching has nothing to do with the government’s policy to have Buddhist monks propagate socialist ideology to the Lao people.

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<sup>250</sup> Phum Detchawongsa, interview.

<sup>251</sup> According to Phum, every government document used to have on it, “Ekkarat, santiphap, prachathipatai, sangkhomniyom” (Independence, peace, democracy, and socialism), but they recently say “Ekkarat, santiphap, prachathipatai, wathana thawon” (Independence, peace, democracy, and permanent development) (Phum Detchawongsa, interview).

Ideologically, Phum took up a distance from the American and Thai consumerist cultures, Marxism, and the recent change in Lao life of liberalising economic policy. Phum considers that the material is subordinate to the mental, and the “science of mind” should be distinguished from the science of the material in which the Americans lead the world. In the material, Phum explains that it is not possible to end problems and sufferings, but in the mind, it is. Phum calls America “fully materialist”, by which he means consumerist; Lao politics is also “materialist”, but Lao people are different. Also, in comparison with Buddhism in Thailand, Phum believes that supernaturalism and its consumerism, such as the pendent of a small Buddha image, is more prevalent in Thailand than in Laos. Phum does not admire Thai Buddhism even though he received the teachings of Buddhadasa from Thailand. Recently Lao people are becoming the same as Western people seeking economic development, and they consider religion as outdated. Not only are the cultures in the American and Thai camp, as well as the recent introduction of the market economy in Laos, but also socialism is not the ideal for Phum. Although the socialist regime in Laos did not destroy or prohibit Buddhist activities, religion, in which Phum sees most significance, is given a secondary position to Marxist theory. Moreover, Phum says socialism is too radical, even though it seeks peace in the end. Whereas, religion has *mettā*, or loving kindness, which never destroys enemies. Buddhism does not make any struggle because when the mind is strong enough, no struggle ever occurs.

We should understand that Phum’s defence of Buddhism under a socialist regime was a defence of Buddhism rather than of a socialist regime, which is likely to be labelled as antagonistic to religion, and in which Phum and Buddhism had to survive. Such an ideological attitude of Phum is identical to that of Buddhadasa and his group of Buddhists within Thailand belonging to the opposite ideological camp. They took a critical stance to both capitalist consumerism and worldly socialism from a Buddhist perspective, as Buddhadasa articulated in his Dhammic Socialism<sup>252</sup>.

The propagation of Buddhadasa’s school of Buddhism in Laos has been conducted by Phum’s efforts from the royalist period through to the time of the change in regime to the present. In the socialist Lao conditions where Thai monks are not

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<sup>252</sup> See Chapter VI.

allowed to preach, propagation of the *dhamma* by Buddhadasa's group relies on Phum, a Lao disciple of Buddhadasa. Every year during the rains retreat Phum teaches every day at his temple to his disciples, including twenty-two monks, eight novices, and about twenty *mae chi*, who altogether number around fifty. These numbers of his disciples are rather large for a temple in Laos without a school of scriptural studies, and even in comparison with most of other provincial Suan Mokkh branches in Thailand<sup>253</sup>. Apart from preaching to his disciples who live in the temple, Phum gives a sermon for lay people every Sunday afternoon. Phum is also invited every year to teach at temples in other provinces in Northern and Southern Laos. At each temple, he organises a seven-day retreat, and spends three to four months in summer on the training in the provinces. Some who became interested in the *dhamma* that Phum expounds in the provinces come to his temple in Vientiane to study with him for a longer period of time. Phum said that although there are no other temples than his which can be considered as a "branch" of Suan Mokkh in Laos, many young monks now respect Buddhadasa, so Buddhadasa's school is spreading in Laos.

The public sphere of Buddhism in Vientiane has not functioned as in Bangkok, where Pun, Sawai, and Wirot frankly expressed their opinions and discussed them with their audience. However, Phum's preaching of the *dhamma* and teaching of *vipassanā* has also been an expression of Buddhist people in socialist Laos, where most people kept silence in the Buddhist public sphere for fear of being involved in religious activities. Here, another of Buddhadasa's disciples has had an important role.

In this chapter, I have examined how Buddhadasa's teaching was propagated in the Buddhist public sphere in contemporary Thailand and further beyond that into Laos. Buddhadasa's propagation activities expanded first through the journal, *Phutthasasana*, which he wrote and published with his brother, Thammathat. The propagation of the *dhamma* was further expanded by many groups linked to Buddhadasa, especially those

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<sup>253</sup> Every year there are about five monks and two female ascetics in Suan Mokkh Chiang Rai during the rain retreat; and nine monks in Suan Mokkh Isan of Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon (Phra Maha Khachit, interview; Phra Khru Kittiyansunthon, interview). Perhaps the case of Suan Mokkh Isan Lan Tham is an exception. As a regional centre of the Sublime Life Mission in Northeast, the temple has a project to train young monks and novices to become *dhamma* teachers. Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani says that there are about twenty to fifty monks and novices who join this project (Phra Khru Phisanthammaphani, interview).



of lay followers, who belong to different circles, such as elite Bangkok government officials, people in northern Thailand, town commoner's assemblies, and the socialist regime in Laos. In order to communicate with the masses, both print media and oral communications at each gathering place were important. Each group created a space of discussion where people came to seek an understanding of Buddhism and to exchange their learning with others.

Those devoted followers of Buddhadasa who became motivators of the *dhamma* propagation were not wealthy enough to be able to donate greatly or to fund the propagation activities. However, their high social status and high levels of education facilitated their activities and meant they were trusted with donations for their works. The well-to-do urban middle class origins of many of those propagators are remarkable, though the anonymous people who participated the public sphere should not be forgotten. The rich contribute their money which is essential for the work of propagation, whereas less educated or people less capable of running public activities could simply come to the gathering of preachers whom they respected as their *achan* (teacher). It is more important to emphasise that in the places of the *dhamma* discussion, no one was excluded, but everybody was invited to apply the *dhamma* to overcome suffering in his or her life.

In the places of discussion, disagreement had to exist. This chapter, which focused on expansion of Buddhadasa's groups, did not deal much with the conflicts of opinions that Buddhadasa and his followers experienced with other groups. The next chapters will pursue the arguments in which Buddhadasa's group was involved, and that contributed vital discussions to the Buddhist public sphere.

### Chapter III Empty mind: a controversial concept of Buddhadasa thought discussed in the Buddhist public sphere

By the middle of the twentieth century, the doctrinal understanding of Thai Buddhists had improved. In the late nineteenth century King Chulalongkorn was shocked at the standard of preaching by provincial monks. Thanks to the efforts of his half-brother, Prince Patriarch Wachirayan Warort, basic doctrinal education spread through the ecclesiastical examinations and textbooks. Also by the end of World War II, academic monks pursued further study of the Pali scriptures, especially by translating the *sutta* into Thai, and they published their translations in Buddhist journals, such as *Thammachaksu* of the Mahamakut Buddhist Academy, and *Phutthasasana* of Buddhadasa's Khana Thammathan. When they sought different ways to go beyond the standards and uniformity of modern ecclesiastical education, differentiation in doctrinal understanding of Thai Buddhists occurred. In other words, diversity of ideas was increasing in the Buddhist public sphere in the post-World War II period.

In the case of Buddhadasa, after synthesising the stories in the Pali scriptures into such books as *Tam roi phra arahan* (Following the footprints of *arahant*) and *Phuttha prawat chak phra ot* (The life of the Buddha in his own words), he pursued his studies further in English journals and books. These introduced him to other traditions of Buddhist thought, and helped to develop his ideas. One of the striking ideas that Buddhadasa introduced into the Thai Buddhist public sphere was the concept of emptiness (Pali: *suññatā*) and empty mind (Thai: *chit wang*).

In Thailand, the concept of emptiness was unfamiliar until 1947 when Buddhadasa translated *The sutra of Wei Lang*, a classical Chinese Zen text, into Thai from the English translation by Wong Mou-lam<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps Buddhadasa became

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<sup>1</sup> Wong Mu Lam (Phutthathat Phikkhu trans.), "Sut khong wei lang", *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 15 No. 2 (May 1947), pp. 96 – 123. *The sutra of Wei Lang* was first translated into English by Wong Mou-lam in 1930 and published by the Yu Ching Press in Shanghai, and a new edition was published in 1944 by Christmas Humphreys in London ("Forward to new edition", Luzac & Co., p. 5). In Thailand, Buddhadasa's Thai translation has been reprinted many times by "Thirathat" (Thira Wongphophra), a Chinese Zen Buddhist living in Bangkok. It has been distributed free for propagation purposes by Phutthasamakhom Pao Keng Teng (保宮亭). When Buddhadasa translated the book into Thai, he sought advice from Tan Mo Siang (陳慕禪), a Chinese Zen preacher in the Tae Chew dialect at Samakhom Phutthaborisat Thai-Chin Pracha (the Thai-Chinese Buddhist Association; 中華佛學研究社). Tan Mo Siang indicated some mistakes in the English translation from Chinese so that

interested in emptiness through this work, then found it also in the Theravāda scriptures, and propagated the idea in his sermons. This seems to have happened in the 1960s when Buddhadasa talked emphatically of emptiness, and it then became familiar to the ears of Buddhists in Thailand<sup>2</sup>. In 1964 especially, the dispute-ridden panel discussion about empty mind by Buddhadasa and M. R. W. Kukrit Pramoj (1911 – 1995) gave people a lot to talk about in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand<sup>3</sup>, and it was even known by the present king, King Bhumibol<sup>4</sup>. The concept of emptiness and empty mind became a controversial issue about which Buddhadasa was criticised as being unorthodox.

In fact, emptiness has been a controversial concept even from the period of early Buddhism. According to Lamotte, following Nāgārjuna, the Śrāvakayāna (or “Hinayāna”), in which the Theravāda was included, teaches the emptiness of beings (*sattvaśūnyatā*), or non-self, while the Buddhayāna (or Mahāyāna) teaches both emptiness of beings and emptiness of things (*dharmāśūnyatā*), which means the world is as empty as the “self”<sup>5</sup>. The Theravāda also had the concept of emptiness in its canon, but it was not discussed in the traditional Theravāda commentaries as much as in Mahāyāna schools which expanded on it. Because contemporary Thai Theravāda Buddhists were uncertain whether this teaching was inherent in their form of Buddhism, emptiness also became controversial when they came to know of it through Buddhadasa, and especially so

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Buddhadasa could grasp the main ideas in the original language (Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya: atchiwaprawat khong than phutthathat* (Talking in the twilight years: an autobiography of Venerable Buddhadasa) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1988), pp. 501 – 502).

<sup>2</sup> There is a collection of Buddhadasa’s sermons on emptiness, which include one given on Magha Puja, 12 February 1960 (Phutthathat phikkhu, “Makhapunnamikatha”, *Chumnum thamma banyai ruang chit wang* (Collection of *dhamma* lectures on empty mind) (Bangkok: Arun Witthaya, 1992)).

<sup>3</sup> According to Panyanatha Bhikkhu, a co-worker of Buddhadasa’s *dhamma* propagation, Buddhadasa said, “I used to think that it would take twenty years for people to understand *suññatā*, but nowadays it looks like not so long. This is because Kukrit helped very much. He helped to criticise it and made people interested in it. People will be able to read and study in various newspapers, which helps to stimulate them to study” (Panyanatha phikkhu, “Chiwit lae phonngan khong than phutthathat” (Life and work of Ven. Buddhadasa) (originally spoken on 2 February 1986), *Chiwit lae phonngan khong than phutthathat* (Bangkok: Atammayo), p. 20).

<sup>4</sup> Sanya Thammasak (Sanya Dhammasakdi), “Phutth-tham kap chiwit kan-ngan” (Buddha *dhamma* and a life of work), Pun Chongprasoet (ed.), *Arai thuk, arai phit* (originally published by Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1973; reprinted by Mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet, 1982), p. 165. According to Sanya, King Bhumibol used the word empty mind to him many times. When Sanya, a member of the Privy Council, was worrying that he did not have a good idea about something the king wished to consult over, King Bhumibol told him to have empty mind.

<sup>5</sup> Étienne Lamotte, “Les dix-huit vacuités”, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna: Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra: avec une étude sur la vacuité*, Volume IV (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1974), pp. 1995 – 2013. I thank Dr. Royce Wiles for translating from and discussing Lamotte’s philological study.

when he was attacked by his opponents.

In earlier studies by Gabaude and Jackson, Buddhadasa's proposal of empty mind was examined as one of his characteristic ideas. Gabaude indicated that emptiness was one of Buddhadasa's criteria to determine the authenticity of the scriptures and Buddhist beliefs<sup>6</sup>, and Jackson implied that Buddhadasa's promotion of empty mind was a modern, Protestant kind of abolition of the monk-laity distinction in order to give access to *nibbāna*<sup>7</sup>. Both studies examined critiques of Buddhadasa's teaching of empty mind, which was claimed to be heretical, but they considered that the opponents' arguments and positions were uncritically represented as conservative or theoretical. In fact, Buddhadasa's opponents used various tactics to manipulate public perceptions of him, at the same time Buddhadasa's untraditional teaching was controversial. The discussions of both Buddhadasa and his opponents should be investigated equally in order to evaluate his thought. Also, in both Gabaude's and Jackson's studies, which mainly explored characteristics of Buddhadasa's thought, the view of Buddhadasa's followers who perceived this teaching as beneficial, was almost untouched. Even though modern, rational characteristics are found in Buddhadasa's thought, it should not be automatically assumed that his followers favoured Buddhadasa because of that. Those followers' opinions should also be examined as a part of the discussions in the Buddhist public sphere.

In this chapter, by looking at discussions about empty mind that Buddhadasa provoked in the late 1960s, I am going to explore what made his proposal controversial for participants in the Thai Buddhist public sphere. In order to approach this question, I am going to examine three things: first, basic points of Buddhadasa's empty mind; second, Buddhadasa's panel discussions with Kukrit Pramoj, by which this concept became widely known; and third, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, a book formatted like a debate over the issue. In the conflict between the opinions of Buddhadasa's group and his opponents, each sought a way to take the advantage of the other in order to gain the

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988), pp. 119 – 121.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Jackson, *Buddhadasa: a Buddhist thinker for the modern world* (Bangkok: The Siam Society under Royal Patronage, 1988), especially “Cit-wang – ‘Freed mind’ and the abolition of the monk-lay distinction”, pp. 157 – 184; “The practice of cit-wang”, pp. 185 – 206; “Cit-wang and Zen”, pp. 207 – 232.

upper hand in the discussion. Through this process, Buddhadasa appeared to be unorthodox not solely because of his introduction of the unfamiliar concept of emptiness into Theravāda, but also because of his image as generated by discussions in the Thai Buddhist public sphere.

## 1. Main features of empty mind in Buddhadasa's thought

The concept of empty mind was one of the ideas that gave people the impression that Buddhadasa was unorthodox from the viewpoint of the Theravāda school of Buddhism. However, Buddhadasa often cited Pali phrases in the *Tipiṭaka* as authorisation, and developed the idea in his own way. As far as I can trace Buddhadasa's thought on empty mind, there are at least five points that became topics of discussion.

First, Buddhadasa explained that empty mind is a state of mind freed from *kilesa* (defilements) and from *upādāna* (clinging) which sees things as *tua ku* (me, self) or *khong ku* (mine, possessions of the self)<sup>8</sup>. According to Buddhadasa,

Empty mind is not a mind that does not feel anything. What is called *citta* (mind) has to have *kwam-ru-suk* (feeling), because it is the nature of the mind. If the mind has a feeling of non-egoism, it is called 'chit wang'. If the mind has a feeling of strong egoism, it is called 'chit wun' (unsettled mind)<sup>9</sup>.

Buddhadasa considered the state of mind that is free from attachment to a self and its possessions as the heart of Buddhism. He referred to the words of the Buddha,

All kinds of *dhamma* (*dhammajāti* [nature])<sup>10</sup> are *anattā* (non-self). No one should attach to any kind of *dhammā*<sup>11</sup>.

When there is no sense of attachment to a "self", or to things as the possession of a self, which in reality cannot be owned, suffering does not arise. Because the ultimate goal of

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<sup>8</sup> Phutthathat, *Kan-tham-ngan duai chit wang phua sangkhom khong than phutthathat* (Working with the empty mind for the sake of society by Ven. Buddhadasa) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana), pp. 7 – 8; Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae khong than phutthathat* (*Suññatā*, empty mind, and original mind by Ven. Buddhadasa) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Phutthathat, *Kan-tham-ngan duai chit wang phua sangkhom*, pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>10</sup> The bracketed phrase was given by either Buddhadasa or Pun Chongprasoet, the editor of the book (Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, p. 17).

<sup>11</sup> Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, p. 17. Buddhadasa often mentioned this phrase in his sermons. In Pali, the latter half of the phrase seems to be *Sabbe dhammā nālam abhinivesāya* (Ranchuan Inthrakamhaeng, *Suan mok thammai? Thammai suan mok?* (Why Suan Mokkh? Suan Mokkh, why?) (Bangkok: Attamayo, 1991), p. 32).

Buddhism is to overcome suffering, Buddhadasa made emptiness or empty mind as the essence of Buddhism.

Second, Buddhadasa explained that the mind is originally pure and empty, free from defilements. Although this argument of Buddhadasa sounds like Zen, he supported his idea by a Pali phrase from the *Tipiṭaka*:

*pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ āgantukehi upakilesehi upakiliṭṭhaṃ*

which means

Bhikkhu[s], the mind is luminous. But, the mind becomes gloomy because *upakilesa* (imperfections) come as visitors<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, Buddhadasa argued that the original mind (*chit doem thae*) does not have any defilement so that it is always pure and it is luminous if we do not let defilements arise by following the noble eightfold path (right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration). He explained,

The mud is not the jewel, but the luminosity is covered by the mud. If we take away the mud, the jewel is luminous as it used to be. The mind is the same. Many sorts of *cetasika* came to it and deprive it of its luminosity<sup>13</sup>.

According to Buddhadasa, defilements came to the original, pure mind in the following way. When a baby is born, it starts to have attachment. For example, when its eyes see a sight object, ears hear a sound, nose smells an odour, etc., it becomes interested in the sight object, sound, odour, taste, or body sensation, and either satisfaction (Pali: *sukha vedanā*) or dissatisfaction (Pali: *dukkha vedanā*) arises. Then, some kind of desire (Pali: *tanhā*) arises, and then *upādāna* (clinging), or in other words, *tua ku – khong ku* (me and mine), arises. Since a little child does not have knowledge of the *dhamma*, *kilesa* easily arises because of its *avijjā* (ignorance). It soon starts to be attached to *sukha vedanā*, and that attachment produces suffering<sup>14</sup>.

However, Buddhadasa thought that *tanhā* or *upādāna* occupies the mind not for too long, perhaps several hours or minutes a day. If the mind were dominated by the sense of me and mine all the time, Buddhadasa said that the person would become crazy. Any time when the mind is not interfered with by *kilesa*, the mind is at peace and able to

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<sup>12</sup> Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, p. 10. This is my English translation of Buddhadasa's Thai translation of the Pali phrase.

<sup>13</sup> Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, pp. 11 – 12.

<sup>14</sup> Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, pp. 14 – 15.

think with *sati paññā* (insight) and *sati-sampajañña* (full awareness)<sup>15</sup>.

For Buddhadasa, empty mind, which is originally pure and freed from defilements and clingings, does not agree with the Abhidhamma theory of mind, therefore these points of disagreement became targets of criticism for the Abhidhamma groups<sup>16</sup>.

Third, Buddhadasa taught that empty mind is attainable and should be pursued by everyone, including lay people living in secular society. Although the idea of empty mind or emptiness belongs to the *lokuttara dhamma*, or the path of overcoming suffering, which is often considered as a teaching for monks who aim at becoming *arahant* by renouncing the mundane world, Buddhadasa found a scriptural foundation which could support the practice of it by lay people. Buddhadasa often referred to a Pali phrase,

*Ye te suttantā Tathāgatabhāsītā gambhīrā gambhīratthā lokuttarā suññatapaṭisaṃyuttā,*

which appears in the *Dhammadinna Sutta*<sup>17</sup>. In the story, the Buddha recommended the practice of emptiness when Dhammadinna sought advice that would benefit lay people.

The Buddha answered,

Then, Dhammadinna, thus must ye train yourselves: As to those discourses uttered by the Tathāgata, deep, deep in meaning, transcendental and concerned with the Void, from time to time we will spend our days learning them. That is how you must train yourselves, Dhammadinna<sup>18</sup>.

By this scriptural authorization, empty mind or emptiness is encouraged for ordinary lay people who also have emptiness as the foundation of their mind, even though their mind is not empty of defilements as that of an *arahant*, hence *upādāna* often interferes with their mind.

Fourth, Buddhadasa taught lay people to “work with empty mind” (*Tham ngan duai chit wang*) in the midst of secular society. According to Buddhadasa, when the mind is empty of egoism (*Khvam-hen-kae-tua*), without the sense of me and mine, we only work in accordance with our duty. Also, when the mind is empty from clinging to me and mine, the mind is filled with *sati paññā* and *sati sampajañña*. Therefore, a person can fulfill their duty most perfectly when they have an empty mind. For example,

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<sup>15</sup> Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter IV.

<sup>17</sup> The *Dhammadinna sutta* is in *Mahā-vagga, Saṃyutta-nikāya, Sutta-piṭaka* (M. Léon Feer (ed.), *Saṃyutta-nikāya Part V Mahā-vagga* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), pp. 406 – 408).

<sup>18</sup> F. L. Woodward, *The book of the kindred sayings (Saṃyutta-nikāya) or grouped suttas: part V (Mahā-vagga)* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1965), p. 348.

Buddhadasa said that when the mind is empty of attachment to the sense of “me” and “mine”, a farmer can plough the field enjoyably even in the middle of the blazing sun, a hunter can shoot a target precisely, and a musician can play music in a most refined way<sup>19</sup>. Buddhadasa promoted “work for the work’s sake”, “work with empty mind”, being forgetful of the benefit to oneself, especially with regard to work for society or for the nation. If there is egoism in the mind, the work will only be a means of unlawful benefit, and will not be done accurately<sup>20</sup>. However, Buddhadasa taught that if a soldier has a sense of responsibility for the nation without any intention to do unjust violence or to kill people, the shooting of the soldier would not be a demerit, as it would be for those who have a sense of me and mine. This is compared to taking a medicine to excrete a parasitic worm. The person may know that the worm will be killed by the medicine, but the primary intention is not to kill, but to cure the body<sup>21</sup>. These acts were considered by Buddhadasa as working with empty mind.

Fifth, even though it was often criticised as Mahāyānistic or non-Theravāda, Buddhadasa indicated that the idea of *suññatā* or emptiness actually occurs in the *Tiṭṭaka*. Apart from the above mentioned *Dhammadinna sutta*, Buddhadasa referred to the *Mahāsuññatā sutta* and the *Culāsuññatā sutta* in which the concept of emptiness is presented<sup>22</sup>. In these *sutta*, the Buddha explained to Ānanda about emptiness in transcendent states of meditation. Buddhadasa did not examine the contents of these *sutta* as specifically as the *Dhammadinna Sutta* in his preaching to popularise the concept to the lay Buddhists in general<sup>23</sup>. Buddhadasa considered the concept of emptiness as the most essential

<sup>19</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 114 – 121.

<sup>20</sup> Phutthathat, *Kan-tham-ngan duai chit wang phua sangkhom*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>22</sup> These *sutta* are in the *Suññatāvagga*, *Uparipappāsa*, *Majjhima-nikāya*. The Pali text is in Robert Chalmers (ed.), *The Majjhima-nikāya* vol. III (London: The Pali Text Society, 1960), pp. 104 – 118. There are at least two English translations of these texts available: I. B. Horner (trans.), *The collection of the middle length sayings (Majjhima-nikāya)* vol. III (London: The Pali Text Society, 1959), pp. 147 – 162; and Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (trans.), Bhikkhu Bodhi (translation edited and revised), *The middle length discourse of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 965 – 978.

<sup>23</sup> In order to indicate the significance of emptiness in the Theravada scriptures, Buddhadasa seems to have most frequently cited the Pali phrase, *Ye te suttantā Tathāgatabhāsītā gambhīrā gambhīratthā lokuttarā suññatapaṭisamyuttā*. Including one occurrence in the *Dhammadinna sutta*, this phrase is mentioned altogether four times in the *Suttapīṭaka*, according to Lamotte’s study on emptiness in certain Buddhist scriptures. It appears in: “Aṇi”, M. Léon Feer (ed.), *Samyutta-nikāya Part II Nidāna-vagga* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1960), p. 267; Richard Morris and A. K. Warder (ed.), *Aṅguttara-nikāya Part I* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1961), p. 72; Richard Morris and A. K. Warder (ed.), *Aṅguttara-nikāya Part III* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1961), p. 107 (Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, p. 2004).



teaching of Buddhism regardless of schools, because it is related to the state in which suffering is overcome.

These five points often became topics in the discussion about emptiness or empty mind that Buddhadasa provoked in the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand. In the following sections, I will examine how these points were discussed by his opponents and his followers.

## 2. Discussions with Kukrit Pramoj

From 1963 to 1965 the Teachers' Association (Khurusapha) had three series of panel discussions and a public lecture, which was entitled “*Dhamma* as a tool to build a person, to build a nation, and to build the world”, where Buddhadasa and Kukrit were the main guest speakers<sup>24</sup>. This was an attractive event for Thai intellectual audiences because it involved two of the most respected intellectuals in Thailand, Buddhadasa and Kukrit<sup>25</sup>. Buddhadasa was a preacher who could seriously present essential points of the *dhamma* which people in general had until then not been aware of in their ordinary Buddhist practice. He was a monk who gained popularity not because of amusing jokes and funny stories, but because of the impressiveness of his religious message. On the other hand, Mom Ratchawong Kukrit was a lay elite intellectual who belonged to the secular world. He was a fourth generation descendent of King Rama II, and had a B.A. with honours in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Queen's College, Oxford.

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<sup>24</sup> The title was, in Thai, “Thamma nai thana pen khruang mu sang khon, sang chat, lae sang lok”. There are several books that collect the discussions at the Khurusapha by Buddhadasa and Kukrit. Here I refer to Arun Wetchasuan's edition. Arun wrote that the version that Pun Chongprasoet's Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism prepared had been widely read, but it was an incomplete record of the whole discussion, it omitted the beginning and the end (Arun Wetchasuan, “Kham nam” (Introduction), Arun Wetchasuan (ed.), *Wiwattha: khwam-hen mai trong kan rawang mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj kap than phutthathat phikkhu* (Dispute: disagreement of opinions between M. R. W. Kukrit Pramoj and Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) (Bangkok: Arun witthaya, 1977, 1996), p. 8). Also, Pun's edition only collected the second of the three Khurusapha events, while Arun's provides all three with precise details of time and date.

<sup>25</sup> Although their reputations could have been different in the 1960s, in an opinion poll both Kukrit and Buddhadasa were elected to the list of “Ordinary citizens [i.e. non-royal family] too precious to leave the world” (*Kan-chak-pai khong samanchon thi khon sia dai mak thi sut*) and were in the top ten of its ranking in 1999. Kukrit was in third place, winning 31.5% of the votes, while Buddhadasa was in sixth place, 20.9% votes (“Khrongkan sanruat prachamati phua sathon phap ruam sangkhom, kanmuang, wathanatham thai kon pi 2000” (Public opinion survey for reflecting a total picture of Thai society, politics, and culture before 2000), *Thai phot* (Thai Post, a daily newspaper), 13 December 1999, p. 2).

After his return from England in 1933, Kukrit demonstrated his ability in many areas, as a banker, a newspaper columnist, a novelist, and a politician. Before the early 1960s, Kukrit had been elected as an M.P. many times and had even served as a minister in the cabinet of Khuan Aphaiwong from 1947 – 1948. In 1950 he launched the newspaper *Sayam rat*, which he owned and contributed to as a main columnist<sup>26</sup>. Kukrit was also popular for his skilful speech, through which he often made cynical comments and jokes about his discussant's arguments, and invited audience laughter and applause. Even though by blood he belonged to a royal lineage and in terms of ideology he was a royalist, Kukrit was rather one of the popular figures in democratic parliamentary politics and in the Thai public sphere.

The series' first panel discussion was held on 6 July 1963 with the invitation of Buddhadasa and three discussants: Kukrit Pramoj, Pui Rotchanaburanon, and Chanthit Krasaesin, under the title, "Ngan khu kan-patibat-tham" (Work is a practice of the *dhamma*). This first discussion was broadcast throughout the country by television and radio<sup>27</sup>.

In the discussion, Buddhadasa expressed his idea that the *dhamma* should not be left to the monasteries but should be applied in everyday life. He said that when speaking of the *dhamma*, people should not consider it as abandoning or escaping from the secular world. Instead, the true *dhamma*, said Buddhadasa, teaches those who live in the secular world to overcome the world, in other words, not to have suffering in the world<sup>28</sup>. In this discussion, Kukrit basically agreed with Buddhadasa, although he playfully twisted Buddhadasa's words with his eloquence, for which he was well known, by saying,

When we listen to the radio or television, they say that work is for money. ... I feel so tired and want to ask [Buddhadasa] a way to escape from the world like this. I do not want to live there.

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<sup>26</sup> Kasaem Sirisamphan, Sunthari Asawai, Atcharaphon Kamutthaphisamai, Sathaban Thai Khadi Suksa (eds.), "Prawat mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj" (A life history of M. R. W. Kukrit Pramoj), *Anuson nai ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop satstrachan phon tri mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj, po. cho., mo. po. cho., mo. wo. mo.* (Commemoration at the cremation of Professor Major General Mom Ratchawong Kukrit Pramoj, Pathom Chulachomklao, Maha Paramaphon Chang phuak, Maha Wachira Mongkut [these three are decorations that Kukrit received from the king]) (23 December 1995), pp. 43 – 51.

<sup>27</sup> Arun, "Kham nam", p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 15 – 16.

To this comment of Kukrit, the audience laughed and applauded<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, by opposing the prevailing saying, “Work is money, money is work”, Buddhadasa proposed an alternative idea, “Work is for work’s sake” by the taking up of one’s duty, which he regarded as a practice of the *dhamma*. He expanded this argument and said that if we work for money, conflicts between capitalists and labourers arise; on the other hand, if labourers are satisfied to practise the *dhamma* in their duty, there will be no conflict, thus such an ideology as communism would have never been born in the world<sup>30</sup>. Buddhadasa insisted that

To practise the *dhamma* is to practise a duty. To practise a duty means to produce the beneficial [result] of the duty. This point is a pure *dhammajāti* (nature), and is the mind which is empty from [egotistical] attachment to self<sup>31</sup>.

One of the discussants, Chanthit disagreed with this position of Buddhadasa and regarded it as an idea only suitable for ordained people. He maintained the truth of the prevailing saying, “Work is money, money is work that creates happiness”, and this is the natural understanding of lay people who are attached to staying in the secular world<sup>32</sup>. In the face of their disagreement, Kukrit supported Buddhadasa’s view in this first panel discussion. Kukrit said,

[I] completely agree with Ven. Buddhadasa who said that in our Buddhist religion the highest good that Buddhists should do is to act in accordance with duty. In general, for everyone who believes in Buddhism, who is not necessarily an ordained person, but farmers, government officials, army officers, and people in any other occupations including renunciates, the so-called good act is to do [one’s] duty perfectly<sup>33</sup>.

After the session, Kukrit even wrote an article, which supported the view of

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<sup>29</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 65. For this argument, the definition of the *dhamma* that Buddhadasa explained should be noted. He said on other occasion, “The word, *dhamma*, according to Pali or Sanskrit, has four meanings. [First,] it is all nature, earth, water, wind, fire, mind, form, and anything that is nature itself is called the *dhamma*. [Second,] all nature has the laws of nature (Pali: *dhammajāti*). For example, it has impermanence, suffering, non-self, and so on. These are called laws of nature. [Third,] the *dhamma* is the duty for human beings to practise. Morality, meditation, wisdom, or the duties of human beings whatever occupation they do for a living are called the *dhamma*. [Fourth,] various fruits that arise from doing duties, for example, happiness, suffering, money or whatever, are called the *dhamma* as they are” (Phinit Rakhongko (ed.), *Thammanukrom thammakhot* (*Thammakhot* [literally means “*dhamma* propagation”; this is a title of the collection of Buddhadasa’s works] Dictionary of the *dhamma*) (Chaiya: Thammathan Mulanithi, 1994), p. 132. This book, *Thammanukrom thammakhot*, is a dictionary of important Buddhist concepts that one of Buddhadasa’s lay disciples codified from the twelve books in the *Thammakhot*, the collection of Buddhadasa’s works).

<sup>32</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 66 – 67.

<sup>33</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 71.

Buddhadasa about this, “Work is to practise the *dhamma*” in *Sayam rat* (Siamese nation), the newspaper that he owned<sup>34</sup>.

However, in the second discussion at Khurusapha Kukrit and Buddhadasa started to disagree with each other. In the second discussion only Buddhadasa and Kukrit were invited to discuss the topic, “Work with empty mind (How should we understand the *dhamma*?)”<sup>35</sup>. In the beginning of their discussion, Kukrit agreed with Buddhadasa, who criticised people’s enthusiasm for memorising scriptural passages and all the numbers of certain characteristics of mind in the Abhidhamma theory, which made it difficult to reach the real meaning of the *dhamma*, or how to overcome suffering<sup>36</sup>. However, when Buddhadasa spoke of *chit wang* or empty mind, Kukrit opposed Buddhadasa with the insolently polite attitude of a royal descendent by calling Buddhadasa “*tai thao*” (Your Excellency)<sup>37</sup>.

By proposing “work with empty mind”, Buddhadasa argued that we should carry out all our duties with a non-egotistical mind, or no sense of the self and

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<sup>34</sup> The article was later reprinted in a book that collected Kukrit’s columns, *Phutthasasana kap khukrit* (Buddhism and Kukrit) (Arun, “Kham nam”, p. 6).

<sup>35</sup> Although here I focus on their discussion on empty mind, there were in fact two major issues of conflict. Apart from the relevance of empty mind for lay people, Kukrit and Buddhadasa did not agree on the role of faith (Thai: *sattha*; Pali: *saddhā*). Kukrit demanded a foundation for Buddhism. Kukrit argued that people should first have faith in the triple gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, and then believe in what the Buddha taught: *dukkha* (suffering), *samudaya* (origin), *nirodha* (cessation), and *magga* (path). Without this first basic faith and understanding of doctrines, Kukrit assumed that people would misunderstand or lose themselves in the world of attachment and sufferings (Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 109). Buddhadasa partially agreed with Kukrit in the second session, but after experiencing an escalation of conflict in Kukrit’s critical columns, Buddhadasa took up this point to criticise Kukrit in the third session of the Khurusapha. In it, Buddhadasa said that Kukrit was trying to bring dogma into Buddhism. According to Buddhadasa, Buddhism is a religion of *paññā* (wisdom), not of faith, so dogma does not exist in the religion of *paññā* as in religions of faith. Buddhadasa explained that *saddhā* in Buddhism cannot be faith or belief in religions with dogma. In Buddhism people should examine everything, then have faith afterwards. He referred to the Buddha’s teaching to be free (Thai: *itsara*) in thinking, examining, understanding, and in each practice and also to be self-reliant all the time. Thus, Buddhadasa said, “To believe in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, *kamma*, or anything before having *paññā* only depends on a person’s necessity. It is not a principle of Buddhism at all” (Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 146).

<sup>36</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 81 – 85.

<sup>37</sup> According to *Photchananukrom chabap ratchabandit sathan pho. so. 2525* (A Thai dictionary: the Royal Academy 1982 edition), *tai thao* is defined as “A pronoun used for those whom we respect. A personal pronoun” (*Photchananukrom chabap Ratchabandit Sathan Pho. So. 2525* (Bangkok: Akson charoen that, 1982), p. 362). As far as I understand, the second person pronoun, *tai thao*, seems to be equivalent to the third person pronoun, *chao khun*, which is used for those on whom has been conferred a *bandasak* (court title) above the level of *phraya*, or a *samanasak* (ecclesiastical title) above *phra ratcha khana* (see the definition of “chao khun” in *Photchananukrom chabap ratchabandit sathan pho. so. 2525*, p. 219). At the time of this discussion, Buddhadasa held the ecclesiastical title, Phra Ratchachaikawi, which is the level of *phra ratcha khana*.

possession by the self, because when the mind is free from egoism, the work would be well done. However, Kukrit said that he did not know how to work with empty mind in the secular world, and if his mind were empty from egoism, he would not work, but would be ordained, instead<sup>38</sup>. For Kukrit, work in secular society contradicts empty mind and the overcoming of suffering, because worldly happiness means suffering from the viewpoint of the *dhamma*, and success in works makes sense only in the secular world. Kukrit argued,

Work is in a state of attachment. If someone cannot abandon *upādāna* (clinging) yet, the person has to continue working. It is a part of suffering. If I do my work with empty mind, I still do not find a way. This is perhaps because I have a narrow mind or eyes that do not discern the *dhamma*. I really cannot think of [how to work with empty mind] yet. ... I express true respect, but I do not understand, and would like to understand. ... These are [the different] expressions of a layman and a monk. We live in a different world just like this<sup>39</sup>.

He said,

If I had determined only to make money in order to become rich, I would not have been here today. I am not *wang* (empty/free)<sup>40</sup>.

Kukrit's point was that the world and the *dhamma* cannot go together.

Their disagreement about "work with empty mind" was a difference of opinion whether it was relevant to apply the *lokuttara dhamma* (supra-mundane states) only to monks or also to lay people. The *lokuttara dhamma* is contrasted with the *lokiya dhamma* (mundane states). Thai Buddhists have been familiar with the *lokiya dhamma*, which teaches people to keep morality by doing good and avoiding evil, but they have not been so familiar with the *lokuttara dhamma*. The *lokuttara dhamma* is the teaching for those who wish to become an *arahant*, in other words usually renunciates, because it indicates paths to transcend the world for attaining *nibbāna* by extinguishing defilements and suffering. To make the mind empty from defilements and clinging should be included in the teaching of the *lokuttara dhamma* for the path of enlightenment and liberation, but Buddhadasa promoted lay people using it in their life, for instance, for farmers while they plough the field<sup>41</sup>. The difficulties in Buddhadasa's proposal that Kukrit pointed

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<sup>38</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 122 – 124.

<sup>39</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 123 – 124.

<sup>40</sup> Arun, *Wiwattha*, p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> Not just empty mind, Buddhadasa also promoted some other ideas belonging to the *lokuttara dhamma* taught for the purpose of liberation, to be applied in lay life. For example, he said that four *iddhipāda* (roads to power): *chanda* (zeal), *virīya* (will to strive), *citta* (concentration), and *vīmaṃsā* (investigation) for the attainment of *nibbāna*, farmers can also be reminded of and use these concepts in their daily activities (Arun, *Wiwattha*, pp. 179 – 180).

out were also recognised by his keen proponent, Pun Chonprasoet. In his comments just after their panel discussion, Pun wrote that both Buddhadasa and Kukrit were fair in their manner of discussion, but their disagreement derived from their specialised areas, respectively in the *lokuttara* and the *lokiya*, especially Buddhadasa's inexperience in the *lokiya* realm<sup>42</sup>.

### Kukrit's criticism after the Khurusapha discussions

The true nature of the conflict appeared after their second Khurusapha discussion, which was not perceived as too radical. Kukrit hated Buddhadasa strongly, and became a prominent opponent. On his birthday in 1964 or 1965, which was either the same year or a year after they had the disagreement at Khurusapha, Kukrit received a book of Buddhadasa as a birthday gift from a poet, Prakat Watcharaphon. Kukrit got very angry, and said that his birthday had become ill-omened. He threw Buddhadasa's book onto the ground, and drove Prakat out of his house<sup>43</sup>. In another occasion, Kukrit said that if Buddhism had only *lokuttara dhamma*, empty mind, and Zen, he would quit believing in Buddhism. Kukrit considered that every suffering could be solved only by *mettā* so that he left *nibbāna* wherever it was. Kukrit considered, as reported by Pun, "heaven is only a night club, *nibbāna* is only a tranquilliser, and Suan Mokkh is nothing different from Disneyland (namely a town of puppets in America for the amusement of children)"<sup>44</sup>.

Not only was he emotionally antagonistic to Buddhadasa, Kukrit wrote a number of essays that opposed Buddhadasa, especially in his newspaper, *Sayam rat*<sup>45</sup>. Kukrit used his position as an oratorical popular politician and columnist, he linked Buddhadasa's propagation of *lokuttara dhamma* with the issue of national security in the Cold War period. According to Pun Chongprasoet, in May 1972 Kukrit wrote an article

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<sup>42</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Thung than phu an" (To readers), *Wiwattha (khwam-mai-hen-trong-kan) rawang mom ratchawong khukrit pramot kap than phutthathat phikkhu* (A dispute: disagreement of opinions between M. R. W. Kukrit Pramot and Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) (Ongkan funfu phutthasana, 1 April 1964; reprinted by Bangkok: Pho. cho. po., 1986), pp. 5 – 6.

<sup>43</sup> Pun Chongprasot, "Khwam-hen khong mom ratchawong khukrit nai ruang 'chit wang'" (The view of M. R. W. Kukrit on 'Empty mind'), Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Pun Chongprasot, "Khwam-hen khong mom ratchawong khukrit", pp. 22 – 23. The bracketed phrase seems to have been added by Pun rather than by Kukrit.

<sup>45</sup> Arun, "Kham nam", p. 7.

criticising the propagation of *lokuttara dhamma* in *Duang prathip* (A light), a journal of the Department of Religious Affairs, and Pun summarised Kukrit's main arguments in his book<sup>46</sup>. In this article, Kukrit argued that if teachings of the *lokuttara dhamma*, including *suññatā*, spread to the people, Buddhism would become an evil obstacle to the development of the nation. Because it teaches people to extinguish defilements, craving, desires, a sense of the self, and clinging, people would lose interest in developing the country when they achieve empty mind and become *arahant*.

However, instead of rejecting the whole of Buddhism as useless, Kukrit considered *lokiya dhamma* to be promoted as a principle of national development. The *lokiya dhamma* teaches people the law of *kamma*: those who do good will receive good; those who do evil will receive evil. According to Kukrit, the *lokiya dhamma* is based on the transient truth which considers those who perform *kamma* to have a self, so people can act aiming at the fruit of the act for the benefit of themselves and of other people<sup>47</sup>. In this way Kukrit regarded a beneficial function of the *lokiya dhamma* as a principle of social development.

On the other hand, Kukrit explained that the *lokuttara dhamma* is a teaching aimed at not making any suffering arise, as a result of one's actions being *suññatā* or empty. In the state of emptiness, according to Kukrit, people could not remain in ordinary lay life so they would have to escape from society, he regarded this as natural for the attainment of *nibbāna*<sup>48</sup>. Also, in the *lokuttara dhamma* both positive *kamma* and negative *kamma* in the *lokiya dhamma* should be avoided, because both of them mean *khwam-koet* (arising), which can lead to suffering. Thus, in *lokuttara dhamma* Kukrit argued,

To struggle over whatever we consider good in the world, society and development is an act of demerit. Instead, an act, which does not cause anything to arise, does not cause any fruit for society or oneself at all, is the right act in *lokuttara dhamma*<sup>49</sup>.

Kukrit understood that the *lokuttara dhamma* had been restricted from spreading to people

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<sup>46</sup> Pun Chongprasot, "Kham nam" (introduction), Pun Chongprasot (ed.), *Arai thuk, arai phit* (Originally published by Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1973; reprinted by Mulanithi phoei phrae chiwit prasoet, 1982). In the book Pun's summary of Kukrit's article was published as: "Khwam-hen bang ton khong mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj" (Some parts of the view of M. R. W. Kukrit Pramoj), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 1 – 8.

<sup>47</sup> "Khwam-hen bang ton khong mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj", pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>48</sup> "Khwam-hen bang ton khong mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj", p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> "Khwam-hen bang ton khong mom ratchawong khukrit pramoj", p. 5.

by traditional secular authorities because it is a profoundly disquieting truth which would prevent the nation from developing<sup>50</sup>.

In Kukrit's understanding of Buddhism, those who follow the path of *arahant* are the ones who have abandoned the world for their own accomplishment, and they do not make a contribution to society. This view on *lokuttara dhamma* coincided with the Marxist criticism of religion which is considered as idealism useless for revolutionary change in society, although Kukrit was known as a keen opponent of communism. As a liberal, but conservative royalist politician, Kukrit did not totally deny Buddhism, but proposed to make use of Buddhism by equating the aspect of the *lokiya dhamma* to an ideology of national development. By national development, in the political context of the late 1960s and the 1970s, he meant improved welfare for people in order to prevent the penetration of communism into Thailand. Kukrit's viewpoint was that of a rightist politician, in which Buddhism had to be an attractive counter-ideology of Marxism for people to become attached to, rather than a means to achieve transcendent liberation by abandoning clinging to a self or the possessions of a self.

Buddhadasa had a view different from Kukrit's. Buddhadasa also saw that Buddhism was useful for the work of society, but by Buddhism he meant *lokuttara dhamma*. Contrary to Kukrit, Buddhadasa did not understand *lokuttara dhamma* as a religion only for those who abandon the world, but as a way to conduct secular duty most efficiently and enjoyably, and to produce the most desirable result.

Although in their second discussion at the Khurusapha, the significant conflict was regarding an appropriate teaching related to whether people were ordained or not, the implication of this dispute should not be considered as the ideological strife between Catholic and Protestant in Christianity. In fact, it was Buddhadasa, a monk, who promoted that lay people practise the *lokuttara dhamma* which used to be occupied by only a few monks, and Kukrit, a layman, who was opposed to the possibility of opening it up for ordinary lay people. By his propagation of *lokuttara dhamma* to lay people, Buddhadasa did not intend to lead a Protestant kind of movement to abolish the monk-lay distinction which would negate the existing order of the Sangha.

Also, it is not quite right to identify the conflict between Buddhadasa and

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<sup>50</sup> "Khwa-m-hen bang ton khong mom ratchawong khukrit pramot", p. 5.



Kukrit as an ideology of commoners versus that of royal high-society members. Buddhadasa recalled that among the audience at the discussion with Kukrit, Mom Chao Suphasawat Sawatdiwat (Chin), a royal descendent who had even higher status and closer links with the recent kings than Kukrit, encouraged Buddhadasa rather than Kukrit<sup>51</sup>. There were quite a few of Buddhadasa's supporters among the royal family, including the Queen Mother of the present king<sup>52</sup>.

Perhaps for Kukrit, who could not completely overcome Buddhadasa in the Khurusapha discussion, one of the most efficient ways to keep face with the audience in the public sphere was to link their disagreement to differences in ideological, political positions. When Kukrit argued that Buddhadasa's propagation of empty mind and *Jokuttara dhamma* was problematic for the national security situation, which was becoming more and more serious in the face of the escalating Vietnam War, he could easily give people the impression that Buddhadasa might be an unorthodox, threatening monk. The disagreement of Kukrit and Buddhadasa continued throughout the period of ideological conflict, and it was only when Buddhadasa passed away in 1993 that Kukrit expressed his high respect for Buddhadasa in his column, "Soi suan phlu" (Suan Phlu Lane)<sup>53</sup>. The article marked the end of their rivalry.

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<sup>51</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 341. Mom Chao Suphasawat is a grandson of King Mongkut, and a son of Prince Sawat. Mom Chao Suphasawat was an elder brother of Queen Rambhai Barni of King Prajadhipok. His father, Prince Sawat, was a younger brother of the grandmother of King Ananda and King Bhumibol. Although by blood King Bhumibol is closer to Mom Chao Suphasawat than Kukrit, he sought political support from Kukrit rather than Mom Chao Suphasawat. Mom Chao Suphasawat had an important political role as a leader of the Free Thai movement in England, and he supported Pridi Phanomyong, whose downfall was brought about by Kukrit through the mysterious death of King Ananda Mahidon. This personal background indicates that Mom Chao Suphasawat was in opposition to Kukrit in real politics, as well as in the discussion over empty mind in Buddhism. The royal family members are not necessarily allied against commoners either in politics or discussions of Buddhism. I thank Prof. Eiji Murashima who kindly explained to me these biographical facts about Mom Chao Suphasawat.

<sup>52</sup> The fact that the Queen Mother recommended inviting Buddhadasa to give a lecture in 1960 at Chulalongkorn University indicates that she was in favour of Buddhadasa's teaching (Sanya Thammasak (Sanya Dhammasakdi), *Nathi khong phutthasamakhom* (The duty of the Buddhist Association) (Bangkok: Phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai, 1961), pp. 25 – 26).

<sup>53</sup> Khukrit Pramot (Kukrit Pramoj), "Soi suan phlu", *Sayam rat rai wan* (Siam rath daily newspaper) (10 July 1993), p. 5. Although this article mainly discussed expressions for death in Thai and the news of Buddhadasa's death was the introduction of his main argument, Kukrit clearly expressed his respect to Buddhadasa and his teachings as "... free from superstitious beliefs, but containing only scrupulous rationality, the true *dhamma* of the Buddha is unrestricted by time and is provable by ourselves".

## An understanding of empty mind by Buddhadasa's followers

The discussion about empty mind was not confined to just Buddhadasa and Kukrit. Especially after Kukrit's criticism made people sceptical of Buddhadasa and empty mind, Buddhadasa's lay disciples also reacted against Kukrit. Those of Buddhadasa's disciples who determined to assist the propagation of his teaching spread not only Buddhadasa's defending arguments, but they also expressed their own views and understandings about empty mind. The most prominent role as such was played by Pun Chongprasoet, the president of the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism.

Pun published a number of booklets that opposed Kukrit using both Buddhadasa's words and his own essays and comments<sup>54</sup>. In one of those books, Pun stated that one purpose for publishing the booklet was:

I used to like the writings of M. R. W. Kukrit for a long time, and was never an opponent of him. However, when he expressed *micchādiṭṭhi* on the Buddha's teachings like this many times, I considered that it is not only a lot of verbal offence to Ven. Buddhadasa, but also has the intention to distort the Buddha's teachings by speaking badly about teachings at the level of *lokuttara dhamma*, *suññatā*, and the accomplishing of the *nibbāna* of the Buddha. Also, there is no one who dares to challenge him at all. If [we] leave his smart expressions further unchecked, it is going to be dangerous to Buddhism, and it will make those who pay respect to him follow his deluded way. Thus, I think that it is appropriate for me to crush the *kilesa* of M. R. W. Kukrit in order to prevent it from becoming too active and a danger to society. ... [People] are deluded to be afraid only that communists will destroy Buddhism, but about the fact that someone of the capitalist and *sakdina* (feudalist) class is openly destroying Buddhism in this way, no one knows and no one points out. Is this love of the nation and religion? His mouth shouts to protect religion, but he himself does not know what the religion teaches, where it is, or how to protect it. These days there are only such talkative people who [just] follow their feelings/emotions (Thai: *arom*) [but do not have a good understanding of Buddhism]<sup>55</sup>.

Such a reaction by Pun to Kukrit represented an expansion of the discussion about empty mind in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand. Pun indicated that Kukrit was campaigning from his socially privileged position to promote the religion of the Thai nation, Buddhism, for national security against communism, but the politically motivated campaign was not necessarily based on a deep understanding about the

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<sup>54</sup> In the publication list of the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism that was attached to one of its booklets (Than Phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*), there are at least four relating to Kukrit: *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*; *Khvam-long phit khong sangkhom nai ruang kan tham bun* (The delusion of society in making merit), *Arai thuk, arai phit; wiattha nai ruang 'chit wang'* (Disputes about empty mind). Apart from this list, there is: Than phutthathat, *Kan-tham-ngan duai chit wang phua sangkhom*, which seems to be Pun's summary of Buddhadasa's third session at the Khurusapha and some other of Buddhadasa's preaching in response of Kukrit.

<sup>55</sup> [Pun Chongprasoet], "Maihet khong ongan funfu phutthasasana" (A note by the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism), Pun Chongprasoet, "Khvam-hen khong mom ratchawong khukrit nai ruang 'chit wang'", Than phutthathat, *Sunyata – chit wang – chit doem thae*, p. 30.

content of the religion. When Kukrit called Buddhadasa's propagation of empty mind and *lokuttara dhamma* a hindrance for national security, and Kukrit was accused as belonging to the "capitalist" and "*sakdina* class", the connotations of their conflict were twisted to the ideological conflict between the right and the left. Even though Kukrit was only a secular intellectual without long monastic experience, who can only with difficulty be regarded as representing any orthodoxy of Thai Buddhism, as a result of the conflict, Buddhadasa became perceived to be unorthodox and a radical preacher in the Buddhist public sphere.

Aside from defending Buddhadasa from Kukrit's criticism, Pun also played an important role in popularising the idea of empty mind by his supplementary comments on Buddhadasa's preaching<sup>56</sup>. Pun's explanation of empty mind suggests how Buddhadasa's followers perceived this concept unfamiliar from their past intellectual experiences. In a booklet, following a preaching of Buddhadasa, which is entitled "Working with empty mind for society", Pun wrote a supplementary essay, "What should we do to be called working with empty mind"<sup>57</sup>. In his essay, Pun explained the idea of working with empty mind by giving examples of several occupations, such as a Prime Minister, governors, government officials, judges, soldiers, executors, policemen, businessmen, and renunciates. Those examples showed how empty mind works in secular society, even though the concept of emptiness, in which state a mind is freed from the defilements of greediness, anger, delusion, craving and fear, but is filled with *satipaṇṇā*, is too difficult for some people to understand. In the case of MPs, Pun commented as follows:

If they [determined to] stand for and [eventually] are elected in order to do a duty for people's benefit, not because they expected a monthly salary (15,000 baht per month) or to seek indirect benefit for themselves, they can dare to say and do something in their duty with 'empty mind' gloriously. They do not sell themselves to capitalists or *sakdina*, because they do not expect to become more important than being a representative of people. When they compete for election, they do not become addicted to bribery of people, so-called 'vote-buying' as capitalists expend millions of baht by expecting that if they can become a Minister, they might be able to gain more than they spent in a short period. MPs with 'empty mind' thus tend to be elected every time, even though they themselves do not have

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<sup>56</sup> Usually Pun published booklets, which consisted of a sermon of Buddhadasa, and his own essay and some supplementary comments on recent incidents and discussions which had taken place in the Thai Buddhist public sphere.

<sup>57</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Cha tham yang rai chung cha riak wa tham-ngan duai chit wang" (What should we do to be called working with empty mind?), Than phutthathat (Ven. Buddhadasa), *Kan-tham-ngan duai chit wang phua sangkhom* (Working with empty mind for society) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana, 1975), pp. 23 – 29.

money to deceive anyone<sup>58</sup>.

Pun even insisted that communists should also have empty mind. Pun said,

... otherwise they are fake communists who still have thick *kilesa* and intense *taṇhā*, by which they only think to rob rich people of their fortune to make it their own; they want to kill capitalists or ordinary people who have not yet agreed with them; and have the intention to eradicate kings who have *dasarājadhamma* (ten kingly virtues). They have not yet dedicated themselves for the public. They have not even had a thought to do something for society. They only advertise their ideology with words, but they still cannot do it. They are provocative because they want to be famous, intend to be a head, and then they will be able to look for a benefit for themselves as do all people with thick *kilesa*. In a group of communists thus there are still mutual betrayals, mutual competitions for positions, and frequent murders of each other. These are because they still do not have true 'empty mind'<sup>59</sup>.

In 1975 when this booklet of Pun was published, the conflict between communist insurgency and the government's counter-insurgency was becoming tense. It was true that people were sick of the *thorarat*, or the three inter-related military dictators before the 14 October 1973 uprising, but politicians in the post-uprising democratic parliament did not exhibit many differences from the corrupt dictators on this issue. Enthusiasm for communist theories of revolution and struggles existed among students and intellectuals, but the actual politics and human nature of international communist leaders did not meet people's expectations for fairness. People were never satisfied with the existing politicians, but at the same time they feared a communist take-over of the existing order as successive Thai governments had been foretelling. In such conditions, people could divert themselves by Buddhadasa's proposal of a non-egotistical conduct of duty with empty mind, which supported and was supported by Pun's comical criticisms of those powerful authorities and equally frightening counter-authorities. Pun's discussions of empty mind were one of his contemporary expressions of and responses to people's demand for social justice in the Buddhist public sphere.

### 3. Discussions by Buddhadasa's opponents and followers

As a result of the Khurusapha discussions with Kukrit, Buddhadasa's concept of empty mind became widely known among Thai Buddhists. More people started to talk about empty mind, and more criticism appeared in the Buddhist public sphere in the

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<sup>58</sup> Pun, "Cha tham yang rai chung cha riak wa tham-ngan duai chit wang", pp. 25 – 26.

<sup>59</sup> Pun, "Cha tham yang rai chung cha riak wa tham-ngan duai chit wang", p. 29.

late 1960s and the early 1970s.

*Arai thuk, arai phit* (What is right? What is wrong?), was a booklet in which Pun Chongprasoet collected the arguments on empty mind from both supporting and opposing standpoints. To focus debate on the issue, he contrasted his summary of Kukrit's article on empty mind<sup>60</sup> and three of Buddhadasa's sermons, which were actually delivered five years before Kukrit's criticism, but Pun considered them as apt responses to Kukrit's points<sup>61</sup>. Apart from the discussions by Kukrit and Buddhadasa, in the appendix of the book Pun reprinted a handbill, articles, a public lecture and letters by other advocates. By juxtaposing the opinions from both the pro and the con sides, Pun created in one book a *wethi*, or a stage of public forum about empty mind. Also, by asking the readers "Krai thuk, krai phit" (Who is right? Who is wrong?)<sup>62</sup>, Pun invited people to think about their position on this issue. Here, I am going to explore the discussions that Pun reprinted in the appendix of the book.

Participants in the discussion forum were varied. As major opponents of Buddhadasa, there were Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu (1936 – ; a popular Abhidhamma preacher and leader of an anti-communist popular movement), and "Khamhuno" (1924 – ; a pseudonym of Chamrat Duangthisan, a famous columnist at the *Sayam rat* weekly magazine). Pun matched each of them with counter-arguments from ordinary citizens who were dissatisfied with their arguments against Buddhadasa. Then, Pun introduced a public lecture by Sanya Dhammasakdi (1907 – ; Sanya had served as the Prime Minister, the chair of the Privy Council, and the president of the Buddhist Association of Thailand), an opinion in support of Buddhadasa's concept of empty mind by a socially respected figure. Lastly Pun concluded the whole discussion merely as a moderator.

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<sup>60</sup> I have already examined Kukrit's argument in this article, which was first published in *Duang prathip* in May 1972. See p. 160 and footnote 46.

<sup>61</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), "Uppasak haeng kan phoei phrae tham" (Obstacles in propagation of the *dhamma*) (A lecture given at Wat Mahathat on 28 November 1967), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 9 – 71; Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Uppasak haeng kan khao chai thamma" (Obstacles in understanding of the *dhamma*) (A preaching at Wat Noranatthasunthrikaram, Bangkok on 4 February 1968), pp. 72 – 109; Pun Chongprasoet (ed.), "Chit praphatson – chit doem thae – chit wang (Yo chak kham banyai khong than phutthathat phikkhu)" (A pure mind, a true original mind, an empty mind (A summary of a lecture of Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu)) (a preaching at Suan Mokkh on 28 July 1969), pp. 110 – 121.

<sup>62</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Maihet" (An endnote), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, p. 8.

## Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu versus “Prayut”

First, Pun introduced a handbill of Kittiwuttho that criticised Buddhadasa’s proposal of empty mind and emptiness<sup>63</sup>.

Kittiwuttho was known as a young, capable Abhidhamma preacher at Wat Mahathat, who came from the third generation of a Chinese wholesale dealer’s family in Nakhon Phathom province. Although there is an age difference of thirty years, Kittiwuttho agreed that his background had some commonalties with Buddhadasa’s. Both families originated in Hokkien province in China, had the same Chinese family name, Khou (許), and had been doing business in Thailand. When they were small, both of them helped the family business and started to learn Buddhism by themselves<sup>64</sup>. Therefore, when they reached the age of twenty, both of them could start preaching *dhamma* to people immediately. Kittiwuttho was ordained in 1957, read the *Tipitaka* in a cave in Chumphon for six months, and studied Abhidhamma at Wat Mahathat with a Burmese monk, Thechin, and his Thai assistant monk, Phra Khru Prakatsamathikhun. From 1960, only three years after his ordination, Kittiwuttho started his *dhamma* propagation on television and radio, and from 1965 he started a training project for novices and young monks to become preachers<sup>65</sup>. According to an Abhidhamma classmate of Kittiwuttho, Kittiwuttho was very bright and his ability to memorise the complicated Abhidhamma technical terms was beyond compare. Even though Kittiwuttho had little background in either formal or ecclesiastical education, his

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<sup>63</sup> Pun wrote in his note that the handbill was brought to him by a supporter of Sawai Kaewsom at the Lan Asok, Wat Mahathat, and that he was publishing it in order for other people with *paññā* to examine what is right and what is wrong (Pun Chongprasoet, “Maihet” (an endnote), Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, “Ruang chit wang nok Phra Traipidok mi khwam samkham nai patchuban mak lae ruang Phra Phuttha Chao son lokkuttara tham Nai Thammathinna kho plian thamma mai” (About [the teaching of] empty mind which is not in the *Tipitaka* and places a lot of emphasis on the present time; and about [the story that] the Buddha taught *lokkuttara dhamma* to Dhammadinna who asked for a new *dhamma*) (Originally published as a mimeographed handbill on Māgha Pūjā 1973), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, p. 131).

<sup>64</sup> On his father’s side, Buddhadasa’s grandfather came to Thailand, while Kittiwuttho’s family settled in Thailand during his father’s generation. Thus, Buddhadasa was third generation Chinese, and Kittiwuttho second generation. On his mother’s side, Buddhadasa’s mother was ethnic Thai, while Kittiwuttho’s mother was an ethnic Chinese born in Thailand, her family also originated in Hokkien province. The biographical information about Kittiwuttho is based on: Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview, Chonburi, 29 April 1999.

<sup>65</sup> The training project is called “Nuai kan phatthana thang chit” (A unit to develop mind). It started in 1965 at Wat Mahathat, and in 1968 it moved to Djithabhawan College, which was then newly built in Chonburi province (Kittiwuttho, interview). For Kittiwuttho’s anti-communist campaign, see Charles F. Keyes, “Political crisis and militant Buddhism in contemporary Thailand”, Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and legitimation of power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, pp. 147 – 164.

classmate said that his ability to work for religion was encouraging for those monks who were not *parian*, as those who had passed the Pali ecclesiastical examinations were called<sup>66</sup>.

According to Pun, Kittiwuttho had been strongly opposed to empty mind in his publications and *dhamma* lectures on radio from around 1964, only seven years after his ordination. Kittiwuttho co-operated in the critical campaign against Buddhadasa with Phra Thipparinya (Thup Klamphasut), who was one of the important lay supporters of Wat Mahathat and the first person who, in 1948, labelled Buddhadasa a communist. In 1969 Phra Maha Khachit, who was then a novice studying under Kittiwuttho's project, witnessed Kittiwuttho burning Buddhadasa's books because Kittiwuttho argued that they would disseminate a wrong view that did not correspond to the Abhidhamma theory<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, Arun Wetchasuan said that in the mid-1970s many handbills that made accusations about Buddhadasa were assumed to be published and distributed all over the country by Kittiwuttho. Arun saw many local monks posting those handbills allegedly of Kittiwuttho on temple walls because they hated Buddhadasa's rational teachings that would interfere with their way of making a living through supernatural "services". Arun thought of two reasons why Kittiwuttho would make the handbills. One was because Buddhadasa radically criticised the Abhidhamma, which Kittiwuttho relied on, as useless and so to be torn up and abandoned. The other reason Arun suspected was revenge by the CIA on Buddhadasa, because he had declined to co-operate with their propaganda. He assumed that the CIA had supervised and provided funds for Kittiwuttho's anti-communist mass organisation through which Kittiwuttho carried out an anti-Buddhadasa campaign. Although these remarks were not well supported by evidence, Arun said that it was very likely<sup>68</sup>.

In the handbill that Pun reprinted in *Arai thuk, arai phit*, Kittiwuttho critically examined the *Dhammadinna sutta* in the *Tipitaka* by which Buddhadasa often legitimated

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<sup>66</sup> Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Nonthaburi, 30 April 1999. Sithawat has been a follower of Buddhadasa since he was a novice in Surat Thani in the early 1940s, and he helped Pun Chongprasoet's propagation activities in Wat Mahathat, and later for a long time he co-operated with Wirot Siriat's Sublime Life Mission. Although Kittiwuttho was notorious for his defamatory campaign against Buddhadasa, Sithawat had a fair view about Kittiwuttho's intellectual ability.

<sup>67</sup> Phra Maha Khachit Siriwattho (The abbot of Suan Mokkh Chiang Rai), interview, Chiang Rai, 16 March 1999.

<sup>68</sup> Arun Wetchasuan, interview, Bangkok, 2 March 1999.

his teaching of emptiness. Buddhadasa liked to indicate that when Dhammadinna and five hundred lay disciples went to ask the Buddha to give a suitable teaching for lay people, the Buddha recommended practising emptiness that had been taught by the *Tathāgata* (perfect one). Although Buddhadasa usually picked up only the first half of the story of the *Dhammadinna Sutta*, the story continues further. Kittiwuttho introduced the rest of the story in his handbill. To this advice by the Buddha, Dhammadinna answered that they looked after house and children and handled gold and silver, it was not easy for them to learn the discourses of the *Tathāgata*. Instead, he asked the Buddha to teach those who keep themselves firmly in lay five precepts. This time, the Buddha taught them to have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, and to conduct themselves with the virtues of the Ariyan (Noble Ones) which would lead to concentration. Dhammadinna answered that those conditions already existed in them. On hearing their statement, the Buddha affirmed their attainment of the fruit of stream-winning (Pali: *sotāpattiphala*)<sup>69</sup>.

By introducing the latter half of the story, Kittiwuttho insisted that neither this section of the *Tipitaka* nor therefore the Theravāda School of Buddhism taught empty mind as one teacher (by whom Kittiwuttho implied Buddhadasa) understood, namely that the Buddha taught lay people to work or to have sexual intercourse with empty mind<sup>70</sup>. In order to support his criticism, Kittiwuttho quoted a phrase in the *aṭṭhakathā* (commentary), *Sārattathappakāsini*. The phrases that Kittiwuttho extracted from *Sārattathappakāsini* comment on the words that Buddhadasa liked to refer to in the *Dhammadinna sutta*. According to Kittiwuttho's Pali quotation,

*lokuttarā[ti] lokuttaradīpakā asaṅkhatasaṃyuttādayo*

(Kittiwuttho's Thai translation: *Plae wa bot lokuttara nan, dai kae asangkhatasamyut pen ton, an sadaeng attha pen lokuttara*)

(An English translation of Kittiwuttho's Thai translation: *lokuttarā* which is given in *asaṅgatasamyuttā* etc. expresses the words of *lokuttara*)

(An English translation from Pali: *lokuttarā* stands for the meaning [of what is] beyond the world, i.e. connected with the un compounded and so on),

<sup>69</sup> Here I have summarised the story of the *Dhammadinna sutta* from Kittiwuttho, "Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...", pp. 126 – 128; and F. L. Woodward, *The book of the kindred sayings*, pp. 347 – 349. Kittiwuttho's story is basically the same as the English edition of the Pali Text Society's *Tipitaka*.

<sup>70</sup> Kittiwuttho, "Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...", pp. 128 – 129.



(Kittiwuttho: *Bot wa sunyatapptisangyutta nan, dai kae sut tang tang, mi khatchanika sut pen ton, an sadaeng phawa thi wang chak sat*)

(A translation of Kittiwuttho: *suññatappaṭisaṃyuttā* which is given in various *sutta*, such as the *Khajjanika Sutta*, expresses the state that is empty/free from animals/beings)

(A translation from Pali: *suññatappaṭisaṃyuttā* stands for emptiness of a living being, [like in] the *Khajjanika-suttanta* and so on)<sup>71</sup>.

By citing the story of the *Dhammadinna sutta* and these phrases in the commentary, Kittiwuttho argued that the Buddha never spoke of empty mind. He explained that by the word, *lokuttara* the Buddha meant *asaṃkhata-dhamma*; by *suñña* he meant the five aggregates which are empty of/free from a person, as expressed in the *Khajjanika Sutta*<sup>72</sup>. Furthermore, Kittiwuttho insisted that the teaching of emptiness or empty mind belongs to Mahāyāna Buddhism, and does not belong to the *Tipiṭaka* and pure Theravāda Buddhism. Therefore, he concluded, “to cite an idea which developed in the tenth century after the extinction of the Buddha’s speaking is not a merit at all. It does not help those who practise it. It is a wrong claim that it is the true word of the Buddha”<sup>73</sup>.

In Kittiwuttho’s criticism of empty mind, there are at least three points to notice. First, as Kittiwuttho said, it is true that in the *Dhammadinna sutta* the group of lay people had the fruit of stream-winning (Pali: *sotāpattiphala*) even though they said that they could not follow the teaching of emptiness as the Buddha recommended. In fact, Buddhadasa also mentioned the latter half of the story in one of his sermons. In Buddhadasa’s nuanced explanation, if *suññatā*, or emptiness, is too advanced to practice, there are only four items of practice, namely unshakeable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, and the observance of pure precepts, which are already commonly practised, so people do not have to worry. Thus, Buddhadasa said, “If [they] do not accept *suññatā*, there is nothing to add”, by which he implied that lay people

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<sup>71</sup> Kittiwuttho, “Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...”, p. 129. Kittiwuttho wrote that these phrases appear in page 402 of *Sāratthappakāsini* (probably one of the Thai script editions), but I was unable to access the Thai script edition. I thank Royce Wiles for finding the text in the *Sāratthappakāsini* in a Roman script edition, and clarifying the meaning of the original Pali phrases.

<sup>72</sup> Kittiwuttho, “Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...”, pp. 129 – 130. *Khajjanika sutta* is located under the title, *Khajjaniya sutta*, in *Samyutta-nikāya*, Vol. III (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), pp. 86 – 91. An English translation of it is available in “The prey”, *Kindred sayings on elements*, Vol. III (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), pp. 72 – 76.

<sup>73</sup> Kittiwuttho, “Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...”, p. 130.

should be interested in *suññatā* which is more than they are accustomed to, and also that it was recommended as suitable for them by the Buddha<sup>74</sup>. This remark of Buddhadasa indicates his selective interpretation from the scriptures. Buddhadasa still recommended lay people to practise emptiness, even though it was not a necessary condition for lay people's spiritual liberation, as the Buddha still recognised they could arrive at *sotāpattiphala* simply by the common code of lay practice.

However, as for the second point of Kittiwuttho's argument, his conclusion by citing this *sutta* and its commentary: namely that the concept of emptiness is not taught in the Theravāda *Tipiṭaka*, went too far. Although it is commonly known that the ideas and discussions about emptiness developed in Mahāyāna Buddhism as Kittiwuttho pointed out, the fact that it exists in the Theravāda *Tipiṭaka* cannot be denied. Aside from the *Dhammadinna sutta*, the Buddha also taught Ananda in the *Culasuññatā sutta* and the *Mahāsuññatā sutta* how to enter and abide in emptiness<sup>75</sup>.

Moreover, when it is more carefully examined, the *Sārattathappakāsini*, the traditional Theravāda commentary that Kittiwuttho cited, is also supportive of the point that often appeared in Buddhadasa's preaching. The commentary explained the meaning of *suññatā* as "emptiness of a living being, [like in] the *Khajjanika-suttanta* and so on"<sup>76</sup>. In the *Khajjanika sutta*, instead of mentioning the word, emptiness, the Buddha was saying "I say, every body should be thus regarded as it really is, by right insight: 'this is not mine; this am not I; this is not the Self of me'"<sup>77</sup>. In other words, the ancient commentator of the Theravāda School understood that *suññatā* was to be understood as "empty [of self]" or equivalent to non-self. Detachment from "me" and "mine" was one of the important

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<sup>74</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Suññatā' huachai khong Phutthasasana" (Emptiness: the heart of Buddhism), Klum Watcharaphon (ed.), *Phuttha-tham kam mu diao: ruam botkhwam lae patthakatha khong than phutthathat phikkhu lae khun pun chongprasoet* (A handful of the Buddha Dhamma: collections of essays and lectures by Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Mr. Pun Chongprasoet) (Bangkok: Klum Watcharaphon), pp. 37 – 38.

<sup>75</sup> The Buddha said, "However, Ananda, there is this abiding discovered by the Tathāgatha: to enter and abide in voidness internally by giving no attention to all signs" (Robert Chalmers, *The Majjhima-nikāya* Vol. III, p. 111; Bhikkhu Nānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle length discourse of the Buddha*, p. 972), and he explained each level of *jhāna* and *nibbāna*. This passage is also cited in Rune E. A. Johansson, "Nibbāna as emptiness", *The psychology of nirvana* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 34.

<sup>76</sup> See pp. 169 – 170 (*Sārattathappakāsini* cited in Kittiwuttho, "Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...", p. 129; English translation from Pali by Dr. Royce Wiles).

<sup>77</sup> F. L. Woodward, *The book of the kindred sayings (Samyutta-nikāya) or grouped suttas: part III (Mahā-vagga)* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1965), p. 75.

messages that Buddhadasa taught<sup>78</sup>.

Third, Kittiwuttho's citation and his Thai translation of a Pali commentary is perceived to be very difficult perhaps for most ordinary people who are not used to technical terms of Buddhism in Pali. In his Thai translation of the Pali phrases, several Pali words remained untranslated, and do not make sense if his audience did not already have some knowledge of Buddhist technical terms. Especially when these almost incomprehensible Pali terms were delivered fluently in his speech, people would have felt that Kittiwuttho was truly an expert of Pali scriptures, an area they did not know well, and they would even have had a feeling of high respect for him.

Furthermore, in his Thai translation, which was filled with Pali words, the only comprehensible Thai phrase was *wang chak sat*. This is a translation of the Pali phrase, *suññatappatisamṃyuttā*, which actually means "emptiness of a living being", but for those Thais not specialising in Buddhist scriptures, Kittiwuttho's Thai translation was perceived as something like "not having a violent nature like an animal"<sup>79</sup>. In other words, Kittiwuttho's Thai translation only functioned to give Thai people an ambiguous impression that the emptiness in the Pali scriptures was not at all so deep as Buddhadasa was trying to say, but something to do with the nature of beasts. Especially when Kittiwuttho presented it with rather trustworthy points, such as the latter half of the *Dhammadinna sutta* and the Mahāyāna development of emptiness, people became more inclined to accept his main, false claim: i.e. that the concept of emptiness does not exist in the Theravāda *Tipiṭaka*. This was a shrewd technique by an eloquent preacher, Kittiwuttho.

In the face of such arguments from Kittiwuttho, Buddhadasa's followers reacted strongly. As a counter-argument to Kittiwuttho, although it was not directly about the handbill, Pun introduced a letter from "Prayut"<sup>80</sup>. Prayut, who worked for the Irrigation Department, was perhaps an ordinary lay follower of Buddhadasa but at a distance from Buddhadasa's personal acquaintance. He felt that he could not stand

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<sup>78</sup> Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, "Me and mine", Swearer, Donald K. (trans. & ed.), *Me and mine: selected essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 80 – 114.

<sup>79</sup> A comment from a Thai lecturer at the Australian National University when I asked the meaning of the Thai phrase that Kittiwuttho translated from Pali.

<sup>80</sup> "Prayut" (This name looks like either a first name or a pseudonym), "Samnao chotmai thung kittiwuttho phikkhu" (The draft of a letter to Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu) (The letter is dated 6 February 1965), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 132 – 137.

listening to Kittiwuttho's accusations against Buddhadasa and empty mind on the radio, so he sent his letter of refutation, one copy to Kittiwuttho, and another to Pun in order to share his view with other people<sup>81</sup>.

Prayut perceived that Kittiwuttho did not examine the empty nature of mind from his own experience and wisdom, but he only followed classical commentaries written after the death of the Buddha. Prayut also pointed out that in the radio broadcast Kittiwuttho distorted the fact that the concept of emptiness does exist in the *Tipitaka*, and manipulated the meaning of *suññatā* to be "total vanishing". He indicated that together with the extensive demonstration of the Abhidhamma theory, Kittiwuttho utilised his attractiveness as a young and skilful speaker to induce people to trust him. Because of these acts, Prayut criticised Kittiwuttho for not using his own *satipaññā* but instead uncritically following the *atthakathā* teachers<sup>82</sup>.

Although Prayut's criticisms against Kittiwuttho stood up to reason, perhaps Prayut had not studied scriptures as Kittiwuttho had done. The reason for Prayut accepting Buddhadasa was not only out of respect for Buddhadasa as an authority on interpretation, but also because he recognised the practicality of empty mind for overcoming suffering. Prayut wrote that he studied Buddhism as a *chao ban* (villager or ordinary commoner), for whatever made his suffering lighter and his *paññā* (insight and understanding) increase, no matter whether the teaching originated from the Mahāyāna or Theravāda, without "being deluded" by the *Abhidhammapitaka*<sup>83</sup>. This was the same way Buddhadasa developed his thought. Such an impression by Prayut stands for an acceptance of Buddhadasa's unfamiliar concept of empty mind in contemporary Thailand as more authentic than traditional Theravada scholasticism of the Abhidhamma.

### "Khamhuno" versus Wai

Next, Pun introduced two articles by "Khamhuno", who criticised empty mind and published in *Sayam rat* weekly magazine, which was run by Kukrit Pramoj.

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<sup>81</sup> Pun, "Maihet", Kittiwuttho, "Ruang chit wang nok phra praipidok ...", p. 131.

<sup>82</sup> Prayut, "Samnao chotmai thung kittiwuttho phikkhu", p. 134.

<sup>83</sup> Prayut, "Samnao chotmai thung kittiwuttho phikkhu", p. 135.

According to Pun, some people misunderstood that “Khamhuno” was Kukrit himself<sup>84</sup>, but in fact the name was a pseudonym of Chamrat Duangthisan<sup>85</sup>. Pun explained that Khamhuno used to be a monk at Wat Phichaiyat in Bangkok, he passed the seventh grade of the Pali ecclesiastical examination, but by the time of the discussion, he had already disrobed and was working as a columnist on Buddhism<sup>86</sup>. In the book *Arai thuk, arai phit* Pun collected Kittiwuttho’s “Chao na ‘phu chit wang’” (A farmer with ‘empty mind’)<sup>87</sup> and “Tua ku lae khong ku” (Me and mine)<sup>88</sup>. In both of these articles, Khamhuno elaborated the arguments of Kukrit, his employer, who criticised the propagation of empty mind and *lokuttara dhamma*, and backed this up with his higher Pali qualification than Buddhadasa.

In the first article, which is especially important Khamhuno’s aim was to connect the concept of empty mind with communism. Khamhuno argued that in Buddhism there are two levels of teaching: the level of empty mind and the level of non-empty mind, namely *lokuttara dhamma* and *lokiya dhamma*. At one level, he wrote that the Buddha taught, for example to the *pañcavaggiya* (the five ascetics who first accompanied Gotama) in the *Dhammacakkapavattana sutta*, not to be attached to anything, such as wife, children, fortune, but rather encouraged them to feel bored with those and leave them alone (*ploi wang*)<sup>89</sup>. On the other hand, Khamhuno wrote,

The Buddha taught ordinary people to be attached to their family, to society, eventually to the nation. In other words, everyone has a responsibility as a member of society, [so that they] cannot work as a person with ‘empty mind’. ... In life to survive (*kan-tham-ma-ha-kin*), if [they] want to become wealthy, [they] have to be honest, be diligent, know [how to] guard and protect [themselves], plant rice in the field, and plant vegetables and fruits in the garden. So, they have to have a sense of the self as an owner. [They do] not plant with the power of the isolated ‘empty mind’, [which makes them] say ‘This rice belongs to the government, this rice field is not mine, but a collective field’<sup>90</sup>.

He pointed out that in worldly society having a sense of ownership generates better results rather than considering oneself as a common owner, therefore the Buddha taught

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<sup>84</sup> Pun Congprasoet, “Maihet” (An endnote), Khamhuno, “Tua ku lae khong ku” (Me and mine), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, p. 150.

<sup>85</sup> Chamrat confirmed that the pseudonym “Khamhuno” was his (Chamrat Duangthisan, interview, Bangkok, 31 July 1998).

<sup>86</sup> Pun Congprasoet, “Maihet”, Khamhuno, “Tua ku lae khong ku” (Me and mine), p. 150.

<sup>87</sup> Khamhuno, “Chao na ‘phu chit wang’” (A farmer with empty mind) (Originally published in *Sayam rat sapda wichan*, 18 October 1964), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 139 – 144.

<sup>88</sup> Khamhuno, “Tua ku lae khong ku” (Originally published in *Sayam rat sapda wichan*, 29 November 1964), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 145 – 149.

<sup>89</sup> Khamhuno, “Chao na ‘phu chit wang’”, pp. 141 – 142.

<sup>90</sup> Khamhuno, “Chao na ‘phu chit wang’”, p. 142.

the mundane level of teaching, which does not speak against those who have the defilement of the sense of ownership. Khamhuno concluded that the system of collective farming and communes in communism were in vain because they tried to make farmers be persons with empty mind, who have no sense of being an owner<sup>91</sup>.

This essay of Khamhuno developed Kukrit's point of disagreement with Buddhadasa: the incompatibility of empty mind and *lokuttara dhamma* for lay people, he purposefully connected them with communism. As Pun rephrased it, the argument of Khamhuno implied that the teaching of empty mind was a vehicle that brings communism into Thailand, and the teacher of empty mind, Buddhadasa, was propagating communism so the government should quickly eradicate him<sup>92</sup>. Even though Khamhuno provided no supporting evidence for Buddhadasa's being a communist, those articles contributed to suspicions about Buddhadasa's political and ideological intentions.

Khamhuno even made fun of empty mind, which is freed from a sense of me and mine, by saying,

If someone picked up a pen which fell from the bag of a person who is thinking to become 'empty mind', and asks 'Whose pen is this?'; then, immediately there would be a voice in reply with *upādāna*, 'Mine'<sup>93</sup>.

These statements of Khamhuno suggest that his essays were written in order to discredit the concept of empty mind in his readers. Even without a rational argument, facile yet catchy impressions can have a very important impact in the public sphere of Thailand.

Consequently, reactions to Khamhuno were also emotional. Pun mocked Khamhuno, who had studied as a monk, as follows:

He is recently holding a motto, 'work is money, money as work creates happiness'. Thus, the mind of 'Khamhuno' cannot be empty, and has no way of understanding 'empty mind' at all. He used to stretch himself out in a temple for a long time in the way of 'empty mind'. He had no need to work for survival, but [just] relied on the people's support. When he studied higher *pariyatti* (scriptural studies), his mind started to be disquieted, thus he had to escape from the state of a renunciate to be a lay man. ... [After he] disrobed, he writes essays that destroy the most important teaching of Buddhism, again for the purpose of survival, or for pleasing his employer (*chao nai*) who also hates *suññata*<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> Khamhuno, "Chao na 'phu chit wang'", p. 144.

<sup>92</sup> Pun, "Maihet", Khamhuno, "Chao na 'phu chit wang'", p. 144.

<sup>93</sup> Khamhuno, "Tua ku lae khong ku", p. 146.

<sup>94</sup> Pun, "Maihet", Khamhuno, "Tua ku lae khong ku", p. 150.

Pun also published a letter from “Wai”, who opposed Khamhuno strongly<sup>95</sup>. Claiming himself as “a farmer with empty mind in Songkhla province”, Wai talked about his own experience as follows:

I am a farmer who has been closely associated with rice planting until becoming an adult. I think that rice planting is not an easy task at all. But, because I had a kind of empty mind, it helped me to do that task. ‘Khamhuno’ would not have grown rice, because he used to be a monk who for a long time begged from villagers to eat. [He did] not have to do any work, [but] ate and slept comfortably, so he does not know anything at all. Empty mind is, therefore, a foundation of life. If life is always repressed by *upadāna*, life is beyond enduring<sup>96</sup>.

Wai concluded his letter with a strong tone,

Actually, at the level of [your] mind, when you [Khamhuno] do not understand Ven. Buddhadasa clearly enough, is it appropriate for you to rush to state that Buddhadasa talks about impossible things? ... Your level of knowledge of *dhamma* is still as far away from Buddhadasa as sky and earth. Please know yourself somehow, and do not follow your employer to become crazy together<sup>97</sup>.

These quotations indicate that discussions in the mid-twentieth-century Buddhist public sphere of Thailand were not always rational or supported by evidence. There were rational arguments as Buddhadasa demonstrated, but there were also many manipulations, exaggerations, speculations, and jokes. Evidence or facts were not so important as the general impressions that people received. Those who went on to the stage of public discussion tended to argue down their discussant even with mere quibbles. Therefore, extensive campaigns, which were often supported by generous funding and respected people, were very influential.

However, whatever tactics were applied, as long as there was no official intervention from the government or the Sangha, it was hardly ever possible for a single opinion to eradicate others from the public sphere. The only possible victory in the public sphere was for some opinions to gain hegemony over competing ones. In order for Buddhadasa’s teaching to gain hegemony, Pun collected and publicized the opinions of Buddhadasa’s ordinary followers, who attempted to make counter-arguments to his

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<sup>95</sup> Wai, “Samnao chomai thung ‘Khamhuno’” (The draft of a letter to ‘Khamhuno’) (The letter is dated 25 January 1965), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 151 – 162.

<sup>96</sup> Wai, “Samnao chomai thung ‘Khamhuno’”, p. 158.

<sup>97</sup> Wai, “Samnao chomai thung ‘Khamhuno’”, pp. 161 – 162. Although in the book *Arai thuk, arai phit* Khamhuno is given the role of an opponent of Buddhadasa, later he changed his attitude towards Buddhadasa, perhaps following the change in Kukrit. In my interview with Khamhuno on 31 July 1998, he explained that Buddhadasa had only the third grade of Pali qualification, but he was competent in English and intellectual inquiry, and his teaching was “scientific Buddhism” without superstitions. He said that Buddhadasa learnt the ideology of *suññatā* from Mahāyāna Buddhism, but it does not contradict Theravāda Buddhism (Chamrat Duangthisan [Khamhuno], interview).

opponents. Also, by contrasting the opposite sides of the argument, Pun appealed to people's rationality to distinguish the right view.

The other approach that Pun applied was to introduce the opinion of a socially respected lay disciple of Buddhadasa, Sanya Dhammasakdi.

### Sanya Dhammasakdi

Sanya had been a judge, elected to the presidency of the Buddhist Association of Thailand many times, appointed by the King to be interim Prime Minister after the 14 October 1973 uprising, and Chair of the Privy Council in 1975<sup>98</sup>. Pun reprinted a public lecture by Sanya when he had given his own example of how empty mind helped him in his highly responsible tasks. In a public lecture, "The *Buddha dhamma* and work life", which he gave at the Chachoengsao branch of the Buddhist Association of Thailand on 9 September 1972, Sanya said,

I myself have invited [empty mind] many times. I used it because there were strong tensions in some meetings which had intense conflicts. If [the meeting] resolved this, one group would listen; if [it] resolved that, the other group would listen. [In such a case] how could we seek the best way out? I was the chair of such a meeting. I took these as an exercise, simply switched off, and made my mind empty from considering anyone, but only considered reason. When [I found out that a] reasonable [decision] should be this, no matter who was going to be angry, hate it, or not listen to it, they were not an issue to consider. Then it went well. Namely, we only held reasons, but were not considering people as "us" or "them"<sup>99</sup>.

About the teaching of empty mind and *lokuttara dhamma*, which had been criticised as inappropriate for the laity, Sanya affirmed,

It is really possible to have *anattā* (non-self) and empty mind. These principles of the *dhamma* are most useful [teachings] for us. When a tension arose, I myself confess that I have been benefited by it very much<sup>100</sup>.

If we do not attach to anything as me and mine, we can overcome everything. Even death, which we are afraid of the most in the world, or the things that we regard as the most important in the world do not have meaning. Property, status, children, wife, and honour are all of the characteristic of *sāmañña lakkhaṇa* [general characteristics of what is formed, i.e. impermanence, non-self, and suffering]. This is the peak of the *dhamma* in my knowledge and understanding. The *Buddha dhamma* can help while we are working in this way, or for us to know that level, not just by making merit, respecting monks, dedicating robes on the occasion of *kathin* and *pha pa*. Although keeping five or eight precepts is good, if [we] would like the *Buddha dhamma* to help us in our way of living and in our work, we have to study

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<sup>98</sup> Suksanti Chirachariyawet (ed.), *7 rop achan sanya* (Seventh twelve-year cycle [i.e., eighty-four years] of Achan Sanya) (Bangkok: Mulanithi nitthisat, Mahawitthayalai thammasat, 1991), pp. 181 – 182.

<sup>99</sup> Sanya Thammasak (Dhammasakdi), "Phuttha-tham kap chiwit kan-ngan" (The *Buddha dhamma* and work life), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, pp. 166 – 167.

<sup>100</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Phuttha-tham kap chiwit kan-ngan", p. 168.



Buddhism to really reach its core (*lokuttara dhamma*). Then, [we] will think about it and test whether it is true or not. The Buddha did not teach us to believe in anyone, but taught people to examine whether something is true or not<sup>101</sup>.

These remarks by Sanya indicated that empty mind was actually practised, and *lokuttara dhamma* was considered as beneficial for worldly life by a lay Buddhist in Thailand, based on the way he had understood it through Buddhadasa's teaching. Sanya's son, Chakradharm Dhammasakdi, also said in his interview that Sanya practised empty mind while he was the interim Prime Minister after the 14 October 1973 uprising. After the military dictators were expelled by the people, a great many demands came forth, directed at the successor government. Chakradharm said that Sanya used to be respected as a good person, but during that time he received a lot of criticism which he had never had before. Sanya often told his family that he could not take on such a heavy task without the practice of empty mind<sup>102</sup>. In Pun's book, Sanya's story functioned as a good support of the validity of Buddhadasa's teachings on empty mind and *lokuttara dhamma*, no matter what criticisms were given about those unfamiliar concepts.

#### Pun's understanding of the debates on empty mind

Pun, as a propagator of Buddhadasa's teachings, concluded the discussion forum by contrasting the problems that he perceived in Buddhadasa's opponents' statements and Buddhadasa's contribution to the Thai people. Pun regarded that the purpose of Buddhism was not to argue over which teaching is good to follow, but instead to teach people to be able to overcome their sufferings by restricting greed, anger, and delusion. Therefore, as Buddhadasa presented it, Pun denied teachings which do not teach the overcoming of suffering, as not taught by the Buddha and it was not necessary to be interested in them. By following Buddhadasa's ideas, Pun insisted that the teaching of *suññatā* or empty mind, which teaches one to overcome suffering, is unique to Buddhism, whereas the *lokiya dhamma* is also taught in all the other religions. He thus criticised Buddhadasa's opponents who promoted only *lokiya dhamma* but rejected *lokuttara dhamma* as follows:

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<sup>101</sup> Sanya Thammasak, "Phuttha-tham kap chiwit kan-ngan", p. 169. The bracketed portion was given by Sanya.

<sup>102</sup> Chakradharm Dhammasakdi (Chakkatham Thammasak), interview, Bangkok, 12 October 1998.

... it is natural for those who do not have *paññā* (insight) or who are not courageous enough to use their own *paññā* to understand the highest teaching of the Buddha. [They] do not have to proudly present themselves as a teacher of scriptures, a *mahaparian* (a person with Pali qualification), or a teacher of the Abhidhamma. [These people] are not different from those who are employed to keep cows, [but] have never tasted milk<sup>103</sup>.

Pun also criticised what they had done,

If teachers, the kind who tend to make people veer off from Buddhism, stop arguing and competing about what is unjust in terms of reason, it is considered to be a kind of merit. Because of [preventing other people exploring the *dhamma*] they can make themselves people who interfere in other people's business from which they themselves get no return. When Thai people started to be interested in *suññatā* and empty mind, they used rhetorical speech to make people doubtful and not believe in *suññatā* further. The more someone has chances to explain the *dhamma* on the radio or in the newspaper, the more puffed up they are as great philosophers. I [Pun] thus collected their thoughts to present here in order for readers to examine [them]<sup>104</sup>.

In contrast to these opponents, Pun explained the contribution of Buddhadasa's *dhamma* propagation. Pun understood that Buddhadasa was highly respected by intellectuals, was even invited by the Ministry of Justice to give religious instructions over ten years, for the following reasons:

He [Ven. Buddhadasa] is the first monk in Thailand who introduced and widely propagated many teachings of the *sacca dhamma* (truth) that have been buried in the *Tipitaka*. Those who achieved even the ninth level [i.e. the highest level] of the Pali qualification or teachers of the Abhidhamma had never discovered nor understood them. ... He [Ven. Buddhadasa] does not have a high level of Pali qualification and his ecclesiastical title is only at the level of Phra Ratcha Khana, because his purpose of ordination was not to serve the ecclesiastical administration, but to preach to the people. ... Thus, he secludes himself in a forest and practises the way of renunciates by following the teachings of the Buddha. He still translated from the [Pali] *Tipitaka* into Thai, and codified a number of books, such as *Khumsap chak phra ot* (A treasure trove from the Buddha's words), *Phuttha prawat chak phra ot* (The life of the Buddha in his own words), and *Ariya sat chak phra ot* (Four noble truths from the Buddha's words). Who could have ever done like these works, or done as well as him? Even though there are official [Thai translations of] the *Tipitaka*, almost no Thai people can understand what it means. It is because they just put Thai words into Pali style sentences. ... *Mahaparian* (Pali qualification holders) or Abhidhammists have never read the Buddha's own words in the *Suttapitaka*, and do not know the truth. Thus, they cannot grasp the principle of Buddhism<sup>105</sup>.

Pun's impressions of Buddhadasa can stand for the aspects of Buddhadasa's teachings that were so appealing for Thai intellectuals. What Pun called the truth that Buddhadasa revealed was the *lokuttara dhamma* that teaches people the way to overcome suffering. One of the most central themes of Buddhadasa's works was to indicate, among many other complex and detailed theories about the states of mind or paths for

<sup>103</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Patchima likhit" (Epilogue), Pun, *Arai thuk, arai phit*, p. 178.

<sup>104</sup> Pun, "Patchima likhit", p. 179.

<sup>105</sup> Pun, "Patchima likhit", pp. 181 – 182.

liberation, the messages in the *Tipiṭaka* that can teach people to reduce suffering. According to Buddhadasa's teaching, all those detailed ideas in the *Tipiṭaka* make sense when they are viewed as something that supports the aim of overcoming suffering. Popularising the ideas of the *lokuttara dhamma* was Buddhadasa's contribution to the Thai people.

However, Buddhadasa's propagation of the *lokuttara dhamma* was controversial in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand. As a summary of all the above Thai Buddhists' discussions about the *lokuttara dhamma* and the concept of empty mind, there were at least three points for Buddhadasa's teaching to be controversial.

The first point was whether the *lokuttara* or supermundane level of teaching is relevant for laity or not. If the source of suffering is understood as attachment, everyone, regardless of their ordained status, can remind themselves not to attach to the self, which is only a misperception of the compound of aggregates, and to the things that do not belong to them as their possessions. What Buddhadasa called empty mind, or the state of mind that is free from the sense of attachment, was considered by his lay followers to be useful in worldly life, which was always associated with greediness, anger, and delusion. Buddhadasa promoted having such an empty state of mind as a temporary liberation, or state of *nibbāna*, which is also attainable for lay people as well as renunciates. In fact, the *Tipiṭaka* gives many examples of lay people who accomplished the path of sainthood, and thus the *lokuttara dhamma* is also open for lay Buddhists. However, the path for liberation has been considered as too difficult for ordinary people in Thailand. They perceived that it is such a highly revered path, even for those forest monks who keep themselves away from worldly pleasures and force themselves to do ascetic practices in order not to indulge in transient happiness, which is not true liberation. With this basic presumption, people found it difficult to imagine that they, who were satisfied with worldly happiness, could follow the path of the saint in their daily life. Therefore, in this context, Buddhadasa's propagation of the *lokuttara dhamma* was viewed by some as an authentic teaching of the Buddha, and by others as a teaching irrelevant for ordinary people<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> In the mid-1980s Buddhadasa's propagation of the *lokuttara dhamma* and empty mind was further challenged by Samana (Phra) Phothirak, the leader of the Santi Asoke, a new Buddhist group that separated from the Thai Sangha. Phothirak criticised the elite followers of Buddhadasa, as usually

The second point was whether the concept of empty mind belongs to the Theravāda or the Mahāyāna. Buddhadasa's teaching of emptiness or proposal to practise empty mind was also regarded as a teaching for people not to endure suffering in the world. From this point of view, it is not important to Buddhadasa nor to those who support his teachings, where the teaching of emptiness originated whether it was Mahāyāna or Theravāda, as long as it helped them to overcome suffering. As a matter of fact, the concept of emptiness actually exists in Theravāda scriptures, this fact was a strong support for Buddhadasa and his followers to promote the practice of empty mind. However, at the same time, because of the fact that the concept was unfamiliar in traditional Theravāda commentaries, but was emphasised in the Mahāyāna, Buddhadasa's proposal of empty mind could be attacked as unorthodox.

The third point was that opponents of Buddhadasa created controversies about him through their written and oral debates. Along with Buddhadasa's and Thammathat's propagation and dissemination of their own ideas, these controversies in themselves served to expand and enrich the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand. Even though Buddhadasa's teaching of the *lokuttara dhamma* and empty mind were unfamiliar to Thai Buddhists in general, he had reasonable grounds in support of his ideas so that they were accepted by intellectuals in their daily practice. His opponents manipulated their interpretations, for example by claiming that *suññatā* does not exist in Theravāda *Tipiṭaka*, and by relating the practice of mind empty of "me" and "mine" to the communist policy of co-operative agriculture instead of private enterprise. They also used other methods to make people trust or be attracted to them rather than Buddhadasa, such as the fluent presentation of material from a Pali commentary, jokes, and citing a higher Pali qualification. Whatever the evidence for the arguments, ordinary people who could not

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being absorbed in greediness in luxurious living, but who only apply the method of empty mind when they feel sufferings by letting go attachment. From the perspective of an ordinary commoner, Phothirak proposed what he considered more practical teachings for people in general. For example, the Santi Asoke is known for their strict adherence to moral precepts, which they think more realistic for people to train themselves, and by establishing a Buddhist community of common ownership which was supported by the members' moral precepts. However, Phothirak wrote that he truly respected Buddhadasa, but he critically examined Buddhadasa's teachings in order to help people in worldly society (Satcha Wimittanin (edited from a public lecture of Phra Phothirak), *Panha sangkhom thi kae mai dai phro kansuksa phutthasasana phit phlat* (Social problems that cannot be solved because of wrong education in Buddhism) (Bangkok: Rongphim mulanithi thamma santi, 1985)). Such views of Phothirak were confirmed by him in my interview with him on 6 May 1999.

follow the arguments in the Pali *Tipiṭaka* or its commentaries by themselves only took on a certain incredulity towards Buddhadasa's teachings. In these ways suspicious images of Buddhadasa as unorthodox and radical were generated and transmitted in the Buddhist public sphere in the 1960s and 1970s.

## Chapter VI Abhidhamma groups in contemporary Thailand and their conflict with Buddhadasa

In the mid-twentieth century, when Thai Buddhists were pursuing deeper understanding in the doctrines and ways of Buddhist practice, Buddhadasa developed his views on emptiness possibly through the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. As I have examined in the previous chapter, empty mind became polemical in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand, but Buddhadasa considered it a teaching relevant to Theravāda Buddhists. For Buddhadasa, it was not only because the concept of emptiness actually existed in Theravāda scriptures, but also because he understood that any ideas that would be useful for overcoming suffering should be incorporated into practice no matter what their origin, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or even other religions.

At about the same time that Buddhadasa was developing his ideas on emptiness, other groups of Thai Buddhists pursued in different ways their intellectual and religious interests to go beyond the basic level of Thai ecclesiastical education. One of the most remarkable paths was the study of the Abhidhamma, the highly refined definitions and exegesis of Buddhist doctrines that had been developed in the Theravāda school. Some groups based closely on the Abhidhamma became keen opponents of Buddhadasa, and this conflict stood out as one of the most striking doctrinal confrontations in the Buddhist public sphere in mid-twentieth-century Thailand. In order to understand Buddhadasa's position in the context of contemporary Thai Buddhism, I am going to explore two points in this chapter.

First, I will present a history of contemporary Abhidhamma studies in Thailand. Compared to the new Buddhist groups which arose in the 1970s, very little work in the existing sociological studies of Thai Buddhism has dealt with the popularisation of Abhidhamma studies in Thailand before the 1960s. Gabaude, in his study on Buddhadasa, has a chapter on the Abhidhamma, where he mainly analyses Buddhadasa's interpretation of the classical theory of the Abhidhamma<sup>1</sup>. In other chapters on Buddhadasa's hermeneutic of conditioned arising, rebirth, and spirits,

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Gabaude, "Le langage scolastique: l'Abhidhamma", *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988),

Gabaude contrasted the ideas of Buddhadasa and those of his Abhidhamma opponents. He also gave biographical information about these groups; however, his study lacked a comprehensive historical picture of the Abhidhamma groups in contemporary Thailand<sup>2</sup>. Rather, those whom he called “Abhidhammists” did not comprise a monolithic unity. In relation to the propagation of *vipassanā* meditation, Tambiah has also mentioned Phra Phimolatham (At Asapho), an influential Mahanikai Order elder, who introduced *vipassanā* together with Abhidhamma studies from Burma<sup>3</sup>. However, the lone activities of Phra Phimolatham did not account for or represent the growing popularity of Abhidhamma studies and *vipassanā* as new phenomena in Thailand. In fact, there were more popular teachers and more extensive demands made on them.

Second, I will examine the ideological conflict initiated by Buddhadasa’s controversial lecture on the Abhidhamma in 1965, which invited critical retorts from Abhidhamma groups. Gabaude indicated that the distinct positions of Buddhadasa and the Abhidhamma groups were respectively interpretative and scholastic, rationalist and supernaturalist<sup>4</sup>. Jackson also examined similar points as Gabaude, such as Buddhadasa’s *dhamma*-language interpretation of rebirth and supernatural beings<sup>5</sup>. However, both of their studies placed emphasis on Buddhadasa’s characteristic interpretation but did not pay much attention to the controversial nature of his Abhidhamma opponents. Even though Buddhadasa incorporated various foreign elements which had inspired him in his teachings, this does not always mean that criticism of him from the Abhidhamma groups was based on some orthodoxy of Thai Buddhism. It is necessary to study the arguments of his opponents as critically as those of Buddhadasa.

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pp. 126 – 174.

<sup>2</sup> Gabaude, “Le langage classique: la production conditionnée”, pp. 175 – 241; “Le langage magique: la prolongation de la vie”, pp. 242 – 279; and “Le langage animiste: les esprits”, pp. 279 – 344.

<sup>3</sup> S. J. Tambiah, “The center-periphery dialectic: the Mahathat and Bovonnivet sponsorship of meditation compared”, *The Buddhist saints of the forest and the cult of amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 183 – 199. He presented Phra Phimolatham’s propagation of *vipassanā* as an element of ascetic practice that the Mahanikai Order needed politically as a countermeasure to the more indigenous ways of the ascetic forest monks, many of whom were eventually integrated into the Thammayut Order. Also, the administration effort for *vipassanā* propagation which expands from the capital to the provinces, and the spontaneous faith of urban intellectuals in forest monks were contrasted by him.

<sup>4</sup> Gabaude, “Le langage scolastique: l’Abhidhamma”, and “Le langage animiste: les esprits”.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Jackson, *Buddhadasa: a Buddhist thinker for the modern world* (Bangkok: The Siam Society under Royal Patronage, 1988), pp. 125 – 133.

By means of these two points, this chapter will present the position of Buddhadasa relative to others in the contemporary Thai Buddhist public sphere. It is not possible to understand Buddhadasa's thought simply by studying the content of his works. The history and relationship between Buddhadasa and his Abhidhamma opponents will also serve to demonstrate an important dimension of the doctrinal development of Thai Buddhism in the twentieth century.

## 1. Abhidhamma studies and their history in contemporary Thailand

The Abhidhamma, or *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, is one of the three baskets of the *Tipiṭaka*, together with the *Suttapiṭaka* (teachings of the Buddha) and the *Vinayapiṭaka* (monastic discipline). Compared with the contents of the other two collections which were recited in the first and second councils, the development of the Abhidhamma came later. Two or three hundred years after the death of the Buddha, his followers seem to have developed precise definitions and exegesis of the teachings preserved in the other collections, and they analysed the factors of experience (Pali: *cetasika*) and their interactions into a complex classification. In some schools this analysis evolved into the third collection, the Abhidhamma. However, the Buddhist communities were far from agreement about doctrine, especially about these classifications, and various Abhidhamma texts and collections came into existence belonging to different schools, such as Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda. Some schools did not even have an Abhidhamma collection. Even though the Abhidhamma came later and its forms in different schools do not agree with each other, the content of the Abhidhamma, but not its form, has been considered as attributable to the Buddha<sup>6</sup>. In other words, even from its origin, the Abhidhamma was contentious and probably had a polemical function in its insistence on orthodoxy.

Although Thai Buddhists also inherited the Theravāda Abhidhamma as a part of the *Tipiṭaka*, the popularity of Abhidhamma studies is a recent phenomenon in Thailand. Contemporary Thai Buddhists acquired methods to study the Abhidhamma through

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<sup>6</sup> Collett Cox, "Buddhism, Ābhidharmika schools of", Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 53 – 58.



monks from Burma, where, among all ethnic groups belonging to the Theravada school, Abhidhamma studies have been most emphasised. In Burma, as well as in Sri Lanka, students have mostly relied on a reworking of the material that summarised the teachings of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, of which the detailed classifications and discussions about the process of perception, consciousness and other Buddhist psychology are difficult. The summary is the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, or “compendium of philosophy”. It was written by Anuruddha, who was born in South India and lived in Sri Lanka earlier than the twelfth- but later than the eighth-century C.E. Saddhatissa has portrayed the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* as, “For the Burmese or Sinhalese student who begins to study Abhidhamma, this book is first committed to memory. Trying to study the Abhidhamma without mastering this book is like trying to construct a house without a suitable foundation”<sup>7</sup>. Later Buddhists have been studying the Abhidhamma with the assistance of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* and its sub-commentaries, especially the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-tīkā*, written by Sumaṅgala at the time of King Parākramabāhu (1153 – 1186)<sup>8</sup>. In Burma and Sri Lanka, Abhidhamma studies are closely linked with monastic training in *vipassanā* meditation<sup>9</sup>.

However, in Thailand, according to Phra Sikhampirayan (Thawan; 1920 – ), a principle teacher at the Abhidhamma school at Wat Rakhang, Khana 7, some portions of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, its *aṭṭhakathā* and Abhidhamma teachers were lost when Ayutthaya was surrendered by Burma, although the *Suttapiṭaka* and *Vinayapiṭaka* survived. He also said that King Rama I attempted to restore the Abhidhamma when he went on an expedition to Northern Thailand and Luang Prabang, but his efforts were not totally successful<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Hammalawa Saddhatissa, “Introduction: the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*”, Hammalawa Saddhatissa (ed.), *The Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha of Bhaddantācariya Anuruddha and the Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-tīkā of Bhaddantācariya Sumaṅgalasāmi* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1989), p. xv.

<sup>8</sup> Hammalawa Saddhatissa, “Introduction: the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*”, p. xix.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful for this comment from a meditation practitioner, whom I asked how the highly philosophical Abhidhamma studies relate to *vipassanā* meditation. It helped me to understand why Abhidhamma studies are important in some forms of Buddhism. The same point is also indicated by Collett Cox, who wrote “Abhidharma enables the practitioner to discriminate those aspects of experience that are defiling and so lead to suffering from those that are virtuous; through this discriminating insight, one can remove the defilements, cultivate virtue, and thereby emulate the Buddha and attain enlightenment” (Cox, “Buddhism, Abhidharma schools of”, p. 54).

<sup>10</sup> Phra Sikhampirayan, interview, Bangkok, 28 December 1998. This information needs to be

In twentieth century Thailand, the study of the Abhidhamma has also been included in the curricula of ecclesiastical examinations for *nak tham* (grade 3 – 1) and Pali (level 3 – 9). Studies of the Abhidhamma are included in the eighth and/or ninth, that is the highest, levels of the Pali examination<sup>11</sup>. For the ninth level Pali exam, candidates are asked to translate from the Pali *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-tīkā* into Thai. This text is an expanded commentary on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, which reorganised, summarised and explained material from the seven books of the *Abhidhammapīṭaka*. If the existing curricula of ecclesiastical examinations are followed<sup>12</sup>, those who study the Abhidhamma would be limited in number, because it is only studied in the most advanced levels of the Pali examinations, and this level has traditionally been highly respected. In this way, people were required to be experts in Pali in order to learn the Abhidhamma, it was not designed for popular consumption.

Apart from the ecclesiastical examination system, there seems to have been a more popularised form of Abhidhamma study, by which people could study it in Thai. According to Buddhadasa, in around 1921, when he was fifteen years old, he attended an Abhidhamma class at a temple in his neighbourhood, Wat Thammabucha, Phumriang, Chaiya<sup>13</sup>. However, little is known about those local Abhidhamma studies in early twentieth century Thailand, and they were likely to have been much less influential than

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supported by further historical surveys.

<sup>11</sup> A ninth level Pali qualification holder, Sathianphon Wannaphok, said in an interview that the Abhidhamma is asked about in the eighth and ninth levels (Bangkok, 30 April 1999), but two other ninth level qualification holders, Suchip Phunyanuphap (interview, Bangkok, 10 March 1999) and Siri Phetchai (interview, Bangkok, 11 March 1999), said that the Abhidhamma is only examined in the ninth level. According to Ishii's list of canonical texts for each level of the Pali examination, the eighth level requires translation from the *Samantapāsādikā* (a sub-commentary on the *Vinayapīṭaka*) from Thai to Pali, and from the *Visuddhimagga* from Pali to Thai (Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society: Thai Buddhism in history* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1986), p. 95). The *Visuddhimagga* is a para-canonical text, which is abstracted from the entire *Tipīṭaka*, rather than an *aṭṭhakathā* which depends on a base text. It includes Abhidhamma material also. Perhaps the eighth level sometimes requires translation of sections relating to the Abhidhamma in the *Visuddhimagga*.

<sup>12</sup> A textbook on the Abhidhamma, *Chula aphithammatthasangkhaha* (*Culā abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*), written by Phra Thipparinya, was approved in 1951 for use in the third, or the lowest, grade *nak tham*, however, it was not used for a long time (*Anuson ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop phra thipparinya* (Commemoration of Phra Thipparinya's cremation) (21 May 1977), p. 14; Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview, Chonburi, 29 April 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Phutthathat phikkhu, *Aphitham khu arai?* (What is *abhidhamma*?) (Bangkok: Samnak nangsu thammabucha khong khana phoei phrae witthi kan damnoen chiwit an prasoet, 1978), pp. 5 – 6. Buddhadasa said that people were excited to talk about *kāmāvacara* (the world of pleasure) or *rūpāvacara* (world of form), even though they did not know the meaning well, but there were instead many unfamiliar concepts. Buddhadasa seems not to have become involved in the Abhidhamma too deeply, as he said that he did not know how to use it.

either Buddhadasa himself or Phra Phatthanta Wilasa, a Burmese monk teacher of the Abhidhamma.

The arrival of Phra Phatthanta Wilasa (1897 – 1936?) was an important beginning of the popularisation of Abhidhamma studies in Thailand<sup>14</sup>. Phatthanta seems to have been an ethnic Burmese of Pyinmana province, which is situated in the southern end of Upper Burma<sup>15</sup>. He studied the *Tipitaka* from the time he was ordained as a novice at the age of twelve, and he continued his study as a monk in Mandalay and Pahkokku for nine years. After that, he practised *vipassanā* meditation at the place of U Chan Dun, a disciple of the renowned Mingun Hsayadaw (1869 – 1954)<sup>16</sup>. In 1930 Thai gem traders invited him as a *vipassanā* teacher to Bo Phloi, Kanchanaburi province in Western Thailand, and in 1931 a group of lay supporters of Wat Prok, which is known as a Burmese temple in Bangkok, invited him to stay there<sup>17</sup>.

The students of Phatthanta became the first generation of popular Thai Abhidhamma teachers. Since Phatthanta could not speak Thai very fluently, some Thai intellectuals, such as Luang Praphanphatthanakan and Luang Thepdarunanusit (Thawi Thammathat; the ninth level Pali qualification holder during the sixth reign), helped by translating Burmese or Pali into Thai when he taught his Thai students<sup>18</sup>. He seems to have become quite famous among eager Buddhists in search of a good teacher. Even Phraya Lapphlithammprakhan, an important friend and supporter of Buddhadasa,

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<sup>14</sup> Phra Phadungsulakkarit (A *thayok* of Wat Prok), “Prawat phra phatthanta wilasa” (A history of Phra Phatthanta Wilasa), Phra Phatthanta Wilasa, *Thamma bet talet* (Small piece of the *dhamma*) (Bangkok: Samakhom sun khonkhwa thang phra phutthasasana, 1982), pp. 6 – 7. The name of this Burmese monk, which I transcribe here in accordance with Thai pronunciation, can also be transcribed using Pali spelling as Bhaddanta Vilāsa. Although in Pali Bhaddanta means “venerable” or “reverend”, and it is used to refer to a monk, my impression is that Thai people seem to use it as the name of the Burmese monk (T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), “Bhadanta (Bhaddanta)”, *Pali-English dictionary* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society), pp. 497 – 498).

<sup>15</sup> Because of his parents’ names (U Kyaung and Daw Hla Win) and the place of his birth, he was most likely an ethnic Burmese. I thank Associate Professor Kei Nemoto for his advice on the ethnic and geographical situation in Burma, as well as the possible English spellings of Burmese names, which were found in Thai materials.

<sup>16</sup> Mingun Hsayadaw is respected as the preceptor of the famous meditation teacher, Mahasi Hsayadaw. For Mingun Hsayadaw’s biography and work, see Madhav M. Deshpande, *Milindapañhā-aṭṭhakathā* by *Thaton Mingun Zatawun Sayadaw alias U Narada Mahathera* (transcribed and edited) (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Phra Phadungsulakkarit, “Prawat phra phatthanta wilasa”, pp. 5 – 8.

<sup>18</sup> Phra Phadungsulakkarit, “Prawat phra phatthanta wilasa”, p. 7; Siri Phetchai (The head of the academic division, Association for the Research Centre of Buddhism (*Samakhom sun khonkhwa thang phra phutthasasana*)), interview, Bangkok, 11 March 1999.

introduced Buddhadasa to study with Phatthanta<sup>19</sup>. However, the life of Phatthanta ended with what was rumoured to be a mysterious murder. Some said that he was murdered by a villain when he was practising walking meditation at midnight<sup>20</sup>, and others said that one morning he was found hanging alone in his *kuti* but was assumed to have been murdered by illegal Mon immigrants who lived in the temple and had been told to leave in order that a meditation hall could be built<sup>21</sup>. As a biographer wrote that he stayed in Wat Prok for five years, he seems to have died in 1936 at the age of thirty-nine<sup>22</sup>. Although Phatthanta's instructions on the Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* lasted only for a short period, his students succeeded him in his teachings and took an important role as Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* teachers. Among them, Naep Mahaniranon was particularly important.

Ubasika Naep Mahaniranon (1898 – 1983) was born the daughter of Phraya Sattayanukun, former governor, of Chao Muang Kanchanaburi<sup>23</sup>. As a woman in an earlier generation, she did not have any formal education, and throughout her life she had difficulties in writing Thai. She had already married and had three sons before she became seriously interested in meditation practice around thirty. In 1932, Naep was introduced to Phatthanta by Luang Praphan, who liked to visit many famous monks to have *dhama* conversations. She agreed with his teaching that the *dhama* practice was not thinking, but watching the present *ārammaṇa* (object of consciousness), without bringing in the past or the future<sup>24</sup>. Her understanding improved in a few years, and Phatthanta told her to take on the role of an Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* teacher<sup>25</sup>. In 1944, she opened her first *vipassanā* school at Wat Rakhang<sup>26</sup>, and taught with Sai

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<sup>19</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Anumothana" (Blessing), Khana thammathan lae phu thi khaorop nai khunnatham khong phraya lapphlithammaprakhan (The Khana Thammathan and a group which respect the moral principles of Phraya Lapphlithammaprakhan) (ed.), *Mahawitthayalai chiwit khong phutthathat phikkhu, panya nai phutthasasana nikai sen khong khun prachak* (A university of life by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, and Insight in Zen School of Buddhism by Khun Prachak) (A cremation volume for Phraya Lapphlithammaprakhan, 19 September 1968), p. (6).

<sup>20</sup> Siri Phetchai, interview.

<sup>21</sup> Wannasit Waithayasewi, interview, Bangkok, 3 May 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Phra Phadungsulakkarit, "Prawat phra phatthanta wilasa", p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> "Chiwit lae ngan khong achan naep mahaniranon" (Life and work of Naep Mahaniranon), *Panyasan* (Journal of *paññā*), No. 15 (21 September 1983), p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Wannasit, interview.

<sup>25</sup> "Chiwit lae ngan khong achan naep mahaniranon", p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> "Chiwit lae ngan khong achan naep mahaniranon", p. 3. The year might be 1934. Wannasit, who was one of the closest disciples of Naep, said in an interview that Phatthanta died soon after the

Saikasaem, who wrote *Aphitham yo* (Abhidhamma in summary)<sup>27</sup>, which seems to have been one of the first Abhidhamma textbooks written by a contemporary Thai. Naep became an important teacher who supervised *vipassanā* schools in forty-one provinces<sup>28</sup>.

At the end of the 1940s, there was an effort to introduce the Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* practice from Burma at a high level in the Thai Sangha. In 1948 the then Phra Thammatrailokachan, who is best known by his later ecclesiastical title, Phra Phimolatham (At Atsapho; 1903 – 1989)<sup>29</sup>, then in the Sangha Ministry of Administration, requested the ambassador of Burma to send Burmese monks with expertise in the *Tipīṭaka*, as well as complete sets of the *Tipīṭaka*, the *aṭṭhakathā* (commentaries), and the *ṭīkā* (sub-commentaries), which had been transmitted in Burma<sup>30</sup>. At his request, two Burmese monks, Ven. Sathamma Chotika Thammachariya (? – 1966) and Ven. Techintha Thammachariya Thammakathika<sup>31</sup> came to Thailand in 1949. Furthermore, in 1952 At sent two monks and a novice with Pali qualifications to Burma to acquire the method of *vipassanā dhura* (the task of contemplation) and *gantha dhura* (the task of the books, i.e., of studying the scriptures). When Phra Maha Chodok Yanasit (ninth level Pali qualification holder; 1918 – 1988), who had studied *vipassanā dhura* in Burma, was returning to Thailand in 1953, two Burmese *vipassanā* teacher monks, Ven. Phatthanta Atsapha Thera Pathankammathanachariya and Ven. Inthawansa Thammachariya Kammathanachariya, were also invited to Thailand by At<sup>32</sup>.

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school at Wat Rakhang opened. He also said that Sai Saikasaem, who used to work at the Department of forestry in Chiang Mai and who could speak Burmese, helped by translating Phatthanta's teaching at the school (Wannasit, interview).

<sup>27</sup> Wannasit, interview.

<sup>28</sup> "Chiwit lae ngan khong achan naep mahaniranon", p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> At Asapho is most well-known by his second to last ecclesiastical title, Phra Phimolatham. The title, Phra Phimolatham was given to him on 4 December 1959 and he was known as the holder of this title until the next elevation to Somdet Phra Phutthachan on 5 December 1985, even though it was withdrawn from 11 November 1950 to 31 May 1975 for a charge he was innocent of ("Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)", *Maha thera prawat: somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)* (A history of the great elder: Somdet Phra Phutthachan (At Atsapha Maha Thera)) (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkon ratcha witthayalai, 1990), pp.120 – 122).

<sup>30</sup> In 1950 three sets of scriptures were dedicated by the Buddhist Congress of the Burmese Union (this is a translation of the term, *Sapha kan phutthasasana haeng sahaphap phama*, which appears in a Thai source). One set was sent to Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University at Wat Mahathat, another to Mahamakut Buddhist University at Wat Bowonniwet, and the other to the Abhidhamma School at Wat Rakhang ("Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)", pp. 116 – 117).

<sup>31</sup> Here I gave their names in accordance with Thai pronunciation and transliteration. Thai people usually call the former Achan Chotika, and the latter Achan Techin. The Pali transliterations of their names are Saddhamma Jotika Dhammācariya and Tejinda Dhammācariya Dhammakathika, respectively.

<sup>32</sup> "Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)", pp. 118 – 119; "Prawat lae phonngan doi yo:

These Burmese and Thai monks who studied in Burma played an important role as teachers of both Abhidhamma and *vipassanā*. The Burmese monk, Chotika, taught Abhidhamma at Wat Mahathat from 1950 to 1954, and also at Wat Rakhang until he died in 1968<sup>33</sup>. Both of these monasteries have a long history, dating from early in the Bangkok dynasty. Based on Burmese textbooks, Chotika and his disciples established Abhidhamma textbooks and examinations in Thai, these have nine levels (*Cuḷa abhidhammika* 3, 2, 1; *Majjhima abhidhammika* 3, 2, 1; and *Mahā abhidhammika* 3, 2, 1)<sup>34</sup>. The Abhidhamma classes that were started by Chotika still continue up to the present, both at Wat Mahathat and at Wat Rakhang. The one at Wat Mahathat was especially developed by the efforts of At, who in 1968 opened the Abhidhamma Chotika College (Aphitham Chotika Witthayalai) and in 1981 put it administratively under Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, which has more stable sources of support<sup>35</sup>. Apart from his textbooks and examinations, Chotika was very important in forming well-known Thai Abhidhamma teachers in later generations. For example, Phra Thipparinya, whose Abhidhamma textbook was once adopted as study material for the third grade *nak tham*; Bunmi Methangkun, who established the Abhidhamma Foundation; and Wannasit Waithayasewi, who established the Naep Mahaniranon Foundation. Chotika should be considered as the teacher who gave a significant foundation to Abhidhamma study in Thailand<sup>36</sup>.

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phra thammathiraratmahamuni (chodok yanasit therā, parien tham 9 prayok)” (Life and work in summary: Phra Thammathiraratmahamuni (Chodok Yanasit Thera, ninth level Pali qualification), Phra Thammathiraratmahamuni, *Phet nai duang chai* (A jewel in the mind) (Bangkok: Samnak ngan klang kong kan wipatsana thura, 1996), pp. 242 – 243. The names of these monks in Pali transliteration are Bhaddanta Āsabha Thera Padhānakammaṭṭhānācariya and Indavaṃsa Dhammācariya Kammaṭṭhānācariya.

<sup>33</sup> “Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha therā)”, pp. 115 – 116; “Aphitham chotika witthayalai, mahachulalongkon ratcha witthayalai”, Aphitham chotika witthayalai (ed.), *Ngan mop prakatniyabat apitham bandit run 34/2540* (The ceremony to confer the qualification of Apitham Bandit) (Bangkok: Aphitham Chotika Witthayalai, Mahachulalongkon Ratcha Witthayalai, 1998), p. 13. The year when Chotika started his teaching at Wat Mahathat could possibly be 1951, because publications from the Abhidhamma Chotika College refer to their origin as Chotika’s arrival in Thailand, which they say was in 1951. Compared with the rough overview of the school history of the Abhidhamma Chotika College, I assume that the data in “Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha therā)” are more reliable. This is because the latter provides more detailed information about At’s works, which were presumably recorded by At himself or surveyed by his disciples.

<sup>34</sup> Phra Sikhamphirayan, interview.

<sup>35</sup> “Aphitham chotika witthayalai, mahachulalongkon ratcha witthayalai”, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> According to a brochure I received in 1999, the Abhidhamma Chotika College has developed its branches to twenty-one in Central Thailand, four in the North, eleven in the Northeast, fourteen in the East, and two in the South (“Aphitham chotika witthayalai, mahachulalongkon ratcha witthayalai

The other Burmese monk who came with Chotika, Techintha (or more commonly Techin), also taught the Abhidhamma at Wat Mahathat, although he seems not to have been together with Chotika, but in Khana 5, or Division 5 of the monks' residential area in Wat Mahathat. Through Techin's teaching, which was helped by Phra Khru Prakatsamathikhun, a Thai assistant monk, the famous preacher, Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, learnt the Abhidhamma<sup>37</sup>. However, Techin's lessons did not last very long. In 1961 Techin went back to Burma, and he never returned Thailand<sup>38</sup>. It is rumoured that he was arrested at the immigration bureau in Burma because he brought some gold bars from Thailand<sup>39</sup>.

For the teachers of *vipassanā* in the Burmese style, Phra Maha Chodok, a Thai returnee student from Burma, was important<sup>40</sup>. With the assistance of the two Burmese *vipassanā* teachers, Chodok made Khana 5 of Wat Mahathat a famous *vipassanā* training class, which continues to exist up to the present. Among his disciples was, Khun Mae Siri Krinchai (1917 – ), who now supervises *vipassanā* at the Young Buddhist Association of Thailand (*Yaowa phutthika samakhom haeng prathet thai*)<sup>41</sup>.

However, At's undertakings led to difficulties because of his downfall through conspiracies in ecclesiastic politics<sup>42</sup>. In September 1960 At was ordered to disrobe being charged with a major *vinaya* offence, and in October and November his position as the abbot of Wat Mahathat and his ecclesiastical title, Phra Phimolatham, were taken away. Furthermore, in April 1962 he was arrested on the accusation of taking part in communist activities. These charges were made up in order to remove him from power,

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nai phra boromarachupatham" (The Abhidhamma Chotika College, Mahachulalongkon Ratcha Witthayalai under Royal Patronage)). The data indicate expansion of Abhidhamma study from the teaching of Chotika in Bangkok into provincial Thailand.

<sup>37</sup> Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview.

<sup>38</sup> "Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)", p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Wannasit, interview.

<sup>40</sup> For Chodok's brief bio-data, see "Prawat lae phonngan doi yo: phra thammathiraratmahamuni (chodok yanasit thera, parien tham 9 prayok)".

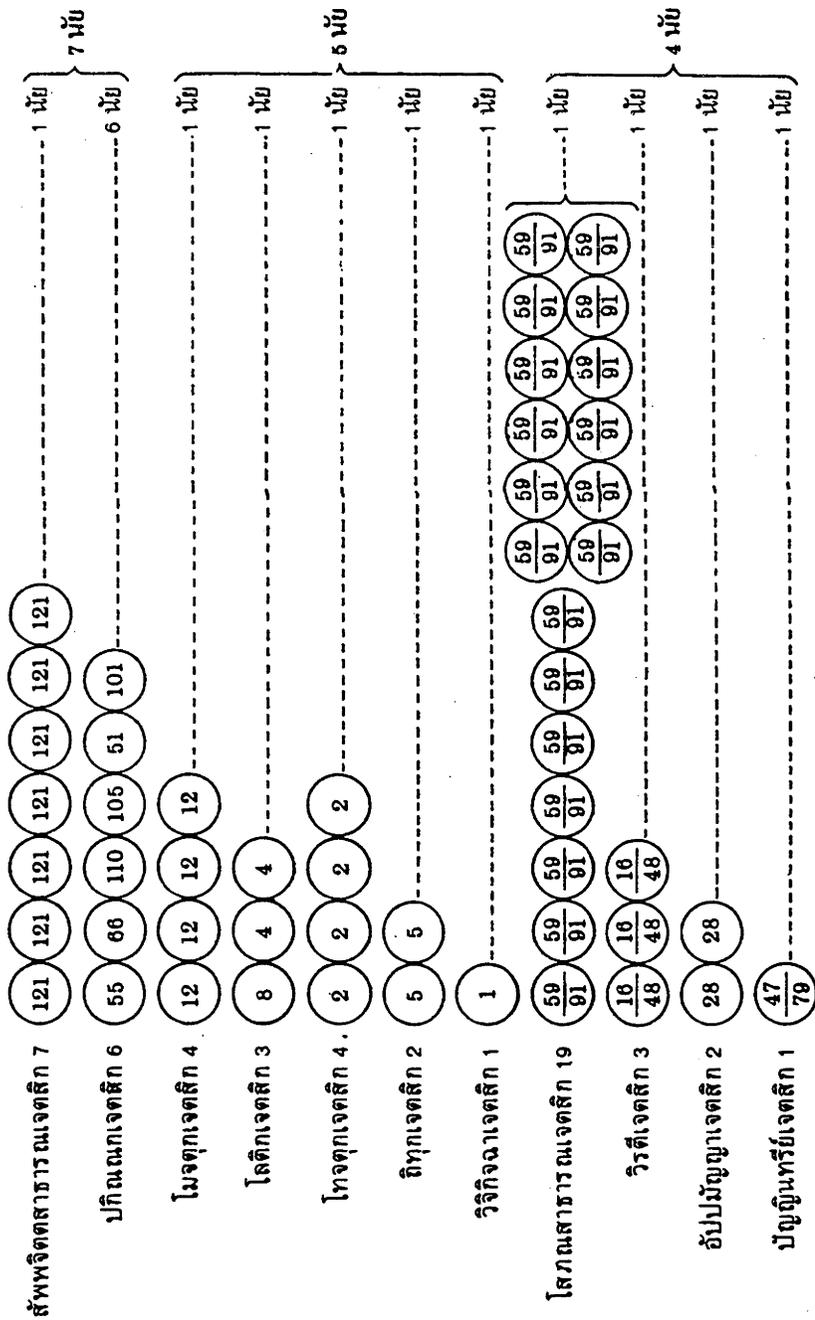
<sup>41</sup> About Khun Mae Siri, see *Thammathan khong khun mae siri: thi raluk nuang nai wara charoen chansa khrop 6 rop (72 pi)* (Khun Mae Siri's gift of the dhamma: commemoration for her sixth twelve year cycle (seventy-two years old)) (22 August 1988).

<sup>42</sup> About At's downfall and its related political dispute, see Krachang Nanthaphot, *Mahanikai – thammayut* (Mahanikai Order and Thammayut Order) (Nonthabri: Santi tham, 1985), pp. 175 – 253; Peter Jackson, "Persecution of Phra Phimontham (Vimaladhamma) Bhikkhu", Peter Jackson, *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict: the political functions of urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 94 – 112.

Figure 4. A scheme of contemporary Abhidhamma studies introduced by a Burmese monk, Chotika.

This figure is extracted from: Phra Sattamma Chotika Thammachariya, *Paramattha chotika paritchet thi 1-2-3: chit, chettasik, rup, nipphan* (Chotika's supreme teaching lesson 1-2-3: *citta, cetasika, rūpa, nibbāna*) (The textbook for the most elementary level of the Abhidhamma examination by Chotika's Abhidhamma College at Wat Mahathat) (Bangkok: Mulanithi Sattamma Chotika, 1997), p. 39.

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and they were dismissed in August 1966. At's downfall meant a serious loss of support for those monks who had been invited by him. At returned from jail to Wat Mahathat in November 1966, but it took more time to regain his ecclesiastic title and his position as abbot. This happened in May 1975 and October 1981 respectively<sup>43</sup>. During the period when At lost power, one Burmese *vipassanā* teacher monk returned to Burma, and the other moved to Chonburi province where a lay supporter founded a place for him<sup>44</sup>. The Abhidhamma teacher, Techin, also returned to Burma in 1961, and Chotika died in Thailand in 1966. In the 1960s, At's project of propagation of Abhidhamma studies and *vipassanā* practice must have gone through a difficult time.

In the meantime, the propagation of Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* were also promoted by lay preachers who had not had any direct link with At's ecclesiastic politics. Phra Thipparinya (Thup Klamphasut; 1889 – 1977), who was an important lay supporter of Wat Mahathat, and had studied Abhidhamma with Chotika, published an Abhidhamma textbook, *Chula aphithammatthasangkhaha* (Elementary *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*). In 1951, this was approved as a textbook for the third grade *nak tham* examination by Somdet Wanrat at Wat Banchamabophit<sup>45</sup>. This was perhaps one of the early Abhidhamma textbooks written by Thais in the twentieth century, even then people felt that the textbook was too difficult<sup>46</sup>, and its time as a *nak tham* textbook did not last too long<sup>47</sup>. Phra Thipparinya devoted himself to propagating the Abhidhamma as a supporter of the Burmese teachers, as a member of the *Tipitaka* translating committee specialising in the *Abhidhammapitaka*<sup>48</sup>, and as an Abhidhamma lecturer on the radio<sup>49</sup>.

The most influential event for Abhidhamma propagation in contemporary Thailand was the beginning of Naep Mahaniranon's regular lectures at the Buddhist

<sup>43</sup> "Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)", pp. 120 – 122.

<sup>44</sup> "Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)", pp. 118 – 119. The one who returned to Burma was Inthawansa, and the other was Phatthanta Atsapha.

<sup>45</sup> *Anuson ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop phra thipparinya*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Kittiwuttho Phikkhu, "Dae phra thipparinya" (To Phra Thipparinya), *Anuson ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop phra thipparinya*, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> Wannasit, interview. As far as Wannasit remembered, the textbook was only used for a year or so.

<sup>48</sup> Phra Phimolatham, "Anuson khun phra thipparinya" (Memory of Khun Phra Thipparinya), *Anuson ngan phra ratcha than phloeng sop phra thipparinya*, pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>49</sup> Kittiwuttho Phikkhu, "Dae phra thipparinya", p. 26.

Association of Thailand in 1953<sup>50</sup>. One of her listeners, Bunmi Methangkuro (1909 – 1991), was the owner of a chalk factory in Ayutthaya province, by which he had become wealthy. When he first listened to Naep’s lecture at the Buddhist Association by chance in 1953, he suffered from stomach trouble, which came from work stress, but through her lecture he understood the usefulness of Buddhist teaching which until then he had not realised. At Naep’s suggestion, Bunmi not only began studying the Abhidhamma with Chotika at Wat Rakhang, but also in September 1953 opened Abhidhamma classes at the Buddhist Association. Naep, Phra Chanbannakit, and Bunmi himself were invited as lecturers<sup>51</sup>. Through their efforts, Abhidhamma teaching was developed and propagated at the Buddhist Association of Thailand.

Maniphan Charudun, another member of Naep’s audience at the Buddhist Association also expanded opportunities for Abhidhamma propagation. In 1954 Maniphan first attended Naep’s lecture with his wife, Utsa, and discovered the usefulness of the Abhidhamma for everyday life. Then committee member and committee secretary of the Office of Culture concerning Custom and Tradition (*Kammakan lekhanukan samnak watthanatham thang rabiap prapheni*) in the National Culture Council (*Sapha watthanatham haeng chat*), Maniphan proposed a project to promote Abhidhamma studies at his place of work. Phibun Songkhram, then the Prime Minister and the president of the Council, approved the project, and Maniphan organised Abhidhamma lectures at the auditorium of the Ministry of Culture. As part of this project, he also invited Naep to give a lecture, and the auditorium was filled with five to six hundred people who came to listen to her. Although this project should have been abandoned with Phibun’s downfall in the September 1957 coup by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Maniphan considered this the first case of Abhidhamma propagation that was officially supported by the government in the contemporary history of Thailand<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> “Chiwit lae ngan khong achan naep mahaniranon”, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> “Phra achan bunmi methangkuro: duang prathip duang ek haeng phra aphitham” (Phra Achan Bunmi Methangkuro: the number one light of the Abhidhamma), Aphitham mulanithi lae khana sit (The Abhidhamma Foundation and a group of disciples) (ed.), *Alai phra achan bunmi methangkun* (In memory of Phra Achan Bunmi Methangkun) (Bangkok: 6 June 1992), pp. 1 – 3; “Mulanithi aphitham mulanithi” (Foundation for the Abhidhamma Foundation) (A brochure given to me on my visit on 9 October 1998).

<sup>52</sup> Maniphan and Utsa Charudun, “Than achan naep kap pathom haet hai koet samakhom sun khonkhwa thang phra phutthasasana lae mulanithi phumiphalo phikkhu” (Ven. Naep and the origins of the Association for Centre of the Research on Buddhism and the Phumiphalo Bhikkhu

In the early 1960s, the popularity of Naep and strong financial assistance made the Abhidhamma groups powerful in the Buddhist Association of Thailand, which was by then already a prestigious place for Buddhist intellectuals. According to Sanya Dhammasakdi, one of the founding members and a key promoter of the Association's activities, the Association used to have few assets of its own so the members had to buy pencils and paper by splitting donations, or by bringing their own food to offer to the monks. However, an Abhidhamma devotee donated land of 200 – 300 *rai* from which the Association could gain several thousand baht each year as rent, and also another student of the Abhidhamma donated land of 80 *rai* as a place for *dhamma* practice. Sanya said that the Abhidhamma studies group established their own committee within the Buddhist Association, and their members were involved in the Association's administration. At the same time, there was also a group for Sutta studies in the Association, and the Association's journal, *Phuttha-tham* (the Buddha *dhamma*), published evenly series on the Abhidhamma and on the Sutta<sup>53</sup>. Although in his lecture Sanya did not indicate any strife between the Abhidhamma and the Sutta groups, on which Buddhadasa's disciples relied, in the Buddhist Association, the Abhidhamma group members started to leave the Association after 1962.

In December 1962, Maniphan's group for Abhidhamma studies separated from the Buddhist Association of Thailand, and launched their own Association for the Centre of Research on Buddhism (*Samakhom sun khonkhwa thang phra phutthasasana*). This group proposed that the Buddhist Association establish a philological studies section to maintain, transcribe, translate and publish ancient palm leaf manuscripts that Thailand had inherited. The Association's president, Sanya, examined their proposal at

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Foundation), *Thang bamphen kuson phua ok chak thuk haeng kan koet: anuson nai kan chapanakit sop achan naep mahaniranon* (The way to make merit in order to exit from the suffering of births: commemoration at the cremation of Achan Naep Mahaniranon) (Bangkok: Samakhom sun khonkhwa thang phra phutthasasana, 14 December 1983), pp. 1 – 4.

<sup>53</sup> Sanya Thammasak (Sanya Dhammasakdi), *Nathi khong phutthasamakhom* (The duty of the Buddhist Association; originally given on 18 February 1961) (Bangkok: Phutthasamakhom haeng prathet thai, 1961), pp. 13 – 16. In fact, available data indicate that Bunmi was a member of the administration committee and the *dhamma* studies committee at least from 1957 to 1964; Naep and Khun Ying Rabiap Sunthralikhit, another Abhidhamma teacher, were in the advisory board as long as from 1957 to 1967; and Naep and Bunmi were elected as one of the six vice-presidents in 1963 and 1965, respectively. The data here are based on the lists of the executive committee members and advisors of the Buddhist Association published in the Association's journal, *Phuttha-tham*, from 1957 until 1967, which I was able to access at the National Library of Thailand. They might also

the executive meeting, but it was not approved because the Association only intended to provide lectures on the *dhamma*. The group of Maniphan later moved to the Somdet Building (*Akhan tuk somdet*) at Wat Saket. They upheld Naep as the president of the new Association until her death in 1983, and when those holders of high level Pali qualification translated old canonical texts, they sought her advice as a *vipassanā* meditator of higher achievement, even though she read neither Pali nor Thai<sup>54</sup>. Even though Naep and other Abhidhamma teachers, such as Khun Ying Rabiap Sunthralikhit, remained in the Buddhist Association as advisors and lecturers<sup>55</sup>, the year 1962 seems to have been the beginning of the splitting of the Abhidhamma groups from the Buddhist Association.

In 1962 another Abhidhamma group headed by Bunmi, which he had established as the Abhidhamma Foundation (*Aphitham mulanithi*) in 1957, was also asked by the Buddhist Association to find another place to give their lecture, because the old place had to be demolished for the building of a new auditorium<sup>56</sup>. Bunmi's group remained in the Buddhist Association for a while even after 1962, but presumably resigned from it in 1966, because after that his name was no longer listed as a member of the administrative committee or the *dhamma* studies committee<sup>57</sup>. Also from April 1966, Bunmi started giving Abhidhamma lectures at Wat Phra Chetuphon, which is commonly known as Wat Pho, to the abbot and vice-abbot of which he had been introduced by Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu<sup>58</sup>. Even after 1966 Naep and others continued to stay, but Bunmi's resignation looks like the end of a financially strong Abhidhamma group in the Buddhist Association, and a shift of stage for the giving of Abhidhamma lectures.

Contrary to the rational views of Buddhadasa and his disciples, both Naep and Bunmi in their teachings put emphasis on a belief in the real existence of supernatural beings, such as *phi-sang thewada* (spirits and deities), and life after death<sup>59</sup>. Especially

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have been in the committees before 1957, and perhaps continued to be on them after 1967.

<sup>54</sup> Maniphan and Utsa Charudun, "Than achan naep kap pathom haet hai koet ...", pp. 13 - 14; Maniphan Charudun and Siri Phetchai, interview, Bangkok, 11 March 1999.

<sup>55</sup> See footnote 53 (about the membership of the executive committees in the Buddhist Association).

<sup>56</sup> "Mulanithi aphitham mulanithi" (A brochure).

<sup>57</sup> See footnote 53 (about the membership of the executive committees in the Buddhist Association).

<sup>58</sup> "Mulanithi aphitham mulanithi" (A brochure).

<sup>59</sup> Some said that the teachings of Bunmi and Naep were the same, but others said not exactly. Bunmi's biographer proudly wrote a comment by Naep, who heard Bunmi's remarks about his feelings in *vipassanā*, "Let me bless Bunmi. I entrust him to look after the Abhidhamma" ("Phra

when Bunmi was teaching at Wat Pho, he “proved” the reality of reincarnation and mediumship, and gained people’s attention. His daughter, Sasithon Methangkun, performed as a medium (*rang song*). As Bunmi’s biographer often mentioned, he was so concerned that people could not be interested in the Abhidhamma because it involved memorising many numbers, his performances seem to have been a way to attract people<sup>60</sup>. Once, his daughter demonstrated her mediumship by driving a car while wearing a blindfold at Suan Lumpini Park. However, Chanai Saengthongsuk, a famous conjurer in Thailand, revealed that this was a trick<sup>61</sup>. Bunmi was exposed to criticism, and it became the last performance of mediumship<sup>62</sup>. Bunmi’s reputation should have suffered from such a demonstration of supernaturalism and reincarnation. He demonstrated it also in the provinces and in several foreign countries, but his biographer wrote that it was not satisfactory, because those people and newspapers which did not understand the Abhidhamma criticised him excessively<sup>63</sup>.

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achan bunmi methangkuro: duang prathip duang ek haeng phra aphitham”, p. 5). Wannasit, who used to be an Abhidhamma teacher at Bunmi’s school at Wat Pho but resigned later, said that the understandings of Naep and Bunmi were basically the same, however Bunmi placed too much emphasis on supernaturalism in order to gain people’s attention, but Naep never performed “miracles” (Wannasit, interview). Sawai Kaewsom and his friend stated that their understandings about *viññāṇa* (this Pali word means consciousness, but in Thailand tends to mean “a soul”) after death. They said that Naep understood that *viññāṇa* flows in the air after the death of a person, while Bunmi insisted that there is no *viññāṇa* after death, but an energy of *kamma* continues to exist and leads to rebirth (Sawai Kaewsom and his friend, interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999).

<sup>60</sup> “Phra achan bunmi methangkuro: duang prathip duang ek haeng phra aphitham”, pp. 3, 4, 5.

<sup>61</sup> The spelling of the name, Chanai Saengthongsuk could not be confirmed at my interview with Sawai Kaewsom, but was found by efforts of Achan Chintana Sandilands and Mrs. Vacharin McFadden, who contacted their friends in Thailand from Canberra. I am grateful for their kindness.

<sup>62</sup> “Kitchakan ngan khong than achan bunmi methangkun” (Activities of Ven. Bunmi Methangkun), Aphitham mulanithi lae khana sit, *Alai phra achan bunmi methangkun*, p. 8; Sawai Kaewsom and his friend, interview, 21 March 1999.

<sup>63</sup> “Phra achan bunmi methangkuro: duang prathip duang ek haeng phra aphitham”, p. 4. Issues about supernaturalism and reincarnation were points about which Bunmi and Buddhadasa’s disciples disagreed with each other. Sawai Kaewsom was once invited by Bunmi to give a talk at Wat Pho, and he opposed Bunmi’s understanding of *kamma*. By criticising Bunmi, who explained the concept of *kamma* as life after death, Sawai insisted that *kamma* is intention to perform good and evil, and thus it is only a matter of the present life (Sawai Kaewsom, interview, 21 March 1999). Since the Buddha said those who believe in reincarnation of a soul and those who deny it are both *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view), Buddhadasa was careful enough in his teaching not to deny reincarnation, but to encourage the overcoming of sufferings in this lifetime. See for example, Than phutthathat (Ven. Buddhadasa), “Tai laeo koet ik ru mai” (Are we reborn again or not), Pun Chongprasoet, *Rian ru phutthasasana phai nai 15 nathi* (Studying Buddhism within fifteen minutes) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana), pp. 19 – 24. However, some of Buddhadasa’s followers, such as Pun Chongprasoet and Sawai Kaewsom, interpreted his teaching that there is no rebirth after death, and the idea of rebirth as not Buddhist but Brahmanist (see for example, Pun Chongprasoet, “Rian ru phutthasasana phai nai 15 nathi”, Pun Chongprasoet, *Rian ru phutthasasana phai nai 15 nathi*, pp. 5 – 18; Sawai Kaewsom, *Tai koet, tai sun, panha lok taek ru?* (Reincarnation, or extinction after death: Is it a

Apart from the influence of Phra Phimolatham (At) and Naep Mahaniranon, Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu is another famous Abhidhamma teacher. Ordained in 1957 at the age of twenty, Kittiwuttho moved to Wat Mahathat in 1960 in order to study Abhidhamma with the Burmese teacher, Techin, and to teach the *Tipitaka* and the Abhidhamma in the Dhamma Research Division (*Phanaek thamma wichai*), a propagation division of Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University<sup>64</sup>. Since the Dhamma Research Division was located at Lan Asok, Kittiwuttho's teaching of the Abhidhamma was also of interest to people who came to discuss the *dhamma* there. His propagation activities were consolidated when he established the Foundation of the Abhidhamma (*Mulanithi aphitham*) at Wat Mahathat in August 1965<sup>65</sup>. Supported by the Foundation, Kittiwuttho extended his radio preaching on a broadcast frequency allocated by the government, as well his training of young novices and monks to become preachers<sup>66</sup>. Also using these bases, he started attacking Buddhadasa around 1964<sup>67</sup>. Compared with other Abhidhamma groups, Kittiwuttho's propagation of the Abhidhamma started later in the 1960s, when others were already facing difficulties either in the politics within the Sangha or in the prestigious lay associations.

#### Positions of Abhidhamma groups in Thai Buddhism

In summary, the history of Abhidhamma studies in contemporary Thailand suggests two points important to understand the conflict between Buddhadasa and Abhidhamma groups. First, Abhidhamma studies have a rather marginal position in the ecclesiastical examination curricula of the Thai Sangha. In Thailand today, the Sangha enforces "orthodoxy" through the ecclesiastical examinations, because all Thai Buddhists have to accept them<sup>68</sup>. Even though the Theravāda Abhidhamma is the

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problem that divides the world?) (1991)). Bunmi's Abhidhamma group and Buddhadasa's disciples had opposing views on this issue, and they provoked a conflict in the Buddhist public sphere in Thailand.

<sup>64</sup> Kittiwuttho, interview. About Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, see also Chapter III, pp. 167 – 172.

<sup>65</sup> Than chao phra khun somdet phra wanrat, "Kham klao nai phithi poet mulanithi aphitham mahathat wittayalai" (A speech at the opening ceremony of Mulanithi Aphitham Mahathat Wittayalai), *Chofa*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1965), p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Kittiwuttho, interview.

<sup>67</sup> Pun Chongprasoet, "Maihet" (An endnote), Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, "Ruang chit wang nok phra traipidok ...", *Arai thuk, arai phit*, p. 131.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Ishii, "The establishment and significance of the ecclesiastical examination system", *Sangha, state, and society*, pp. 81 – 99.

doctrinal core that the Theravāda school developed throughout its history, in Thailand it was studied only by limited numbers of people intending to take the higher levels of Pali examinations. It is considered not only too difficult for the majority of Thai people to understand and discuss, but also less crucial than the Vinaya and the Sutta for the Sangha authorities to use as a principle.

Second, Abhidhamma studies are only a recent phenomenon in Thailand. They were re-imported from Burma by the middle of the twentieth century, and especially after the downfall of Phra Phimolatham (At), the key promoters of Abhidhamma studies in Thailand were lay teachers rather than elder monks in the Sangha. Although there were also monk-teachers of the Abhidhamma, such as Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, they were not in a position of authority in the Sangha to make judgement on doctrinal controversies. In other words, in contemporary Thailand the Abhidhamma groups should not be understood as the adjudicator of “orthodoxy” of Thai Buddhism, but rather as prominent participants in the Buddhist public sphere.

Because of their position as newly arisen minority groups, Abhidhamma groups were criticised by Thammayut monks at Wat Boromniwat and Wat Bowonniwet, where many powerful monks in ecclesiastical politics abide<sup>69</sup>. However, because of their highly detailed systematic theories, the Abhidhamma teachers were theoretically well prepared for any doctrinal disputes. In their view, one of the most respected monks from the Mahanikai Order, P. A. Payuttho (1939 – ), also misunderstood Buddhist doctrine<sup>70</sup>. All these monks were respected as academics in Thailand, but none of them

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Wannasit mentioned that Pemangkharo Bhikkhu at Wat Boromniwat had harshly criticised the Abhidhamma. Also, he said that Phra Thepdilok (Rabaep Chittayano) at Wat Bowonniwet used to criticise it, but Rabaep changed his mind and recently requested their textbooks to study (Wannasit, interview). Rabaep is one of the academic monks at Mahamakut Buddhist University, and well-known for his critical campaign against Catholicism, which he claimed had a plot to destroy Buddhism. About his campaign, see Phra Ratchathamnithet (Rabaep Chittayano), *Phaen thamlai phra phutthasasana* (The plot to destroy Buddhism) (Bangkok: Sun songsoem phra phutthasasana haeng phrathet thai, 1994).

<sup>70</sup> For example, when I interviewed Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu on 29 April 1999, we happened to speak of a contemporary debate between the Thammakai group and P. A. Payuttho about whether *nibbāna* is *attā* (self) or *anattā* (non-self). Kittiwuttho said both the Thammakai and Payuttho were wrong. If *nibbāna* is *anattā* as Payuttho insisted, *nibbāna* should have the *sāmañña lakkhana* (general characteristics: impermanence, suffering, and not-self), which belongs to the *saṅkhata dhamma* (conditioned *dhamma*). If it is *attā* as the Thammakai group insisted, it is suffering, which also has the *sāmañña lakkhana* of the *saṅkhata dhamma*. Kittiwuttho explained, according to the Abhidhamma theory, that *nibbāna* is neither *attā* nor *anattā*, but it is the *asaṅkhata dhamma* (unconditioned *dhamma*), which has the characteristic of tranquility (Kittiwuttho, interview). Another Abhidhamma teacher, Wannasit

had any authority from the Thai Sangha to give a definitive answer to doctrinal questions. They were all discussants in the Buddhist public sphere, who could only present their own interpretations, and the public audience of their discussion decided which one had the most convincing argument. Among their opponents, Buddhadasa was the most influential competitor for the Abhidhamma groups in the Thai Buddhist public sphere in the 1960s.

It is important to note that not all the Abhidhamma groups were monolithically antagonistic to Buddhadasa. As their history suggests, they can be roughly divided into three groups: first, institutionalised Abhidhamma studies introduced by Phra Phimolatham (At)'s sponsorship and Chotika's scholarship<sup>71</sup>; second, lay teachers at the Buddhist Association affiliated with the charismatic figure of Naep Mahaniranon; and third, Kittiwuttho's Foundation, which arose later and independently from the other two<sup>72</sup>. After the mid-1960s the second group further differentiated into three groups: the philologist group, which moved to Wat Saket<sup>73</sup>; Bunmi Methangkun's group, which moved to Wat Pho<sup>74</sup>; and the group of Wannasit Waithayasewi, who established the Naep Mahaniranon Foundation (*Mulanithi naep mahaniranon*) in 1980<sup>75</sup>. Among these

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Waithayasewi, said that those who study only the *Suttapitaka* did not understand the reasonable principles of *sabhāva* (individual essence). In his view, Payuttho was one of them, and he analysed the *dharmma* incorrectly. However, Wannasit also said that if Payuttho studied the Abhidhamma, he would be very good (Wannasit, interview).

<sup>71</sup> This group includes two educational institutions. One is the Abhidhamma school at Wat Rakhang, Khana 7, where Chotika used to teach, and which has been handed down to Phra Sikhamphirayan (Thawan). The other one is the Aphitham Chotika Witthayalai in Wat Mahathat, which is now run as a part of Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University. These two were institutionalised as colleges rather than becoming centred on individual charisma.

<sup>72</sup> For conducting activities, Kittiwuttho established the Foundation of the Abhidhamma (*Mulanithi aphitham*) and Djitthabhawan College, which was founded in 1967 in Chonburi province. However, Kittiwuttho's training project for novices and young monks does not specialise in the Abhidhamma, but provides wider and more general knowledge for those monks, who otherwise have few chances of formal education, to become capable preachers (Kittiwuttho, interview).

<sup>73</sup> This group established the Association for the Centre of Research on Buddhism in Wat Saket. Apart from philological studies, the group also has an Abhidhamma class at their weekend school. It includes Maniphan and Utsa Charudun, and Suchin Borihanwannaket, a well-known female Abhidhamma teacher.

<sup>74</sup> The institutional body of this group is the Abhidhamma Foundation, which was established by Bunmi Methangkun. After Bunmi presumably left the Buddhist Association in 1966, he continued his activities at Wat Pho until 1987 when his patron, Somdet Wanrat, died and he was asked to return the temple premises. In 1987, the Abhidhamma Foundation moved to Phutthamonthon Sai 4, and after Bunmi's death in 1991, his daughter has been in charge of the activities.

<sup>75</sup> Wannasit used to be a teacher at Bunmi's Abhidhamma school at Wat Pho, but he withdrew because of disagreeing with Bunmi's excessive emphasis on supernaturalism. He now teaches Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* at Wat Bowonniwet, but only to lay people, not the monks and novices living there, who are not allowed to have instructions from outside teachers (Wannasit, interview).



subdivided Abhidhamma groups, those which conducted harsh campaigns against Buddhadasa were those of Bunmi and of Kittiwuttho. In their campaigns, some Abhidhamma teachers and students, joined together and co-operated, for example Phra Thipparinya, who first accused Buddhadasa of being a communist, and Anan Senakhan, an anti-communist police officer who studied Abhidhamma with Bunmi<sup>76</sup>.

On the other hand, there were several individuals and one group which accommodated both the teachings of Buddhadasa and those of the Abhidhamma. For example, Sawai Kaewsom, the *dhamma* orator at the Lan Asok, was inspired by Buddhadasa's booklet, *Phasa-khon - phasa-tham* (Human language and *dhamma* language) and also incorporated the Abhidhamma theory into his teachings<sup>77</sup>. Ravi Bhavirai, a famous public intellectual and astronomy teacher at Chulalongkorn University, also adopted both Buddhadasa and the Abhidhamma<sup>78</sup>.

Furthermore, Phra Phimolatham (At), one of the most influential patrons of Abhidhamma propagation in contemporary Thailand, was even supportive of Buddhadasa. According to Phra Sithawat, who was a personal secretary of At before his arrest in 1960, At highly respected Buddhadasa as a Buddhist philosopher<sup>79</sup>. At not only visited Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh, but also in 1954 accorded him the honour of giving a speech at the sixth council (the *Chaṭṭasaṅgāyana*) in Burma as a representative of Thai Buddhists<sup>80</sup>. The following episode of Buddhadasa's, presumably first, public criticism of the Abhidhamma is indicative and helps understand the relationship between the Abhidhamma groups and Buddhadasa.

This episode occurred at Wat Mahathat in 1953 at the celebration for the conferring on Phra Phimolatham (At) by the government of Burma of the title, *Agga-Mahāpaṇḍita* (literally "foremost great scholar", according to Sithawat, it is an honorary position next to the vice-Supreme Patriarch in Burma)<sup>81</sup>. Buddhadasa was

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<sup>76</sup> The Wat Saket group and Wannasit's group also did co-operate in defending the Abhidhamma against the Buddhadasa's lecture at the Buddhist Association in 1965, but they did not commit to further critical campaigns.

<sup>77</sup> Sawai Kaewsom interview, Bangkok, 21 March 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Ravi Bhavirai (Rawi Phawirai), interview, Bangkok, 4 May 1999.

<sup>79</sup> Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Nonthaburi, 30 April 1999.

<sup>80</sup> Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya: Atchiwaprawat khong than Phutthathat* (Talking in the twilight years: an autobiography of Venerable Buddhadasa) (Bangkok: Mulanithi Komon Khimthong, 1988), pp. 377 – 379.

<sup>81</sup> Sithawat, interview. The year of the incident that Sithawat mentioned in his interview was

invited by At to give a speech under the title, *gantha dhura* (“the task of the books”, i.e., scriptural studies)<sup>82</sup>. In front of the faces of the Abhidhamma teachers and students who attended in the main hall of Wat Mahathat, Buddhadasa rejected the Abhidhamma. Immediately, Chao Khun Phra Khamphiprichayan Thera, one of the influential monks, seized the microphone from the moderator and rebuked, “This destroys Wat Mahathat the most, destroys the Abhidhamma most radically, and is the worst speech”<sup>83</sup>.

The title, *gantha dhura*, which was given to Buddhadasa by At, seems to have already contained a cause of conflict. It is used as a pair with *vipassanā dhura*, which means “the task of contemplation”. Also, the speaker, Buddhadasa, whom At selected, was known for his study of scriptures and for radical speech. By giving this title to Buddhadasa, I suspect that At, who was also promoting *vipassanā* meditation practice together with Abhidhamma studies, might have expected him to criticise a certain tendency of Abhidhamma teachers to teach students just to memorise numerical categories in meticulous theories and schemes instead of applying the principles in practice. Buddhadasa, on the other hand, was known for only selecting practical ideas that would help reducing suffering. Although this is only a speculation, Buddhadasa might have been nominated by one of the key promoters of Abhidhamma to criticise the contemporary tendency in Abhidhamma studies, especially rote learning, and he actually took on the role by freely airing his own opinions.

This story and the relationships between Buddhadasa and individual Abhidhamma students and groups indicate that the reason for their conflicts cannot be reduced to ideological disagreement over the Abhidhamma itself. Because some Abhidhamma teachers and students had no problem with Buddhadasa, and vice versa, the Abhidhamma could be used together with Buddhadasa’s teaching. The most important criterion for Buddhadasa in distinguishing the authenticity of a certain teaching was whether or not it was related to the purpose of overcoming suffering. Buddhadasa dared to say that we should tear out some portions of the *Tipitaka*, if they have nothing to do

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confirmed in “Somdet phra phutthachan (at atsapha maha thera)”, p. 120. As far as Sithawat knows, this speech by Buddhadasa was not recorded.

<sup>82</sup> Sithawat, then a monk secretary of At, sent a telegram to Buddhadasa to ask him to give a speech under this title on behalf of At (Sithawat, interview).

<sup>83</sup> Sithawat, interview.

with this purpose<sup>84</sup>. Although Buddhadasa tended to say that the Abhidhamma was too philosophical and of too little use for *dhamma* practice<sup>85</sup>. Buddhadasa's radical criticism of the Abhidhamma was accepted by some Abhidhamma teachers and students who shared his concerns in this regard. In fact, the aim of studying the precise details of the Abhidhamma theory of mind is to apply them as necessary in meditation practice and to the way to reach *nibbāna*<sup>86</sup>. Ultimately Buddhadasa and Abhidhamma studies were not totally without common ground.

The following discussion about Buddhadasa's provocative lecture will suggest that the most important issue in the conflict between Buddhadasa and Abhidhamma groups at the Buddhist Association was the effect of Buddhadasa's claim that the Abhidhamma was not in the form of the Buddha's words. The Abhidhamma teachers tried very hard to preserve the credibility of the Abhidhamma, and to discredit Buddhadasa. Their doctrinal challenge of Buddhadasa's explanation about the mind was not the primary cause of their conflict, but rather a method in order to keep face in front of the public. The significance of their conflict was in the impact of their arguments on the audience in the Buddhist public sphere.

## 2. Buddhadasa's lecture at the Buddhist Association in 1965 and responses to it

On 21 January 1965 Buddhadasa gave a controversial lecture, "Things that we have not yet understood" at the Buddhist Association of Thailand, a Buddhist place for exchanging ideas and holding discussions<sup>87</sup>. This lecture provoked extensive refutation from the lay teachers of the Abhidhamma, and became the beginning of a serious conflict with Buddhadasa. This was only two days after the third session on empty mind at the Khurusapha auditorium, in which Buddhadasa gave a lecture to respond to the criticism from Kukrit Pramoj, who had disagreed with him in the previous session and then written critical articles in his newspapers. During this time Buddhadasa became a

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<sup>84</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai* ..., pp. 472 – 473.

<sup>85</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai* ..., p. 486.

<sup>86</sup> See footnote 9 (about the practical purpose of the Abhidhamma).

<sup>87</sup> This lecture is published as: Phutthathat phikkhu, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai* (The things that we have not yet understood) (Samutprakan: Ongkan funfu phutthasasana).

controversial figure in the Buddhist public sphere.

In this lecture Buddhadasa, according to the purpose he stated at the beginning, did not intend to say who was right and who was wrong, but rather to indicate the issues to be understood as a foundation. Buddhadasa said, “Everyone should consider their rights and duties to dig into these issues to be clear about them for the benefit of all. I am also in the position of one among the many people who co-operate in this duty”<sup>88</sup>. Thus, in the lecture Buddhadasa presented different views about each issue, and explained his way of understanding.

In the lecture, Buddhadasa examined ten issues that people get caught up in and which prevent them from understanding the *dhamma*. The ten issues he raised were: 1) whether *lokuttara dhamma* is suitable for lay people or not; 2) whether original mind has defilements or is pure; 3) whether or not all desires are defilements; 4) whether *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) means reincarnation or not; 5) whether we should believe in later canonical works or not; 6) the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*; 7) *suññatā* (emptiness); 8) *kilesa* (defilements) and *bodhi* (enlightenment); 9) superstitions and dogmas in Buddhism; and 10) those who should be called “Buddhadasa” (a slave of the Buddha)<sup>89</sup>. Among the ten, some were related to the discussion with Kukrit in the previous year, but throughout the lecture, most topics taken up were to do with problems that he perceived in contemporary Thai teachings that referred to Abhidhamma.

Buddhadasa’s explanations about Abhidhamma were controversial for his audience at the Buddhist Association both in historical and semantic terms. First, he explained historically,

When we explore the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the third basket of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*, it is not in the form of *Buddha-vacana* (the Buddha’s words). It is only *Buddha-vacana* in terms of *attha*, or meaning and is only a portion of it. We have to be very careful to choose meanings for the Pali *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, which correspond to the *Buddha-vacana*. When speaking of *vyañjana* (letters), or the characters and words of speech, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is not *Buddha-vacana* at all. It is not in the form of speech by the Buddha nor in terms of form of language or literary style. The *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is composed of verses written in a later period<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> These ten issues are discussed in the following pages in Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*: 1) pp. 2 – 5; 2) pp. 5 – 8; 3) pp. 9 – 15; 4) pp. 15 – 19; 5) pp. 20 – 23; 6) pp. 23 – 31; 7) pp. 32 – 41; 8) pp. 42 – 44; 9) pp. 44 – 46; and 10) pp. 46 – 50.

<sup>90</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, pp. 23 – 24.

This statement by Buddhadasa had a significant impact on his audience. Although Buddhadasa carefully stated that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is the *Buddha-vacana* in terms of its meaning, that is, it is equal to the teachings of the Buddha, his statement almost sounded as if the Abhidhamma was less authentic because it was composed later, not spoken by the Buddha himself. Such an impression was further amplified by his subsequent talk.

Although the Buddha actually mentioned the word, *abhi-dhamma*, Buddhadasa suggested that by *abhi-dhamma* the Buddha did not mean the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, which was to be composed after his death, but instead he meant the *dhamma* which was explained deeply, broadly, and completely. In the same way that the compound word, *abhi-vinaya*, means precise interpretations in detail added to the *vinaya*. Like a collection of judicial precedents, *abhi-dhamma* means the detailed explanation of the *dhamma* that requires extra insight to understand. In other words, Buddhadasa said,

... the Buddha intended to analyse minutely the parts which need to be explained in detail, so he did not think *abhi-vinaya* and *abhi-dhamma* were necessary. ... He only spoke of the *dhamma* and *vinaya* as we can see in the [first and second] councils, which only settled [questions of] the *dhamma* and *vinaya* in the *Tipiṭaka*. ... There was no mention of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, but only the *dhamma* and the *vinaya*<sup>91</sup>.

By this explanation, Buddhadasa implied not only that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was not composed by the Buddha, but that the *abhi-dhamma* that the Buddha mentioned was also something extra and not as essential as the *dhamma* and the *vinaya*.

Furthermore, Buddhadasa said that later Buddhists turned to supernaturalism which was more attractive for ordinary people than the religious teachings, but he considered that those aspects concealed the *dhamma* that the Buddha taught. Buddhadasa found, for example, that the *Gambhira Kathāvatthu* of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* contains a lot of *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view) and new ideologies born in South India<sup>92</sup>. He also indicated that the story of the Buddha's ascent to the *Tāvatiṃsā* (the realm of the Thirty-three Gods) to preach the Abhidhamma to his mother appeared only in the *Dhammapada aṭṭhakathā*, which was written even later than the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*<sup>93</sup>. In this later exegesis, Buddhadasa did not discover anything significant added to the teachings of how to overcome suffering given in the *Suttapiṭaka*, such as the four noble truths and dependent

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<sup>91</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>92</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, pp. 27 – 28.

origination<sup>94</sup>. When Buddhadasa discredited the later exegesis as being nothing to do with the overcoming of suffering, his claim that the *Abhidhammapīṭaka* as not *Buddha-vacana* not only brought into question its composer, but also implied a doubt about whether its teaching was equivalent to that of the Buddha.

Moreover, Buddhadasa interpreted the meaning of the word, Abhidhamma, in his own way. He sought a concept that would be relevant, by definition, to be called *abhi-dhamma*, which means the greatest or the highest *dhamma*, that is, for Buddhadasa, *suññatā* (emptiness). Here he cited his favorite Pali phrase,

*Ye te suttantā Tathāgatabhāsītā gambhīrā gambhīratthā lokuttarā suññatapaṭisaṃyuttā* (As to those discourses uttered by the Tathāgata, deep, deep in meaning, transcendental and concerned with the Void, from time to time we will spend our days learning them)<sup>95</sup>.

From this phrase, he deduced,

... anything that does not indicate *suññatā* is not a discourse by the Tathāgata, is not deep, is not deep in meaning, is not transcendental. When something indicates *suññatā*, then it is the deep discourse by the Tathāgata, has deep meaning, and is transcendental<sup>96</sup>.

Then, he asked which one is appropriate to be called *abhi-dhamma*, the state of emptiness that does not desire anything, or the state of pursuing merit, heaven, and *mahā-kusala citta* (a mind with great merit), as some Abhidhamma teachers were promoting in their lectures. Of course, Buddhadasa supported the former as the highest *dhamma*<sup>97</sup>. He criticised those inflammatory Abhidhamma teachers as making dogma in Buddhism, because they were teaching that without studying the Abhidhamma, people would fall into hell<sup>98</sup>. Buddhadasa proposed in front of an audience of Abhidhamma teachers in the Buddhist Association to replace the content of the Abhidhamma with emptiness.

This lecture was very provocative for the Abhidhamma groups. In response,

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<sup>93</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, p. 27.

<sup>95</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, p. 30. According to Lamotte's study on emptiness in Buddhist scriptures, this Pali phrase appears at least four times in the *Suttapīṭaka*. For more details, see Chapter III, footnote 23. The translation of this Pali phrase here is cited from: F. L. Woodward, *The book of the kindred sayings (Saṃyutta-nikāya) or grouped suttas: part V (Mahā-vagga)* (London: The Pali Text Society, 1965), p. 348.

<sup>96</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, pp. 30 – 31.

<sup>97</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, pp. 31 – 32.

<sup>98</sup> Phutthathat, *Sing thi rao yang khaochai kan mai dai*, pp. 45 – 46.

they published on 31 July 1965 a book entitled *Refuting the lecture of Buddhadasa*<sup>99</sup>. This book was a similar attempt to that of the book by Pun Chongprasoet, *Arai thuk arai phit*, which collected both articles that disagreed with Buddhadasa's concept of empty mind and those defending it. This time, one of the Abhidhamma groups headed by Bunmi Methangkun set up in the book a forum of public debate to speak against Buddhadasa. Following the introduction by Bunmi, the book begins with Buddhadasa's controversial lecture, there is a line-up of the refutations from the Abhidhamma lecturers at the Buddhist Association, including, Phra Chanbannakit, Khun Ying Rabiap Sunthralikhit, Phra Maha Songthan, Wiset Butsapawet, and Wannasit Waithayasewi. In the book, the most serious problem that the Abhidhamma teachers perceived in Buddhadasa's lecture was whether or not the Abhidhamma was truly the Buddha's words (Thai: *Phuttha-phot*; Pali: *Buddha-vacana*).

This seems to have been because Buddhadasa's indication that the *Abhidhammapitaka* was a later exegesis and not the speech by the Buddha had a great impact on his audience. According to Bunmi, after his lecture the Abhidhamma teachers every day had to answer the question whether or not the Abhidhamma is the Buddha's words, and the Abhidhamma teaching became very confused. Moreover, books and handbills, which opposed the Abhidhamma as not being the Buddha's words, were distributed within the Buddhist Association, and the Abhidhamma school in the Association was almost ruined. This was only twelve years after the establishment of the Abhidhamma school within the Buddhist Association, which Naep and Bunmi alone had established as lecturers, but then it had already grown larger in numbers of students, classrooms, and lecturers<sup>100</sup>. Buddhadasa's lecture seriously damaged the flourishing Abhidhamma studies in the Buddhist Association.

One of the reasons for such a reaction was because of the general perception by ordinary Buddhists in Thailand. In fact, it is agreed by international scholars that the

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<sup>99</sup> [Bunmi Methangkun (ed.)], *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu* (Bangkok: Aphitham mulanithi, 1965, 1980). The second edition, which was published in 1980, was in co-operation with the Ongkan phithak phutthasasana (Organisation to protect Buddhism), which was headed by Anan Senakhan, who studied the Abhidhamma with Bunmi at Wat Pho (Bunmi Methangkun, "Thoi thalaeng" (Postscript), *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu*, p. (ngo.)).

<sup>100</sup> Bunmi Methangkun, "Kham prarop" (Forward), *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu*, pp. 13 - 14.

*Abhidhammapiṭaka* was composed later than the other two *piṭaka*, which were more or less taught by the Buddha and recited in the first and second councils; all this is according to studies based on the chronology of early Buddhism. According to Saddhatissa, among the seven books of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, three were probably recited in the second council held in the fourth century B.C.E., another three were recited at the third council held during Emperor Asoka's reign (c. 269 – 232 B.C.E.), and the last one was most likely composed by the president of the third council<sup>101</sup>. However, Buddhaghosa, the late-fourth-century commentator and compiler of the *Visuddhimagga*, guarded against accusations that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was not *Buddha-vacana* (the Buddha's words), and stated that the textual order of the Abhidhamma originated with Sāriputta, a principle follower of the Buddha, and the Buddha himself was the first *ābhidhammika*<sup>102</sup>. Consequently, it is no surprise if contemporary Thai people who have faith in Buddhism do not know such assessments of the historical origins of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, and have never dared to question whether it was the words of the Buddha or not, because it makes up a part of the *Tiṭaka*. In such circumstances, Buddhadasa's remark was too shocking for those Thai Buddhists who had just started being interested in the Abhidhamma.

No matter what the actual facts were, the important thing in a public sphere is image or perception. The Thai Abhidhamma teachers had to defend the Abhidhamma's credibility with plausible arguments. For example, Bunmi wrote,

One [of the philosophers in Thailand] said that the seven volumes of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* is the Buddha's words, but the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* is not the Buddha's words, because Anuruddha was the one who wrote it later on<sup>103</sup>.

He also wrote,

Some people say that among the seven books of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, there is a book which is the words of the Buddha. That is book one, the *Dhammasaṅgani*. While, the other six, including the *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhātukathā*, *Puggalapaññatti*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Yamaka*, *Tika-paṭṭhāna*, and *Duka-paṭṭhāna*, were composed later<sup>104</sup>.

Bunmi, by putting these suggestive ideas in many other contexts, which had nothing to do with the main discussion, although he never asserted that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was truly the Buddha's own words, he seems to have expected his readers to think of it as a

<sup>101</sup> Hammalawa Saddhatissa, "Introduction: the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha", pp. xiii – xxiii.

<sup>102</sup> K. R. Norman, *Pāli literature including the canonical literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all the Hinayāna Schools of Buddhism* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), p. 98.

<sup>103</sup> Bunmi Methangkun, "Kham prarop", p. 8.

<sup>104</sup> Bunmi Methangkun, "Kham prarop", p. 10.



possibility.

Another Abhidhamma teacher, Phra Chanbannakit, indicated several canonical texts in the *Suttapiṭaka* and the *Vinayapiṭaka* in which *abhi-dhamma* was discussed, and concluded,

In the Buddha's era, there were many elder *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* who studied the Abhidhamma closely. If the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* did not exist, how could they study it? Speaking of the poetic verses, they should have been written at the first council together with the *Suttapiṭaka* and the *Vinayapiṭaka*<sup>105</sup>.

The word, *abhi-dhamma*, actually occurs in the *Suttapiṭaka* and the *Vinayapiṭaka*, but this does not support the view that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was composed at the same time as the other two groups of texts. These defences of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* against Buddhadasa were involved suggestions and manipulations of people's perceptions.

Among other articles, Chao Khun Kwiworayan's lecture, which is cited in the article by Khun Ying Rabiap, presented a reasonable argument to defend the status of the Abhidhamma as *Buddha-vacana*<sup>106</sup>. He referred to commentaries, such as the *Atthasālini*, that says that the seven volumes of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* are arranged as *Buddha-bhāsita* (the Buddha's sayings), and considers the *Kathāvatthu* in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as *Buddha-vacana*, because it was composed in accordance with the Buddha's purpose by Moggaliputta Tissa, the third council's chairperson. Also, he said that the *Tipiṭaka* includes many *sutta*, such as the *Theragāthā*, *Therīgāthā*, and some spoken by Ānanda, that were not spoken by the Buddha, but which are classified as *Buddha-vacana*. He concluded that all the teachings that the Buddha gave in various *sutta* are called the *dhamma*, whilst all the explanations about the *dhamma* that the Buddha taught in various *sutta* are the *abhi-dhamma*<sup>107</sup>. Such an interpretation by Kwiworayan was moderate and widely acceptable for most Thai Buddhists, who respected the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as a part of their religion's scriptures.

After Buddhadasa experienced these attempted rebuttals of the Abhidhamma teachers, in the *dhamma* lecture at Suan Mokkh on 20 March 1971, which was entitled

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<sup>105</sup> Phra Chanbannakit, "Sing thi yang mai at khaochai kan dai" (Things that still might not be able to be understood), *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu*, pp. 196 – 197.

<sup>106</sup> Khun Ying Rabiap Sunthralikhit, "Kham to top" (A retort), *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu*, pp. 203 – 225. This lecture by Chao Khun Kwiworayan was given in February 1963, which was before Buddhadasa's controversial lecture, and not directly to do with criticism of Buddhadasa.

<sup>107</sup> Rabiap, "Kham to top", pp. 204 – 209.

*What is the Abhidhamma?*, Buddhadasa responded more radically to his Abhidhamma critics. Buddhadasa reflected on his lecture at the Buddhist Association in 1965 and admitted that his speech might have given the impression that the Abhidhamma is not the Buddha's words. However, he reminded people that he had also said that in terms of the meaning, there were some portions of the Abhidhamma that could be considered as the Buddha's teachings, but there were also some that could not. In the 1971 lecture, Buddhadasa examined which portions should be regarded as the Buddha's teachings, and which ones should not be<sup>108</sup>. This time, Buddhadasa's criticism became more specifically aimed at contemporary Abhidhamma studies rather than claiming that the *Abhidhammapitaka* was later exegesis. He proposed to replace the "excessive and false *abhi-dhamma*" with "true *abhi-dhamma*".

Buddhadasa sarcastically named contemporary Abhidhamma studies *aphitham met makham* (the Abhidhamma of tamarind seeds), which made circle diagrams in order to memorise the numbers of the mind's characteristics based on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*<sup>109</sup>. Contrary to the *abhi-dhamma* in the Buddha's period, Buddhadasa suggested that contemporary Abhidhamma studies in Thailand explained the Abhidhamma as something to do with supernatural power or something sacred (*khong khlang, khong saksit*). He called such Abhidhamma a *khong koen* (an excessive thing), and warned that it had fallen into *thamma dam* (black *dhamma*), which was a tool for boasting and condescension. He criticised that Abhidhammists of such a black *dhamma* "... had a mind with defilements, defensiveness, and the selling of [Abhidhamma] as consumer goods", and such Abhidhamma as an advertisement for *vipassanā* was instead an enemy of *vipassanā*<sup>110</sup>.

Buddhadasa levelled his criticism at the foundations of contemporary Thai Abhidhammists. He declared,

Sweep away all the Abhidhamma, which we commonly know. Whatever things are attached to the Abhidhamma, such as the *Abhidhammapitaka*, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, and Abhidhamma-something, sweep them away and abandon them. We will not be short of anything, because we have the *Suttapitaka* left

<sup>108</sup> Phutthathat, *Aphitham khu arai?*, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> Phutthathat, *Aphitham khu arai?*, pp. 29, 32, 117. See Figure 4 as an example of the Abhidhamma diagrams.

<sup>110</sup> Phutthathat, *Aphitham khu arai?*, pp. 33 – 39.

as an item of practice in order to attain *nibbāna* quickly without getting lost<sup>111</sup>.

Instead of being “deluded and addicted” to the so-called Abhidhamma, Buddhadasa here again placed *suññatā* in the position of the true *abhi-dhamma*, which literally means the highest *dhamma*, as he had done in the 1965 lecture<sup>112</sup>.

Abhidhamma groups rebutted Buddhadasa also from a doctrinal point of view. Especially, they targeted his Mahāyānistic interpretation of the mind, which did not fit into the theory of Abhidhamma. In a letter from a group of Abhidhamma students questioning Buddhadasa, which was included in the book published in reply to his lecture in 1965, questions were asked about the specifics of his interpretation among the many subdivided types of mind according to Abhidhamma classification. On the issue of empty mind, they argued that, according to the *sabhāva dhamma* (principle of nature) in the Abhidhamma theory, the mind cannot be empty because it always perceives an *ārammaṇa* (object)<sup>113</sup>. Also, they examined the Pali phrase, *pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ*, by which Buddhadasa argued that the original mind is pure and free from defilements. In their interpretation, it only indicated a mind that is not interfered with by coarse defilements. The Abhidhamma divides such states of mind into nineteen kinds, including two *upekkhā santiraṇa*, eight *mahā vipāka*, and nine *mahaggata vipāka*. For example, at the time of sleeping, the mind is *pabhassara* (transparent), and there are no coarse defilements. However, delicate defilements, which are called *anusaya* (underlying tendencies), such as *kāmārāgānusaya* (the underlying tendency to lust for sensual desire) and *avijjānusaya* (the underlying tendency to ignorance), are still latent in the *khanda santāna* (continuity of aggregates, or “body”). From this theoretical foundation, they asked Buddhadasa for evidence that the original mind was pure, and asked about the specifics of his interpretation<sup>114</sup>. Bunmi, Rabiap and other contributors also indicated the same points in their articles, and concluded that empty mind was not taught in the Abhidhamma<sup>115</sup>, and complained that Buddhadasa had only picked up

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<sup>111</sup> Phutthathat, *Aphitham khu arai?*, p. 102.

<sup>112</sup> Phutthathat, *Aphitham khu arai?*, p. 109.

<sup>113</sup> Naksuksa phra aphitham (Students of the Abhidhamma; including Sa’nga Suphat, Suphani Wirawat, Chaluai Phenphaibun, Suchit Sa’nganmu, and Chuai Kannawat), “Samnao chotmai: kho khongchai khong naksuksa” (A draft of a letter: some students’ worries), *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu*, p. 87.

<sup>114</sup> Naksuksa phra aphitham, “Samnao chotmai”, pp. 87 – 88.

<sup>115</sup> For example, Bunmi Methangkun, “Phra aphithampidok pen bot suksa thi wa duai ruang arai”

some phrases from the *Tipiṭaka* that could fit well into his ideas, and rejected others<sup>116</sup>.

Such theoretical arguments about the mind in Abhidhamma were a more reasonable criticism of Buddhadasa's controversial remarks. Although Buddhadasa presented the scriptural basis for his proposal of emptiness and empty mind, which do appear in part in the *Dhammadinna sutta*<sup>117</sup>, *Cuḷasuññata sutta*, and *Mahāsuññata sutta*<sup>118</sup>, they were apparently not explicitly incorporated into the Abhidhamma theory of mind. Buddhadasa interpreted the *Tipiṭaka* freely in his own way, justifying himself by the Buddha's teaching in the *Kālāma sutta*, i.e. not to believe certain ideas merely because of tradition, a teacher, or scriptures. He did not strictly follow traditional Theravāda exegesis, starting from the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, *aṭṭhakathā*, *ṭīkā*, and so forth. Therefore, his interpretation was criticised as *attanomati* (personal opinion)<sup>119</sup>. Abhidhamma should have provided its proponents with effective weapons for debate in the public sphere.

For the Abhidhamma teachers whose principles were criticised by Buddhadasa, they had to defend themselves in the Buddhist public sphere. The doctrinal criticism of Buddhadasa's statement was a reasonable rebuttal, but some of them went further. Some Abhidhamma teachers, especially harsh anti-communist propagandists such as Kittiwuttho and Anan Senankhan, linked Buddhadasa's teaching to communism even though no firm evidence was ever brought forward. Also, instead of being an adherent to the articulated, systematic explanation about states of mind in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, Bunmi's group was criticised even by other Abhidhamma teachers for his advocating supernaturalism in order to seek the interest of and support from the public<sup>120</sup>. The debates between Buddhadasa and the Abhidhamma groups were not purely concerned with doctrinal disagreements, but rather reflected a competition for influence in the Buddhist public sphere.

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(What kind of lesson is it to study the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*?), *To top patthakatha phutthathat phikkhu*, pp. 115 – 119; and Rabiap, “Kham to top”, pp. 213 – 219.

<sup>116</sup> Rabiap, “Kham to top”, p. 222.

<sup>117</sup> The *Dhammadinna sutta* is in *Mahā-vagga*, *Samyutta-nikāya*, *Sutta-piṭaka* (M. Leon Feer, *Samyutta-nikāya Part V Mahā-vagga* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), pp. 406 – 408).

<sup>118</sup> These *sutta* are in *Suññatāvagga*, *Uparipannāsa*, *Majjhima-nikāya* (Robert Charlmers (ed.), *The Majjhima-nikāya* vol. III (London: The Pali Text Society, 1960), pp. 104 – 118).

<sup>119</sup> Siri Phetchai, interview.

<sup>120</sup> Wannasit, interview.

This chapter has examined the contemporary history of the Abhidhamma groups in Thailand and their conflict with Buddhadasa. Even though the Abhidhamma is the traditional exegesis of the Theravāda school, we should understand that the Abhidhamma groups were marginal rather than standing for “orthodoxy” in the contemporary Thai context. Their history suggests that Abhidhamma studies were only recently re-imported from Burma as a new method of doctrinal study. Some lay teachers of the Abhidhamma in Thailand even expanded traditional Theravāda scholasticism by incorporating supernaturalism and anti-communist propaganda.

On the other hand, Buddhadasa had developed his studies along the same path as academic monks in the Thai Sangha, as I have argued in Chapter 1. From 1933 onwards both Buddhadasa and the academic monks at Mahamakut Buddhist University, who were close to the then Supreme Patriarch and elders, deepened their understanding of doctrines by translating insightful stories from Pali scriptures into Thai. In this effort, Buddhadasa’s academic ability was recognised, and his book, *Phuttha prawat chak phra ot* (The life of the Buddha in his own words), was adopted as a textbook by Mahamakut Buddhist University. Buddhadasa had little conflict with elders in the Sangha. By the time of the conflict with the Abhidhamma groups in 1965, Buddhadasa was already a well established, respected, senior monastic scholar and intellectual.

Although Buddhadasa did not hold a position in the ecclesiastical administration, the lay Abhidhamma opponents of Buddhadasa remained in a comparatively peripheral position in the Thai Buddhist academy. Therefore, they were vulnerable enough to lose credibility when Buddhadasa said that the Abhidhamma was not in the form of the Buddha’s own words. Their doctrinal refutations of Buddhadasa’s understandings on the nature of mind were part of their campaign to discredit Buddhadasa in order to retain face in the Buddhist public sphere.

It would be too simplistic to say that Buddhadasa and the Abhidhamma groups were arguing over interpretation versus orthodoxy, or that their views can be categorised as “progressive” versus “traditional”. The Abhidhamma groups in contemporary Thailand represented neither of these. Also, it would be difficult to say that Buddhadasa was setting a standard for the entire Thai Sangha, since he integrated foreign elements into his thought from other schools of Buddhism, and even other religions. It may be

that “orthodoxy” is not absolute in Thai Buddhism and that there is much uncertainty, often flexibility, although it is more important than some social scientists have argued<sup>121</sup>. In order to gain a dominant position in the public sphere, different ideas sometimes competed with each other by whatever means were available, not just by doctrinal argument, but also by politically motivated campaigns labelling opponents as “communist”. Such conflicts that arose were an aspect of doctrinal diversity in the Buddhist public sphere in twentieth-century Thailand.

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<sup>121</sup> For example, see A. Thomas Kirsch, “Modernizing implications of 19th century reforms in the Thai Sangha”, *Contributions to Asian studies*, Vol. VIII (1975), p. 9.

## Chapter V Meeting of Marxism and Buddhism: Buddhadasa and his Marxist followers in 1946 – 1958

Thailand was known as the fortress or would-be 'last domino' of communist penetration into mainland Southeast Asia. Even though Thailand allied with the United States and actually completed its role to block communism at its border on the international strategic map, Thailand could never remain immune from communism. The communist movement reached Thailand from the adjacent Indochinese countries, as well as from its large domestic Chinese community, a part of which supported the Chinese Revolution. It is also true that the Thai communist insurgency has never even scratched the national institutions – the monarchy and the religion, but nothing was more threatening or challenging than communism in the contemporary history of Thailand. So few intellectuals could have avoided determining their position vis-à-vis communism, or Marxism<sup>1</sup>. When it came to Thailand, Marxism faced Buddhism, not only its institutions, but much more significantly, its ideological system, the most essential intellectual foundation of the Thai people.

Marxism is usually understood as not going together with religion. The famous phrase of Karl Marx, "Religion is the opium of the people"<sup>2</sup>, connoted that the people should not be deluded by the temporary relief that religion offers to their suffering, but should awake and take action for the political and economic change to achieve real happiness in their present life. The history of the twentieth century also suggests that in the communist countries such as the Soviet Union<sup>3</sup> and China<sup>4</sup> religion was actually

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<sup>1</sup> In the following discussion, I will use the term, 'Marxism', for the theory delivered by Marx, from which derived both communism and socialism. While I will use the terms, 'communist', "... to describe the parties that accepted violent revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the means of transition to communism", and 'socialism' to describe "those who rejected it" (Eero Loone, "Communism" in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds.), *The Blackwell dictionary of twentieth-century social thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 98).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law. Introduction", Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected works volume 3: Marx and Engels 1843 – 44* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Bochenski, "Marxism-Leninism and religion", Bohdan R. Bociurkiw and John W. Strong (eds.), *Religion and atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), pp. 1 – 17.

<sup>4</sup> Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972). Although China basically held a negative view about religion, Welch observed that by the time of the Cultural Revolution the Chinese Communist Party avoided explicit oppression of religious activities, and occasionally tolerated religious activities depending on the considerations of

oppressed or critically examined as an opponent of ideological struggle. Even in the other Theravada Buddhist countries where the communist party has ever gained control, communism is well-known for the total destruction of Buddhism in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime<sup>5</sup>, and the restrictions placed on religious activities in Laos after 1975<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, religion has always been utilised as an ideological weapon for the anti-communist campaign. In Thailand, a radical sermon was given by the monk leader of a rightist mass organisation, "Killing communists is not demeritorious"<sup>7</sup>.

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domestic political enemies and diplomatic friendship with neighbouring countries in Asia. Welch referred to a comment by Mao about his attitude toward religions: "Any attempt to deal with ideological matters or questions involving right and wrong by administrative orders or coercive measures will not only be ineffective but harmful. We cannot abolish religion by administrative orders; nor can we force people not to believe in it. We cannot compel people to give up idealism, any more than we can force them to believe in Marxism. In settling matters of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people, we can only use democratic methods, methods of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education, not coercive, high-handed methods" (Mao, "On the correct handling of contradictions among the people", *New China News Agency English*, June 18, 1957, *Chinese Buddhist*, 458: 4, cited in Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, p. 365).

<sup>5</sup> The ultra communist Khmer Rouge utterly destroyed Buddhism according to their logic that the Buddhist Sangha must be replaced by a better disciplined communist organisation named Angkar (Charles F. Keyes, "Communist revolution and the Buddhist past in Cambodia", Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre (eds.), *Asian visions of authority: religion and the modern states of East and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 43 – 73). Since 1979 the government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which overthrew the Khmer Rouge with assistance from the Communist Party of Vietnam, supported the restoration of Buddhism. At first, the PRK government was still attached to Marxist doctrine which regards religion as giving 'unhealthy belief', and restricted the age of ordination to above the age fifty by a reason that the country was not wealthy enough to support monks who depend on people's offerings. After the withdrawal of the Vietnamese military in mid-1988, Buddhism recovered its status as the state religion, and the restriction was abolished.

<sup>6</sup> The communists of Laos utilised both Buddhism and the monks during their struggles in 1975. They claimed that both Buddhism and socialism teach things in common, such as equality, communal values, and the seeking of an end to human suffering (Martin Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist kingdom, Marxist state: the making of modern Laos* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996), p. 79). However, after the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) established the new communist state in December 1975, the party no longer made use of Buddhism for ideological propagation, but instead subordinated Buddhist doctrines and institutions to the Party's control. According to Stuart-Fox, "Monks were urged to purge their scriptures of 'backward' content, propagate socialist morality, teach the illiterate to read and write, and provide traditional herbal remedies for the sick. Monasteries functioned as co-operatives. Monks received a rice ration for their teaching and health work. But they were expected to grow vegetables and be otherwise self-sufficient, so as not to have to depend on gifts from the faithful" (Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist kingdom, Marxist state*, p. 81). Buddhism was not necessary for the LPRP which put primary emphasis on orthodox Marxist economic reform and had no concern for a Lao form of socialism until 1979 when they discovered the significance of Lao identity to counter Vietnamese influence. Buddhist festivals were no longer strictly controlled and were even encouraged (Stuart-Fox, *Buddhist kingdom, Marxist state*, pp. 83 – 84).

<sup>7</sup> Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, *Kha khommiunit mai bap* (Killing communists is not demeritorious) (Bangkok: Mulanithi aphitham mahathat witthayalai, 1976); Charles F. Keyes, "Political crisis and militant Buddhism in contemporary Thailand", Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and legitimation of power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA Books, 1978), pp. 147 – 164. About the political events and their background in the 1970s see David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political conflict in Thailand: reform, reaction, revolution* (Cambridge:



However, when in Thailand ethnic Thai Buddhist intellectuals accepted Marxism for the first time, their attitude towards Buddhism was quite different from the common formula of Marxism being opposed to religion. A number of leading Marxist intellectuals were devoted to and came to have discussions with Buddhadasa who had criticised being attached to the facade of conventional Buddhism as a way to reach the core of Buddhism. In the sphere of the *dhamma*, which is the essence of Buddhism that Buddhists pursue for the full realisation of their life and world, all kinds of people from outside the monasteries were invited for discussion. Because of Buddhadasa's presentation of the *dhamma*, not only did ordained and lay Buddhist followers come for further study with Buddhadasa, but even Marxists who felt intellectually inspired by Buddhadasa came to have discussions with him. Buddhadasa was probably one of the very few monks who has been respected by, and has associated with, most of the leading Marxist intellectuals in Thailand. The meeting of Marxism and Buddhism in Buddhadasa's discussion of the *dhamma* was one of the most significant events that happened in the Buddhist public sphere and in the contemporary intellectual history of Thailand.

Among the recent studies on Marxism in Thailand<sup>8</sup>, only a few works have taken Buddhism into account as an ideological issue that Marxism faced in the Thai cultural context. Reynolds and Hong<sup>9</sup> gave some examples of Thai Marxists who were

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Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, Inc., 1981); and Benedict Anderson, "Withdrawal symptoms", *The spectre of comparison: nationalism, Southeast Asia and the world* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 139 – 173. About the counter-insurgency see Katharine A. Bowie, *Rituals of national loyalty: an anthropology of the state and the village scout movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> For example, Yuangrat Wedel, *The Thai radicals and the Communist Party: interaction of ideology and nationalism in the forest, 1975 – 1980* (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1983); Craig Reynolds, *Thai radical discourse: the real face of Thai feudalism today* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1987); Yuangrat Wedel and Paul Wedel, *Radical thought, Thai mind: the development of revolutionary ideas in Thailand* (Bangkok: ABAC, 1987); Hong Lysa, "Warasan setthasat kanmuang critical scholarship in post-1976 Thailand", Manas Chitakasem and Andrew Turton (eds.), *Thai constructions of knowledge* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991), pp. 99 – 117; Kasian Tejapira, "Commodifying Marxism: the formation of modern Thai radical culture, 1927 – 1958" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1992); Chak Wing David Tsui, *China and the communist armed struggle in Thailand* (London: Sangam Books Limited, 1995); Eiji Murashima, *Kanmuang chin sayam: kan-khluan-wai thang kanmuang khong chaw chin phon thale nai prathet thai kho. So. 1924 – 1941* (Politics of the Chinese in Siam: the political activities of overseas Chinese in Thailand in 1924 – 1941) (Bangkok: Sun chin sukka, sathaban esia sukka, chulalongkon mahawiththayalai, 1996), chapter 2. A concise review of the studies of Marxism in Thailand before 1983 is given by Craig Reynolds and Hong Lysa, "Marxism in Thai historical studies", *Journal of Asian studies*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (November 1983), pp. 77 – 104.

<sup>9</sup> Reynolds and Hong, "Marxism in Thai historical studies".

arguing with Buddhism in their studies on the Marxist historiography of Thailand. However, because their study did not specifically pay attention to Marxists' views about Buddhism, their samples were not enough to establish clearly the ideological positions of the Marxists. Wedel<sup>10</sup> argued that the Buddhist influence on Thai Marxist thought was a part of 'Siamization', which most clearly appeared in the thought of Pridi Phanomyong and his disciples. However it cannot be stated that Marxists in Thailand were solely represented or dominated by Pridi's Siamized group throughout the contemporary history of Thailand. Thai Marxists' views on Buddhism differ depending on their political and ideological distance from the Communist Party and also have had different trends and shadings in different periods of time. On the other hand, studies of Thai Buddhism have hardly taken up the Marxists' discussions of Buddhism. Some of these concerns were the sharp political distinction between militant Buddhism opposing communism and the radicalised movement of the Young Monks (*yuwasong*) connected to the Communist Party in the 1970s<sup>11</sup>. In those studies, the peaceful, unpoliticised mutual intellectual encounter of Buddhism and Marxism by the end of the 1950s was not within their purview. Another study focused on the shift of Buddhism's legitimation from a monarchist establishment to a democratic middle class, without paying any attention to Marxism, which was one of the most serious ideological challenges to existing political authority although it was closely associated with Buddhism<sup>12</sup>. In short, the dialogue between Marxism and Buddhism in Thailand has never been specifically examined.

In this chapter I am going to demonstrate the intellectual exchanges between Marxism and Buddhism in the period 1946 – 1958 through the correspondence between Buddhadasa and his Marxist followers. First, I will present the history of Marxism when it came to be influential in Thailand (i.e. between 1946 and 1958 under the relatively liberal political conditions). Secondly, I will examine Buddhadasa's encounter with Marxism through Prasoet Sapsunthon, one of the earliest ethnic Thai members of the

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<sup>10</sup> Yuangrat (Pattanapongse) Wedel, "Modern Thai radical thought: the Siamization of Marxism and its theoretical problems", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Keyes, "Political crisis and militant Buddhism"; Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and politics in Thailand: a study of socio-political change and political activism of the Thai Sangha* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict: the political functions of urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

Communist Party of Thailand. Thirdly, Buddhadasa's relationship with Marxist intellectuals and their discovery of the materialist aspect of Buddhism will be explored, and lastly, the political position of Buddhadasa will be clarified.

### 1. Prevalence of Marxism in the political setting during 1946 – 1958

In Thailand, people first came into contact with Marxism in the mid-1920s through the impact of the East Asian communist movements. The Chinese and Vietnamese communists who came to Thailand even propagated Marxism in Thai, however, their activities were severely curtailed by successive Thai governments. Communist ideology was propagated by the Communist Party, but it had hardly reached the ethnic Thai populace before the end of World War II<sup>13</sup>.

In the meantime, ethnic Thai intellectuals also acquired Marxist philosophy outside the influence by the Communist Party of Siam. Pridi Phanomyong (1900 – 1983), who was the theoretical brain of the Constitutional Revolution in 1932, studied Marxism while he was in France from 1920 to 1927, and adopted it in his economic plan in 1933. Another prominent Thai Marxist journalist and intellectual, Supha Sirimanon (1914 – 1986) became interested in Marxism from 1938 when he visited Japan as a journalist. Supha brought many books on Marxism from Japan<sup>14</sup>, and later in 1951 he published an exegesis of Marx's *Capital* in Thai based on an English text<sup>15</sup>. Marxism began penetrating Thai intellectuals who had contact with foreign countries by the 1930s, but its further propagation was barred by the 1933 anti-communist act, which

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<sup>13</sup> The early history of the communist movement in Siam is concisely examined in Murashima, *Kanmuang chin sayam*. According to Murashima's study, the communist movement of the overseas Chinese in Siam started in 1924 when the leftist faction established their own organisation against the general branch of the Chinese Nationalist Party in Siam. In 1929, they started distributing propaganda leaflets written in Thai in the name of the South Sea Communist Party, Special Committee in Siam. The Communist Party of Siam was established in 1930 by the overseas Chinese and Vietnamese members who convened the inaugural meeting called for by Ho Chi Minh. However, the government enacted the anti-communist act in 1933 when they expelled Pridi Phanomyong for being a communist who had written an economic plan under the definite influence of Marxism. The Communist Party of Siam was also severely crushed and destroyed by the government by the late 1930s. The Communist movement was soon restored in 1937 when Japan invaded in China, the reason was to protest against Japan by organising a movement to boycott trade with it. Under these political conditions, the Communist Party of Thailand was established at its first Party Convention in 1942. Throughout these communist movements in Thailand before the end of the World War II, it seems no ethnic Thais took any initiative.

<sup>14</sup> Eiji Murashima, *Kanmuang chin sayam*, p. 68.

reacted against socialist Pridi's economic plan.

During the period of 1946 – 1958, there was a relative freedom of expressing political ideologies in the Thai public sphere. The period between 1946 and 1958 can be characterised by three subdivided periods according to the governments' policy towards communism: (1) 1946 – 1950, (2) 1950 – 1954, and (3) 1955 – 1958<sup>16</sup>. Even though Phibun's government toughened its attitude toward communist activities by developing an alliance with the United States during 1950 – 1954, throughout the period from 1946 to 1958 the Thais retained various diplomatic choices in international politics. Because of the flexible possibilities, knowledge of Marxism prevailed among Thai intellectuals during the post-World War II period.

After World War II, under the leadership of Regent Pridi Phanomyong, Marxism was tolerated. He was a socialist civilian politician, who had organised the anti-Japanese Free Thai Movement, which in turn permitted Thailand to escape from being internationally sanctioned as an allied nation of the defeated Japan. In 1946, Prasert Sapsunthon, an MP who was elected as a member of the Democrat Party but resigned from Party membership after only six months, submitted a draft private bill to abolish the 1933 Anti-Communist Act. Prasert's proposal was approved in parliament in September 1946. This approval was partly because the abolishment of the Anti-Communist Act was also a condition laid down by the Soviet Union in exchange for Thailand's admission to the United Nation<sup>17</sup>. After the mysterious death of King

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<sup>15</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Commodifying Marxism...", pp. 16 – 17.

<sup>16</sup> In Fineman's study on political and diplomatic history after Phibun's returning coup in November 1947 to Phibun's downfall in 1958, he divided the period into four using the Thai relationship with the United States: 1947 – 1948; 1948 – 1950; 1950 – 1954; 1955 – 1958 (Daniel Fineman, *A special relationship: the United States and military government in Thailand, 1947 – 1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997). In terms of effects on the freedom to express Marxist ideologies, I consider 1950 and 1955 to be the most significant divisions of this period. In Kasian's analysis on post-World War II communist activities, he divided the period between 1945 and 1958 into three: (1) 1945 – 1947, (2) 1948 – 1952, and (3) 1952 – 1958 (Kasian Tejapira, "Commodifying Marxism...", pp. 269). Kasian considered the fall of the Pridi-Free Thai regime in 1947 as the end of relative tolerance toward communists. However, if we look at the control of communist ideology, the Phibun coup government was not tough toward communism until the beginning of the Cold War in Asia. Also, the Anti-Communist Act in 1952 affected the Communist Party's activities and forced them to be recognised, as Kasian argued, but the enforcement of the Act in the public sphere became less serious after 1955 when the Thai government contacted Communist China at the Bandung Conference. In terms of the government's control of and tolerance toward Marxist speech, the attitude of the government toughened during 1950 and 1954, in which are included the massive arrests of the participants in the Peace Committee.

<sup>17</sup> *Anuson nai ngan phra racha than phloeng sop: nai prasoet sapsunthon* (Commemoration for the cremation: Mr. Prasert Sapsunthon) (2 April 1995), p. (8); Prasert Patthamasukhon, *Rattasapha*

Rama VIII in June 1946, Pridi and his group were accused by opposition groups of responsibility for the incident, and they were finally expelled from the government in November 1947 by a military coup. Those coup leaders had been discontented by the marginalized role of the military in parliamentary politics. However, the political conditions were not antagonistic to Marxist discourse even after the downfall of Pridi. Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, who regained power afterwards, in the late 1940s was even supportive of the Indochinese independence movement against France. Thailand did not take on its pro-American, anti-communist policy until the Chinese Revolution in October 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 by which the Cold War became intensified in Asia<sup>18</sup>.

The control over domestic communist activities began to be strengthened after the Thai military's declaration in September 1950 to send troops to Korea on the side of the UN force. In 1951 Pridi's group of socialists also lost its power by the unsuccessful Manhattan coup against the Phibun regime, and by the Phibun coup that overthrew both the parliament and the constitution that underpinned the system of parliamentary democracy. Both communists and Pridi's group of socialists were totally suppressed by the arrest of the Peace Committee members and its associates in November 1952. The Peace Committee of Thailand had begun operating in Thailand after the meeting of the International Peace Committee in Stockholm in 1950 under the guidance of the Soviet Union. The Peace Committee of Thailand incorporated a number of leading Thai intellectuals who were critical of the Thai's participation in the Korean War, and they organised a campaign that collected signatures to oppose it<sup>19</sup>. Along with the Peace Committee's arrest, the Anti-Communist Act was again proclaimed on 13 November 1952 and enforced on the next day. The anti-communist mood in Thailand was further heightened by Thailand becoming the headquarters of the Southeast Asia Treaty

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*thai nai rop 42 pi* (Forty-two years of the Thai Parliament) (Bangkok: Ratthakit seri, 1974), p. 557.

<sup>18</sup> Eiji Murashima, "1940 nen dai ni okeru tai no shokuminchi taisei dakkyakuka to indoshina no dokuritsu undo: tai futsuin funso kara reisen no kaishi made" (Thailand's 'decolonisation' of its system and the Indochinese independence movement in the 1940s: from the Thai-French Indochina conflict to the beginning of the Cold War), Masaya Shiraishi, Eiji Murashima et.al., *Betonamu to tai* (Vietnam and Thailand) (Tokyo: Daimeido, 1998), p. 190.

<sup>19</sup> The Peace movement was organised by the Soviet Union after 1949, and the detailed theory was published by Stalin as *Economic problem of socialism* in 1952. (David Wilson, "China, Thailand and the spirit of Bandung (Part I)", *The China quarterly* No. 30 (April – June 1967), p. 155). About the Peace Committee of Thailand, see Wiwat Catithammanit, *Kabot santhiphap* (Peace [Committee's] revolt) (Bangkok: Khrongkan chat phim khop fai, 1996).

Organisation (SEATO) in 1954<sup>20</sup>.

However, international détente went on into the mid-1950s, and Thailand became tolerant of Marxist ideologies and communist countries. After returning from a world tour in June 1955, Phibun placed emphasis on his policy of democratising the country. He legalised political parties, enhanced press freedom, and encouraged 'Hyde Parks' or the public discussion of politics<sup>21</sup>. Thailand sent a representative to the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in April 1955, and recognised the international significance of Communist China in the region. After that, Phibun sent a secret mission in order to seek an opportunity to restore diplomatic relations with Communist China<sup>22</sup>. Even under the Anti-Communist Act, certain freedom of speech and of the press was allowed until Sarit's 'revolution' in October 1958.

In these relatively tolerant political conditions from 1946 to 1958, a lot of ethnic-Thai intellectuals had an opportunity to learn about Marxism outside the influence of the Communist Party of Thailand. Activities and expressions of opinion based on Marxist ideology flourished during this period. For example, Prasert Sapsunthon, who successfully proposed the abolition of the 1933 Anti-Communist Act in September 1946, legally stood for the Communist Party in the National Assembly until Phibun's coup in November 1947<sup>23</sup>. There were also many Marxist writings produced by Thai Marxists, these were distributed in the Thai public sphere during this period. Supha Sirimanon's journal, *Aksonsan*<sup>24</sup>, which was published from April 1949 to October 1952, and Chit Phumisak's writings<sup>25</sup> (most intensively produced until 1958), were well-known examples of those. Buddhadasa also came into contact with Marxist ideology during this time as well as with other Thai intellectuals.

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<sup>20</sup> David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: a short history* (Chiangmai: Silkworm books, 1982, 1984), pp. 260 – 275.

<sup>21</sup> David Wilson, "China, Thailand and the spirit of Bandung (Part I)", p. 99. Ari and Karuna were members of this secret delegation to China.

<sup>22</sup> Fineman, *A special relationship*, p. 224; Ari Phirom, *Thai-chin* (Thailand-China) (Bangkok: Mitrana kanphim, 1981), p. 51; Karuna Kusalasai, *Chiwit thi luak mai dai* (Life without choice) (Bangkok: Mae kham phang, 1986, 1997), p. 204.

<sup>23</sup> *Anuson nai ngan phra racha than phloeng sop nai prasoet sapsunthon* (Commemoration for the cremation: Mr. Prasert Sapsunthon) (2 April 1995), p. (8). Kasian, "Commodifying Marxism...", pp. 135 – 136, 557.

<sup>24</sup> *Aksonsan* is examined in Kasian, "Commodifying Marxism...", pp. 449 – 494.

<sup>25</sup> About Chit Phumisak's life and one of his most famous works, see Craig Reynolds, *Thai radical*

## 2. Buddhadasa and Prasoet Sapsunthon: Buddhists meet Marxism

In Buddhadasa's encounter with Marxism, Prasoet Sapsunthon (1913 – 1994) had the most significant role. Prasoet, who was once a communist and who then converted to become an anti-communist military advisor<sup>26</sup>, was not only the first person who introduced Marxist thought to Buddhadasa, but also a friend who brought discussion of this new ideology to the already critical-minded monk. Their early intellectual correspondence seems to have contributed to make both of them unique in their respective fields – religion and politics.

In about 1936<sup>27</sup> Buddhadasa heard of Marxism for the first time from Prasoet Sapsunthon. Prasoet was from the same province as Buddhadasa, Surat Thani<sup>28</sup>, and Buddhadasa got to know young Prasoet as a temple boy (*dek wat*) at Wat Rachathiwat in Bangkok<sup>29</sup>. It seems that Buddhadasa was introduced to Prasoet because Buddhadasa had an uncle ordained as a monk at Wat Rachathiwat, where Prasoet boarded<sup>30</sup>. At first, Prasoet was not interested in politics, but was rather a Buddhist poet when he was a student at Chulalongkorn University. Prasoet should be considered as a highly educated intellectual amongst his contemporaries because he had experience as editor of a university journal, and he belonged to the first generations which received the bachelor

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*discourse: the real face of Thai feudalism today* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Prasoet Sapsunthon (1913 – 1994) intellectually supported the strategies of military politicians from Thanom Kittikhachon until Chaowarit Yongchaiyut (*Anuson prasoet sapsunthon*, p. (10)). Prasoet was the one who systematised *Prachaitipatai baep thai* (Thai way of democracy) in the 1960s (Eiji Murashima, “Tai ni okeru seiji taisei no shuki teki tenkan: gikai sei minshushugi to gunbu no seiji kainyu” (The periodical cycle of the political regime in Thailand: parliamentary democracy and military intervention in politics), Yoshiyuki Hagiwara and Eiji Murashima (eds.), *ASEAN shokhoku no seiji taisei* (The political regime in the ASEAN states) (Tokyo: Ajia keizai kenkyu sho, 1987), pp. 151 – 153). Later, it was also Prasoet who systematised theoretically the draft of the constitution by the military, supposedly in the name of democracy in 1983 (Murashima, “Tai ni okeru seiji taisei no shuki teki tenkan”, p. 171).

<sup>27</sup> Buddhadasa said that it was right after Prasoet graduated from the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, and Prasoet was still boarding at Wat Rachathiwat Temple when Prasoet talked about the theory of communism (Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya: atchiwaprawat khong than phutthathat* (Talking in the age of twilight: an autobiography of Ven. Buddhadasa) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1988), p. 340). According to the cremation volume of Prasoet, he graduated from Chulalongkorn University in 1936. (*Anuson Prasoet Sapsunthon*, p. (7).) Buddhadasa recalled that Prasoet was not totally devoted to communist ideas at that time (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 340).

<sup>28</sup> Anuson Prasoet Sapsunthon, p. (7).

<sup>29</sup> Prasoet was a temple boy at that temple from when he was an eight-year-old schoolboy until he graduated from Chulalongkorn University (*Anuson Prasoet Sapsunthon*, p. (7)).

<sup>30</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 377.

of arts degree from Chulalongkorn University. The initial relationship between Prasoet and Buddhadasa was mainly based on exchanges of religious ideas as shown in their surviving correspondence.

There are fourteen letters between Prasoet Sapsunthon and Buddhadasa conserved in the Suan Mokkh Archives. Those fourteen letters include thirteen from Prasoet to Buddhadasa and one from Buddhadasa to Prasoet, the date range is from October 1941 to January 1972<sup>31</sup>. The relationship between the two suggested in their letters is one of high regard and respect towards Buddhadasa from Prasoet, and a wish on his part to share his intellectual enthusiasm with a young, competent monk who was only seven years older. In the first six letters between Prasoet and Buddhadasa up to December 1944<sup>32</sup>, the subjects are, Prasoet's article contributed to the journal, *Phutthasasana*, hiring a tutor for Buddhadasa's English lessons, and some concepts in Eastern philosophy and Buddhism in general. After August 1942, Prasoet expressed his interest in his own election campaign and political activities<sup>33</sup>, standing for parliament as a representative of Buddhists who were abstaining from the four vices (in Pali, *apāyamukha*: drinking, gambling, frequenting prostitutes, and keeping bad company). However, in his letters up to January 1946, Prasoet did not bring up Marxism in his discussion with Buddhadasa. It seems that Prasoet's full conversion to Marxism was not until January 1946 after he won the election, although he seems to have known of Marxism since 1936 when he talked about communism with Buddhadasa<sup>34</sup>.

Prasoet became an adherent of Marxism by September 1946, when he proposed in the parliament the abolition of the Anti-Communist Act<sup>35</sup>. After its successful abolition, Prasoet planned to establish his own Communist Party, which had nothing to do with the existing Communist Party of Thailand. When Prasoet found out about the more substantial communist party in Thailand, he applied for membership, which was

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<sup>31</sup> The letters from Prasoet to Buddhadasa are dated: 8 October 1941, 24 July 1942, 26 August 1942, 31 July 1944, 22 December 1944, 8 January 1945, 5 October 1945, 15 January 1946, 22 November 1946, 3 September 1947, 3 May 1948, 1 November 1948, and 3 January 1972. The letter from Buddhadasa to Prasoet is dated 2 December 1944.

<sup>32</sup> The six letters are dated: 8 October 1941, 24 July 1942, 26 August 1942, 31 July 1944, and 22 December 1944.

<sup>33</sup> Prasoet's wish appeared in his letters to Buddhadasa dated 26 August 1942, 8 January 1945, 5 October 1945, and 15 January 1946.

<sup>34</sup> See p. 221.

<sup>35</sup> Anuson Prasoet Sapsunthon, p. 8.



approved in December 1946. Prasoet seems to have been one of the first ethnic Thais to become a member and an executive office holder of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which had been established by ethnic Chinese in Thailand. In this position, Prasoet became the first, and only, MP who openly stood for the Communist Party of Thailand until the November 1947 coup that overthrew the Thamrong regime. In May 1949 the Party selected and sent Prasoet to China for further study of Marxism-Leninism. In 1952 Prasoet was appointed as a member of the Central Committee of the CPT, and remained in China until August 1959 when he resigned from the Party.

In his letters written up to his departure for China<sup>36</sup>, the communist Prasoet enthusiastically tried to persuade Buddhadasa about Marxist ideology, and he mentions that he has sent to Buddhadasa some books about Marxism, such as *The communist manifesto* and *Dialectical materialism*. Although now a converted communist, Prasoet did not urge Buddhadasa to abandon or to deny the Buddhist religion, instead Prasoet drew Buddhadasa's attention to Marxist perspectives found in his Buddhist teachings. Prasoet seems to have believed that the Marxist perspective would also contribute to a reform in religion. Prasoet criticised current Buddhist practices, which had already diverged from the original ones, for not contributing to the betterment of people's life. Their religion did not teach self-sacrifice, but people expected rewards for their good deeds as a matter of course. Prasoet said that it was only Buddhadasa who could revive a concept of self-sacrifice in the Buddhist religion<sup>37</sup>. Prasoet promoted a religion that helped people in their everyday, worldly life. He rephrased Marx's holistic theoretical compound of philosophy, economics and political science in a Buddhist expression, "the world and the *dhamma* should go together". The *dhamma* or the truth in Buddhism does not exist in an external, other world, but exists for the world to be happy. Prasoet insisted that true morality should be pursued in a country which is nobly Buddhist, but which in fact, instead of morality, was filled with injustice that goes against the teaching of the Buddha. The true morality of a religion is found in poor people who maintain the religion by their daily offerings to monks, rather than in someone who is in a position to

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<sup>36</sup> Those letters of Prasoet included the ones dated 22 November 1946, 3 September 1947, 3 May 1948, and 1 November 1948.

<sup>37</sup> Prasoet Sapsunthon, letter to Buddhadasa, 3 September 1947, Suan Mokkh Archives.

exploit others, by which Prasoet was implying the monks. Thus, he concluded, it is suitable for religion to do practices which benefit poor people – that is true morality with *mettā* (sympathetic love) and *karunā* (compassion)<sup>38</sup>.

In the Suan Mokkh Archives, there are no replies from Buddhadasa about Prasoet's proposals to apply Marxist views toward religion<sup>39</sup>. With the sources I consulted, it is difficult to judge the nature and extent of the impact on Buddhadasa of the Marxism introduced by Prasoet during the latter half of the 1940s. According to Buddhadasa's interview with Phra Pracha in the mid-1980s<sup>40</sup>, Buddhadasa was interested in Marxism or communism because, as a Buddhist monk, he felt that he had to know about Marxism, which was regarded as an enemy of Buddhism<sup>41</sup>. In any case, Prasoet's suggestions possibly acted as a stimulus for the intellectual monk, Buddhadasa. For Thai Buddhists, the concept of *kamma* has been one of the most basic views on life, they were hardly critical of it. For them there was no occasion to question their expectation of a reward for their good deeds, of course this tends to be egotistical and for self-benefit. Buddhadasa's emphasis in his later teachings on 'not being egotistical' possibly has its roots in a Marxist perspective that consistently gives priority to society and the people as a whole, rather than to individual comfort deriving from class advantage. The teachings of 'non-egoism' (*khwam-mai-hen-kae-tua*), 'self-sacrifice' (*sia sala*), and 'usefulness for society' (*prayot to sangkhom* or *suan ruam*) have commonalities with Marxism. These concepts could be a Marxist perspective that Buddhadasa adopted into his own system of thought.

A few years after the last correspondence with Prasoet, Buddhadasa gave a

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<sup>38</sup> Prasoet Sapsunthon, letter to Buddhadasa, 3 May 1948, Suan Mokkh Archives.

<sup>39</sup> Buddhadasa usually kept a copy of his own letters to his friends and disciples, and collected them together with his friends' letters to him. These letters were recently all filed by his disciples, and they are available for access, with appropriate permission.

<sup>40</sup> According to Pracha, he did his interview with Buddhadasa between 1984 and 1986 (Pracha Hutauwat, interview, Bangkok, 1 May 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 337, 564. Buddhadasa seems to have had a certain degree of interest in Marxism as far as we can find from his comments on Marxism in his interview by Phara Pracha. Buddhadasa himself had even bought a book on communism from the Home Library series in order to give it to Maha Thongsup, his friend at the Mahamakut Buddhist University. Buddhadasa wanted to see how Maha Thongsup reacted to it, because at that time communism was novel and known as an enemy of Buddhism. Buddhadasa said that he had read the book on communism in the Home Library series, but he understood only some parts since the ideas were still too new for him (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 301 – 302).

sermon entitled, “Buddhism and society”<sup>42</sup>, as a regular evening session for fellow monks spending the rain retreat in September 1952. This was only two months before the massive arrest of Marxist intellectuals in the Peace Committee, who were accused of being communists. In this context of increasing concern with social issues among Thai intellectuals, Buddhadasa sought to delineate the social dimensions of Buddhism, and especially the social benefit of monks who renounced worldly society. In the sermon, Buddhadasa contrasted the social benefit of those who have not reached *arahantship* and those who have already attained *arahantship*. Those who have not reached *arahantship* attempt to benefit society only within the scope of the social contract of their own rights and duties. Since they are still under the rule of *kilesa* (defilements), they can only think of returning their social debt as much as they have received from others in society. On the other hand, an *arahant* provides benefits to society with *mettā* (loving compassion) and *paññā* (wisdom) without being restricted in the scope of the equal reciprocal exchange of the social contract. An *arahant* only benefits others, especially with the *dhammadāna* (offering of *dhamma*) that raises people’s spirituality, but expects no return<sup>43</sup>. It is too simplistic to infer that all these social aspects of Buddhism found in Buddhadasa’s ideas come from the influence of Prasoet and Marxism, but their written correspondence at least gave hints from which Buddhadasa could further develop his own Buddhist view on society.

It seems that Buddhadasa’s intellectual interest in Marxism did not last long. As soon as Buddhadasa learned that Karl Marx claimed that religion was opium, he lost interest in Marxism. He thought that Marx’s ideology could not be his foundation since Marx never learnt Buddhism properly. Buddhadasa argued that if Marx had ever understood true Buddhism, he would have known that Buddhism was not an opium, but

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<sup>42</sup> Phra Ariyananthamuni (the then ecclesiastical title of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), “Phutthasasana kap sangkhom” (Buddhism and society), *Phutthasasana* Vol. 29 No. 3 – 4 (August – November 1961), pp. 60 – 76. The same sermon was published by Mahachulalongkhon Buddhist University in 1956 in order to congratulate nine monks who had been elevated to ecclesiastical titles in that year (Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Phutthasasana kap sangkhom* (Bangkok: Khana kammakan mahachulalongkon ratchawitthayalai, 1956)). This sermon of Buddhadasa seems to have been chosen for that occasion, probably because of the increasing concerns with social aspects of Buddhism among the monks in Wat Mahathat, in which premises the Buddhist University is located. There were several monks who had been involved in the Peace Committee movement and who had been arrested in 1952 at Wat Mahathat.

<sup>43</sup> Phra Ariyananthamuni, “Phutthasasana kap sangkhom”, p. 73.

a victory over opium, for example over such things as supernatural beliefs (*saiyasat*)<sup>44</sup>. Buddhadasa's initial interest in Marxism had to end with Sarit's coup in 1958, which strictly banned communism. Buddhadasa had to give up all his books on communism, which was by then a large pile including those in Thai and European languages by various authors, to his lawyer friend, Piu Premadittha. Buddhadasa decided to abandon those books so as not to be accused of being a communist<sup>45</sup>.

In the meantime, while he was in China, Prasoet Sapsunthon had an ideological dispute with the Communist Party executives who were of Chinese origin and of pro-Chinese sentiment. Although Prasoet became a member of the central committee of the Party in 1952, he did not agree with two issues of the Party's policies. First, in 1952 Prasoet argued that it was necessary to form a united front with Pridi Phanomyong's group of Thai Marxist intellectuals for the success of the revolution in Thailand, but his opinion was rejected. Second, Prasoet again argued with the Party executives in early 1958 by proposing a peaceful strategy to take office through a parliamentary majority after he was influenced by Khrushchev's idea of a non-violent path to socialism. Prasoet lost both of these ideological disputes, and was accused of being elitist and of neglecting the rural masses<sup>46</sup>. Although leftists tend to be sceptical of Prasoet, who left the Party and became a military advisor after his release from six years of imprisonment in 1963, the issue of non-violence or *ahimsā* was something that the younger radicals also faced in their struggle in the 1970s. Even after becoming a military adviser, Prasoet proposed "intellectual strategies" to combat the communists instead of military methods. At his suggestion, the military promoted public welfare in the poor rural Northeastern region in order to prevent communist penetration, and at the same time, through this method, the military could expect a return in future when they stood for election. It could partly be a Buddhist element within Prasoet that he chose a non-violent path of social reform through what Buddhadasa had been emphasised, *paññā*, or wisdom to distinguish the right thing to do.

The relationship between Buddhadasa and Prasoet did not develop beyond intellectual exchanges to become a political one. Buddhadasa said in his interview with

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<sup>44</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 544 – 545.

<sup>45</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 337 – 338.

<sup>46</sup> Kasian Tejapira, "Commodifying Marxism...", pp. 404 – 406, 558.

Phra Pracha that Prasoet never asked him to join in communist political activities, nor did he invite him for the anti-communist campaign after his conversion<sup>47</sup>. Buddhadasa never became a communist, but seems to have gained an idea of it through communication with Prasoet; on the other hand, Prasoet, whatever he was – either a communist or a military adviser, did not give up the Buddhist perspectives he gleaned from the core of Buddhism presented by Buddhadasa. Their early intellectual exchanges implicitly benefited each of them in their respective realms of intellectual activities in later life<sup>48</sup>.

### 3. Intellectual exchanges between Buddhadasa and Thai Marxist intellectuals: is Buddhism materialism or idealism?

Apart from Prasoet Sapsunthon, Buddhadasa associated with a number of famous Marxist intellectuals during 1946 – 1958. In a relatively liberal political environment during this post war period, those Thai intellectuals were able to absorb Marxism without contradicting their religion, and even equated their new ideology with Buddhism. Among other prominent Marxist intellectuals, here I am going to examine three of the most respected Marxists who had close contacts with Buddhadasa: Pridi Phanomyong, Kulap Saipradit, and Samak Burawat<sup>49</sup>, and their unique understanding of

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<sup>47</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 340.

<sup>48</sup> About an aspect of Prasoet's thought after becoming a military advisor, see his discussion with Sawai Kaewsom in Chapter II, p. 124.

<sup>49</sup> Apart from these three, probably Supha Sirimanon (1914 – 1986) and Chit Phumisak (1930 – 1966) were also important Thai Marxist intellectuals. In fact, both Supha and Chit had read Buddhadasa's works although their contact with Buddhadasa was much less than that of Pridi, Kulap and Samak, or they possibly never met Buddhadasa. According to Phra Pracha, who gave a public lecture at Supha's cremation ceremony, Supha was a Marxist journalist, and at the same time, a pious Buddhist who used to make merit at Wat Phra Kaew, and who always followed the works of Buddhadasa (Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, "Phutthasasana kap khwam-yuttitham thang sangkhom" (Buddhism and justice in society), *Pacharayasan*, Vol. 13 No. 4 (September – October 1986), p. 114). Chit Phumisak also mentioned that some monks such as Panyanantha and Buddhadasa agreed with his understanding of Buddhism. According to Sutcharit Satchawichan, Chit referred to Panyanantha's sermon, "Thammakatha ruang phra phutthasasana thi thae" (*Dhamma* phrases about the true Buddhism), and Buddhadasa's, "Silapphattaparamat" (Pali: *Silabbataparamasa*) in his draft of the famous speech on Buddhism at the 23 October incident of "throwing on to the ground" (*karani yon bok 23 Tula*) (Sutcharit Satchawichan, "Phuttha prachaya nai thatsana 'nakhon that'" (Buddhist philosophy in the view of 'city slave'), *Aksansat phichan*, Vol. 3 No. 11 – 12 (April – May 1976), p. 50). Chit's speech was published as: Nakhon that (City Slave; pseud. Chit Phumisak), "Phuttha prachaya kae saphap sangkhom trong kilet, watthuniyom daialektik kae saphap thi tua sangkhom eng, mi chai patirup tam baep khong sitthantha, prachaya watthuniyom daialektik kap prachaya khong sitthantha phit kan yang chakan thi trong ni" (Buddhist philosophy solves social

'materialism' which came about as a result of their inquiry into both Marxism and Buddhism.

Pridi Phanomyong (1900 – 1983) was an important political figure who was the civilian leader of the 1932 Constitutional Revolution, the leader of the Free Thai movement, the Regent of King Rama VIII, and Prime Minister, he was interested in Buddhadasa's teachings and activities.

The most remarkable fact that indicates Pridi's concern about Buddhadasa's teaching is his plan to establish a Suan Mokkh style meditation centre in 1943 while still in power. When his mother, Lukchan passed away, Pridi came up with a plan to donate 3,000 baht to make merit for her by establishing a place for *vipassanā* meditation practice at Wat Phanomyong in Ayutthaya province, to which his family had given patronage for a long time. Pridi wished to invite a meditation master from Suan Mokkh, and to have Buddhadasa as an advisor for scholarly studies<sup>50</sup>. Between 9 January and 1 March 1943<sup>51</sup> Pridi personally invited Buddhadasa to his official residence through Wut Suwannarak, who was an MP from Surat Thani province and also a relative of Buddhadasa<sup>52</sup>. Pridi discussed with Buddhadasa three times about his plan to found a place for *dhamma* practice in the style of Suan Mokkh in his home province in order to propagate the essential teachings of Buddhism. Buddhadasa introduced to Pridi his junior fellow monks, such as Bo. Cho. Khemaphirat<sup>53</sup> and Panyanantha Bhikkhu<sup>54</sup>, to work for the *dhamma* preaching at the new place. However, the project had to be

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problems at the place of defilement, while the philosophy of dialectical materialism solves it in society itself unlike the reform by Siddhartha: the philosophy of dialectical materialism and the philosophy of Siddhartha are totally different in this sense.), Chit Phumisak (Samnakphim nok huk ed.), *Karani 'yon bok' 23 tula* (The 23 October incident of 'throwing onto the ground') (Samnakphim nok huk, 1986), pp. 27 – 45. This article of Chit was translated by Craig J. Reynolds as: City Slave, "Phi tong luang/ The spirit of yellow leaves" (For the Echols Collection, Olin Library, Cornell University, 1980).

<sup>50</sup> A letter from Pridi's personal secretary to Buddhadasa on 9 January 1943, Suan Mokkh Archives.

<sup>51</sup> There is a letter from Pridi's personal secretary to Buddhadasa on 9 January 1943 to inform Buddhadasa about this plan. In his letter to Regent Pridi on 1 March 1943 Buddhadasa discussed the selection of the place for *dhamma* practice in Ayutthaya because Wat Phanomyong was not large enough (A letter from Buddhadasa to Regent Pridi Phanomyong on 1 March 1943, Suan Mokkh Archives). Buddhadasa and Pridi met to discuss the plan sometime between these two pieces of correspondence.

<sup>52</sup> *Wut Suwannarak* (A cremation volume for Wut Suwannarak, 1 March 1998), p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> A letter from Buddhadasa to Pridi on 1 March 1943.

<sup>54</sup> Phra Thammakosachan (Panyanantha Phikkhu), *Phutthathat khu khrai, than tham arai* (Who is Buddhadasa? What did he do?) (Bangkok: Mulanithi phra dulayaphaksuwaman-chaluai-thiphawan patthamassathan, 1998), pp. 23 – 24. Arun Wetchasuwan, *Rattha burut awuso pridi phanomyong* (Senior Statesman Pridi Phanomyong) (Bangkok: Arunwithaya, 1983, 1999), p. 211.

abolished because they could not find a suitable forest or mountain for *dhamma* practice in Ayutthaya<sup>55</sup>, and Pridi had to go into exile after the coup in November 1947<sup>56</sup>.

Although the Ayutthaya-Suan Mokkh project was not actualised, Pridi's respect for Buddhadasa lasted from their first correspondence until Pridi's death. In 1943 Pridi made donations to publish Buddhadasa's article, "Answering the questions of a Catholic priest" as a propagation booklet<sup>57</sup>. He also offered money to support the journal *Phutthasasana*, and offered books to the Khana Thammathan's library<sup>58</sup>. Also, Pridi officially attended Buddhadasa's lecture entitled, "Buddha-Dhamma and the spirit of democracy" at the Buddhist Association of Thailand in January 1947<sup>59</sup>. Later in the 1970s while in Paris where he chose to spend the latter half of his life in exile, Pridi again intended to establish a temple in the style of Suan Mokkh, which he meant not to be an ordinary ritualistic temple<sup>60</sup>. However, the plan did not come to fruition because

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<sup>55</sup> In the letter from Buddhadasa to Pridi on 1 March 1943, Buddhadasa wrote that it was difficult to find a good forest in Ayutthaya, and suggested a new place on the Phu Khao Thong mountain, which is quite far from Wat Phanomyong. In Buddhadasa's letter to Pho. Siriwat, Pridi's secretary, on 20 June 1943, Buddhadasa wrote that monks in Ayutthaya who were supposed to be in charge of the project had not contacted him (Buddhadasa, letter to Pho. Siriwat, 20 June 1943, Suan Mokkh Archives). Pridi might have given up this plan because it was then that Pridi's political role became more important as the leader of the Free Thai movement because the Japanese attacked the allied powers in mid-1943. Or, Pridi might not have been happy to establish *dhamma* practice in place other than Wat Phanomyong of which he was a patron.

<sup>56</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 402 – 403. Phra Thammakosachan, *Phutthathat khu khrai, than tham arai*, pp. 23 – 24. Arun Wetchasuwan, *Rattha burut awuso pridi phanomyong*, p. 211. Wani Saipradit (Pridi's daughter), interview by the author, Bangkok, 12 October 1998.

<sup>57</sup> According to a letter of 7 June 1943 from Phoem Siriwat, a personal secretary of the Regent Pridi, to Buddhadasa, Pridi selected this article for a cremation volume for Leng Sisamuang's father. Leng, who was a member of the People's Party and the manager of the Siam Commercial Bank at that time, asked Pridi to sponsor publishing the cremation volume for his father (Phoem Siriwat, letter to Buddhadasa, 7 June 1943, Suan Mokkh Archives).

<sup>58</sup> The details about Pridi's contributions to Buddhadasa's journal and his group are in *Phutthasasana*, vol. 11 (1943). This information is also cited in Arun Wetchasuwan, *Rattha burut awuso pridi phanomyong*, p. 208.

<sup>59</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 322. In Phra Pracha's interview, Buddhadasa said that in the lecture a special seat was arranged for Pridi as the Regent of the King Rama VIII, but either the lecture date or Pridi's position was mistaken. Pridi was Regent between 16 December 1941 and 15 December 1945, and he was the Prime Minister from 24 March – 9 May 1946; 8 – 9 June 1946; and 10 June – 20 August 1946. In the time of the lecture in January 1947 Pridi was still an influential patron of the Thamrong regime, although he had stepped down from the Prime Ministership because of the mysterious death of King Rama VIII on 9 June 1946. Pridi's political power was ended by the military coup that overthrew the Thamrong regime on 8 November 1947. The coup also made him an exile from his country (Pridi Phanomyong, *Chiwaprawat yo khong nai pridi phanomyong* (A short biography of Mr. Pridi Phanomyong) (Mulanithi Pridi Phanomyong, 1983, 1992)).

<sup>60</sup> This project was in process in October 1970 when Phra Maha Sathianphong Punyawanno visited England. Phra Maha Sathianphong attended Pridi's lecture at the Samakkhi Samakhom speaking about this project to establish a Thai Buddhist temple in France. Pridi invited Pantarato Bhikkhu (Phra Kramon Chonlasuk) in England to wait until the temple would be ready in France. However, Pantarato Bhikkhu passed away before the temple was prepared (Phra Maha Sathianphong

he could not gain enough support from the local Thai residents<sup>61</sup>. Phunsuk, or Pridi's wife, asserts that Pridi respected Buddhadasa and Panyanantha throughout his life, and he kept a booklet of Buddhadasa, *Kotbat khong phuttha borisat* (The Buddhist Charter) in his pocket even at the moment of his death<sup>62</sup>.

A product of the dialogue between Buddhism and Marxism in Pridi's thought is most apparent in his book, *Khwam-pen-anitchang khong sangkhom* (Impermanence of society), which was written in 1957 during his exile in Mao's China. Although in 1933 Pridi had already had the idea of a Buddhist utopia (*phra si araya mettrai*) as the goal of his socialistic economic plan<sup>63</sup>, his expression of views on Marxism and Buddhism seems to have been theoretically more elaborated after his detailed study of Marxism in China.

In the book, Pridi expressed his distinctive view on the theory of materialism as a Buddhist intellectual. First, he regarded the Buddhist law of impermanence as valid in the case of society because both a Buddhist prophecy and historical materialism suggest that the conflict arising from the immoral, oppressive relationship of production brings about a new social and political system.

Secondly, in order to express his characteristic understandings of materialism better, Pridi translated materialism into Thai as '*sasaratham*'<sup>64</sup>, which is distinguished from both '*watthu-niyom*' and '*niyom-watthu*'<sup>65</sup>. Pridi rejected '*watthu-niyom*' or rigid

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Punyawanno, "Than pridi sang wat thai nai pari" (Pridi builds a Thai temple in Paris), *Chut suan thuang* (The centre of gravity) (Bangkok: Hang hun suan chamkat, 1972), pp. 125 – 133.

<sup>61</sup> Wani Saipradit, interview.

<sup>62</sup> Wani Saipradit, interview. Wani learnt this story from Than Phuying Phunsuk Phanomyong, Pridi's wife and Wani's mother. Phunsuk exhibited the book by Buddhadasa as 'the most favourite book of Than Pridi' at the opening exhibition of the Pridi Phanomyong Library at Thammasat University on 27 June 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Yuangrat Wedel, "Modern Thai Radical Thought", pp. 63 – 85.

<sup>64</sup> See chapter 5 "Samutthan khong manut lae manutsaya sangkhom" (Origins of human beings and human society) in Pridi Phanomyong, *Khwam-pen-anitchang khong sangkhom* (Bangkok: Warasan mo khwam-yuttitham, 1988).

<sup>65</sup> In Thai, *sasara* means 'materials' and *-tham* is the suffix to form an abstract noun, as used in the terms such as *watthanatham* or *arayatham* (*Photchananukrom chabap ratchabandit sathan pho. so. 2525* (A Thai dictionary: the Royal Academy 1982 edition), p.809, p. 421). For its counter concepts, Pridi translated 'idealism' as *chittatham*, which is defined as an ideology that denies the significance of all material aspect (Pridi, *Khwam-pen-anitchang*, p. 45). Pridi seems to have avoided the Thai suffix *-niyom* which indicates some kind of ideology, as the English suffix '-ism', because the Thai suffix *-niyom* is often confused with the Thai verb *niyom*, which means 'be fond of'. Because of this confusion, *watthuniyom*, a Thai translation of 'materialism' has been often confused as *niyom-watthu*, or indulgence in material pleasure. However, the suffix, *-tham* in *sasaratham* that Pridi coined as an alternative translation for materialism, is also ambiguous about whether Pridi intended to integrate *sasara* (material) and *tham* (the *dharmma* of Buddhism), or he simply chose



material determinism, including both the mechanical materialism of eighteenth century France that Marx criticised, and the Communist Party's dogmatic materialist theory that tended to exclude all the spiritual elements that might affect human beings. "True scientific materialism", according to Pridi, is also different from *niyom-watthu* or addiction to material well-being as often superficially stated. Although Pridi retained the most basic materialist tenet which claims that, primarily, material conditions produce the human mind, Pridi still agreed with Buddhadasa's Buddhist view that stressed the role of human will in overcoming defilements (Pali: *kilesa*), being to attached to material comfort<sup>66</sup>. Implying a criticism to dogmatic materialist Marxists, Pridi urged that the average worldly defiled human beings (Pali: *puthujjana*) who reject Buddhist masters as idealists needed to study what materialism and idealism actually mean<sup>67</sup>. For Pridi, Buddhism never contradicts materialism, or the most fundamental Marxist philosophy, because a Marxist who has the right understanding of materialism never dismisses the Buddhist path of overcoming suffering as idealism, but rather accepts it.

The second Marxist intellectual who followed Buddhadasa was Kulap Saipradit (1905 – 1974), who was also known by his pseudonym, Sriburapha<sup>68</sup>. Kulap

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another suffix that implies the abstract nature of the compound word.

<sup>66</sup> Pridi discussed, "The Buddha taught human beings to destroy their defilements not to be infatuated by materials. The true materialist (Thai: *sasarathamnik*) will accept the teaching method which prevent people from becoming intoxicated with happiness too much as taught in Buddhism" (Pridi, *Khwam-pen-anitchang*, p. 45).

<sup>67</sup> Pridi, *Khwam-pen-anitchang*, p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> He came from a not very wealthy urbanite family in Bangkok. Kulap's father was a clerk in the Railway Department, and was also able to speak English. Kulap's father's father was an eye doctor using Thai traditional medicine. After his father died when he was six, Kulap's mother raised her children – Kulap and his elder sister – by tailoring. Although his family was not very wealthy, Kulap was highly educated at an elite high school and at Thammasat University. After the Constitutional Revolution in 1932, Kulap's intellectual excellence was recognised by Prince Wan Waithayakon (who was a part of the royal intellectual elite but who supported the Revolution), and he entrusted Kulap with the job of editor of a daily newspaper that he owned, *Prachachat* ("Banthuk chiwit lae gnan khong kulap saipradit: banthuk chak chanit saipradit phu pen panraya" (A note on the life and work of Kulap Saipradit: a note by Chanit Saipradit, his wife), *Lok nangsu* (Book world) (November 1978), pp. 29 – 34; "Banthuk chak phaet ying suraphin thanasophon – but-sao: lao doi nang chamrat nimaphat – phi-sao" (A note by Kulap's daughter, Dr. Suraphin Thanasophon: a story by Mrs. Chamrat Nimaphat, Kulap's elder sister), *Lok nangsu* (Book world) (November 1978), pp. 35 – 37). Kulap pursued Marxism most intensively when he studied in Australia. Kulap had individual lessons on political science by a junior lecturer at Melbourne University, and he collected Marxist literature during his stay in Australia. About Kulap's life and the English translation of his works while he was in Australia, see Scot Barmé (trans. & ed.), *Kulap in Oz: a Thai view of Australian life and society in the late 1940s* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1995), esp. "Introduction" by Barmé. A series of his articles, "Pratchaya khong latthi maksit" (The philosophy of Marxist ideology) in the journal,

was a journalist and a novelist who fought against social injustice through his writings. Buddhadasa had been in touch with Kulap as a newspaper editor at least since January 1939<sup>69</sup>. After 1940 when Buddhadasa started to give lectures at the Buddhist Association of Thailand, Kulap attended every lecture of Buddhadasa and wrote a summary of it in his newspaper to propagate Buddhadasa's preaching<sup>70</sup>.

Kulap's concern with Buddhism was centred on practice. In his letters to Buddhadasa in September and December 1951, Kulap was interested in Buddhist practice in lay worldly life<sup>71</sup>. In Buddhadasa's words,

Kulap knew how to select *dhamma* that is useful for his daily life. He used it practically in his own life. Kulap studied Buddhism as a lay person, not as a temple dweller who learns Buddhism as rituals and memorises its principles. 'As a lay person' means studying freely [without being restricted by any monastic tradition]. ... Kulap always studied Buddhism by reading English books and journals from foreign countries<sup>72</sup>.

In February 1952 Kulap travelled all the way to Chaiya, Surat Thani in order to visit Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh, and they discussed *dhamma* practice. Buddhadasa did not give any particular advice on meditation, but recommended Kulap read his book, *Tam roi phra arahan* (Following the footprints of the *arahant*), in which Buddhadasa put the story of the Buddha's path as written in the Buddhist scriptures<sup>73</sup>.

Kulap's concern with Buddhism continued after 10 November 1952 while he

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*Aksonsan* in 1950 suggests Kulap's becoming a Marxist (Suphat Sukhonthaphirom, "Ramruk thung khun kulap saipradit" (A memory of Kulap Saipradit), Suphot Dantrakun (ed.), *Ramluk thung 'siburapha' - kulap saipradit doi phuan ruam khuk 2495 - 2500 lae saha thammic* (Memories of Kulap Saipradit by his friends together in jail in 1952 - 1957 and his friends in the *dhamma*) (Nonthaburi: Samnak phim santi tham, 1985), pp. 6, 8). About Kulap's life and work in English, see B. A. Batson, "Kulap Saipradit: the war of life", *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 69, Parts 1 and 2 (January - July 1981), pp. 58 - 73; and David Smyth, "Introduction", *Siburapha, Behind the painting and other stories* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 1 - 44.

<sup>69</sup> According to a Buddhadasa's letter to Kulap dated 3 January 1939, Buddhadasa asked Kulap to publish his article, "Chiwit kap nipphan" (Life and *nibbāna*) in the daily newspaper *Prachachat* of which Kulap was then the editor. However, Kulap's reply to Buddhadasa's request was not found in Suan Mokkh Archives. The correspondence between Buddhadasa and Kulap were first published in the journal, *Pacharayanan* (December 1986), and reprinted in various books. For example, Siburapha, *Udomtham kap phori ngan chut phutthasasana* (The perfect *dhamma* and the works on Buddhism) (Bangkok: Samnakphim dok ya, 1988, 1993), pp. 255 - 276.

<sup>70</sup> However, Buddhadasa was not sure whether or not Kulap attended his first lecture in 1940 at the Buddhist Association (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 320 - 322, 400). Two examples of Kulap's summaries under the pseudonym, Itsarachon, are collected in *Ha sip pi suan mok: phak nung mua khao phut thung rao* (Fifty years of Suan Mokkh: Part I When they spoke of us) (Bangkok: Suan usom mulanithi, 1982), pp. 1201 - 1204, and pp. 1205 - 1209.

<sup>71</sup> Kulap Saipradit, letter to Buddhadasa, 5 September 1951, 3 December 1951, 31 May 1952, Suan Mokkh Archives. Buddhadasa, letter to Kulap, 19 October 1951, Suan Mokkh Archives.

<sup>72</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, pp. 400 - 401.

<sup>73</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 400.

was in jail as a political prisoner in the Peace Committee case together with Samak Burawat. During his time in jail, Kulap as well as Samak received *vipassanā* meditation training from a group of monks from Wat Mahathat headed by Phra Phimolatham (At)<sup>74</sup>. Kulap and Samak contributed some articles on Buddhism to a journal of Phra Phimolatham's group, *Wipatsanasan*<sup>75</sup>. Kulap's longest essay on Buddhism, "Udomtham" was first published in *Wipatsanasan*, and it indicates Kulap's continuous concern with practice in Buddhism since he had discussed it with Buddhadasa. The essay also suggests Buddhadasa's influence on Kulap's understandings of Buddhism as shown in his argument and his reference to Buddhadasa<sup>76</sup> as well as to the monk teachers from Wat Mahathat<sup>77</sup>.

Compared with the purely religious ideal of pursuing the *dhamma* expressed in "Udomtham", the other series of Kulap's essays on Buddhism while he was a prisoner, "Sonthana ruang phutthasasana" (Talks on Buddhism) included some of his understandings of Marxism and Buddhism<sup>78</sup>. In chapter 9, Kulap insisted that the ideology of politics and economics, by which he implicitly meant Marxism, and the Buddhist *dhamma* have a common goal – that is, the overcoming of human suffering. The difference between them, according to Kulap, is the scope of suffering that the two ideological systems define. Contrary to many Marxists who insisted that religions were impractical idealism, Kulap understood that the scope of suffering that the *dhamma*

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<sup>74</sup> About their religious training, see Suphot Dantrakun (ed.), *Ramluk thung 'siburapha'*.

<sup>75</sup> In the journal, Kulap and Samak used the title, 'Kho. Cho.' or *phu tong khang chai*, which means a male prisoner, until they were released. Their title in the journal became 'Nai' (Mr.) after volume 3 no. 4 in July 1957 (Chuai Phulaphoem, "Chak samnak phim" (From the publisher), *Siburapha, Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*). Kulap wrote a series of "Udomtham" (Perfect *dhamma*) in *Wipatsanasan* from Vol. 2 No. 4 (July 1956), and Samak wrote "Nung duan nai wipatsana" (A month of *vipassanā* meditation), *Wipatsanasan*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (January 1956), "Khun kha thang sukkhaphap khong wipatsana kammathan" (Health advantage of *vipassanā* meditation), *Wipatsanasan*, Vol. 2 No. 5 (September 1956), *Wipatsanasan*, Vol. 2 No. 6 (November 1956), and "Thatsana thang pratchaya lang khao phra kammathan laeo" (A view on philosophy after experiencing meditation), *Wipatsanasan*, Vol. 3 No. 4 (July 1957).

<sup>76</sup> *Siburapha, Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*, pp. 24, 30, 43.

<sup>77</sup> *Siburapha, Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*, pp. 43, 64.

<sup>78</sup> This series of essays was first published in the journal, *Kadung thong* (Gold wind-bell) in 1956 under the pseudonym of "Ubasok" (A lay Buddhist male). These essays are collected and republished in: *Siburapha, Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*, pp. 71 – 226. In some sections of the series of "Sonthana ruang phutthasasana", Kulap mentioned Marxist tenets, such as utopian socialism, idealism, the contrast between metaphysical and dialectical methods, and formal and dialectical logic (*Siburapha, Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*, pp. 76, 82, 136, 139). However, they are not argued in relation to Buddhism. Unlike Pridi and Samak, Kulap did not systematically discuss Marxist materialism and Buddhism.

deals with is much broader than the secular ideology that only looks at human suffering in a certain limited definition<sup>79</sup>. Kulap believed that no matter how much better the materials are to improve human life, suffering arises as long as human beings have defilements. At this point, Buddhism is more reliable to improve human life<sup>80</sup>. This is a clear expression by Kulap who valued Buddhism more than Marxist materialism in the same way that Buddhadasa viewed Buddhism and Marxism.

Although being a Marxist, Kulap signalled his intellectual liberty the most by not affiliating with any political group<sup>81</sup>, including the Communist Party. This may explain his stance of continuing to respect Buddhism as a Marxist. The uncomfortable relationship of Marxism with religion can be expected to be reinforced in the Marxist institution, the Communist Party. Even if the Party did not regulate about faith in religion, it could be a psychological dilemma to be a Buddhist and at the same time a Communist Party member. Because of this pressure, the later Buddhist student activists abandoned Buddhism voluntarily, i.e. without being forced by the Party. Kulap, who always gave priority to ideological liberty over the benefits of political affiliation, continued to be Buddhist and Marxist, and only co-operated with the Communist Party so as to form a *naew ruam* (united front). Even while he was in exile in Mao's China<sup>82</sup>, Kulap continued his meditation practice<sup>83</sup> until his death in 1974.

The third famous Marxist friend and follower of Buddhadasa was Samak Burawat (1916 – 1975). Samak was the first Thai who specialised in mining

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<sup>79</sup> Siburapha, *Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*, p. 196.

<sup>80</sup> Siburapha, *Udomtham kap phon ngan chut phutthasasana*, pp. 207 – 208.

<sup>81</sup> According to Chanit, Kulap's wife, Kulap declined offers from politicians to co-operate with them a number of times because he thought that it was not convenient for him to express his opinion about what was just. For example, Kulap declined all of the following invitations: an invitation to join the People's Party after the 1932 Constitutional Revolution; to co-operate in a project for the nation by Field Marshal Phibun; to run a lawyer's office with Direk Chayanam, a famous former ambassador and former Minister for Foreign Affairs; and to become an editor of a government newspaper by Phao Siyanon ("Banthuk chiwit lae gnan khong kulap saipradit", p. 33).

<sup>82</sup> After he was released from prison by the Peace Committee case in 1957, Kulap returned to his journalist career, and was invited to visit socialist countries as a representative of the Thai group several times. While Kulap was visiting China as a head of a Thai delegation of writers and journalists for cultural exchange, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat overthrew the government by a military coup in October 1958, and enacted martial law for the purposes of countering the communist threat. Since Sarit arrested everyone who had visited China as a communist, Kulap decided not to return to Thailand, and he spent the rest of his life in China.

<sup>83</sup> Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae than* (A drop of water in the stream) (Bangkok: Samnakphim ming mit, 1996), p. 181. About Rudi, see Chapter VI.

engineering<sup>84</sup>, and a philosopher who introduced European philosophy to Thailand<sup>85</sup>. By coming first in the royal scholarship examinations in 1934, Samak studied natural resource development and mining, and graduated from the Royal School of Mines, Imperial College of Science and Technology at London University in 1937 obtaining a B.Sc. with first class honours. After his return from Britain, Samak contributed not only to Thai natural resource development for the government, but also taught European philosophy to the monk students at Mahamakut Buddhist University.

Buddhadasa played a significant role at the very beginning of Samak's interest in Buddhism. In 1936 Samak wrote a book, *Phuttha pratchaya athibai duai witthayasat* (Buddhist philosophy explained by science) integrating his Buddhist religion and his major in science. Samak said that he could only write his book through the inspiration from Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana* to which he subscribed while he was in England<sup>86</sup>. Samak's father published Samak's book in Thailand to distribute to his friends. Buddhadasa was one of its readers. According to Buddhadasa,

An interesting work that made science related with Buddhism was by Samak Burawat. ... Samak gave precise scientific examples that coincided with the three principles of Buddhism – *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (non-self)<sup>87</sup>.

Samak once contributed an article to Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*, in 1943 on the three Buddhist principles that coincided with the European philosophy of the "dynamism" of evolution, in which he cited works of Descartes, Kant, and Bergson<sup>88</sup>. After their communications through their published works, Samak and Buddhadasa first met each other at Mahamakut Buddhist University in Bangkok, where they were

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<sup>84</sup> The top science student in Thailand, Samak was requested by then Prime Minister Phraya Phahon to major in natural resources in earth science. This was because there were no Thai engineers who could work for resource development, and thus the mining industry and business was monopolised by foreigners. Samak fulfilled this expectation. After his return from England, Samak did not choose to work in foreign companies which promised him twice the salary that the government could offer. For Samak's life, see his cremation volume: *Anuson nai ngan phra ratcha thang phloeng sop phan ek samak burawat to. cho. to. mo.* (Commemoration in the cremation of Colonel Samak Burawat – the Third Class Order of the Thai Crown, and the Third Class Order of the White Elephant) (15 November 1975).

<sup>85</sup> Samak also introduced European philosophies including Marxism and social Darwinism. He was appointed a member of the Royal Academy in philosophy (*Ratcha bandit nai wicha pratchaya*) in 1942 at the age of twenty-six (*Anuson phan ek samak burawat*, p. [4]).

<sup>86</sup> Samak Burawat, "Suan mokkhaphalaram", *Nangsuphim rai sapda ekachon* (Weekly magazine "Private"), vol. 4 No. 16 (31 May 1947); reprinted in *Ha sip pi suan mok*, pp. 1156 – 1165.

<sup>87</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 545.

<sup>88</sup> Samak Burawat, "Ruang phratchaya wa duai kan-plian-plaeng" (About the philosophies of

introduced by Phra Siwisutthiyan (Bunrot Suchiwo) in 1946<sup>89</sup>. Samak also visited and stayed at Suan Mokkh for a few days, and Buddhadasa took Samak to some interesting geographical sites in the Chaiya area<sup>90</sup>. However, later Buddhadasa seemed not to agree with Samak very much, and said

Samak Burawat compared Buddhism with science, and eventually made it a philosophy. Buddhism as philosophy is not worth reading. ... Samak was not interested in the overcoming of suffering. He was only interested in the causal relationship, not in *nibbāna* and *idappaccayatā* (dependent origination). Later, he began to be consulted about auspicious and inauspicious times (*du ruk du yam*)<sup>91</sup>.

Samak's discussions of Buddhism and Marxism were most explicitly written in an article, "Phutthit phachoen na kap khommiunit" (Buddhism in the face of communism) in an intellectual Marxist journal, *Aksonsan* in August 1952<sup>92</sup>. In this article, Samak compared and contrasted Buddhism and Marxism by explaining their ideological position. Samak criticised the lay elite Buddhists in the Buddhist Association of Thailand and the Young Buddhist Association, as well as a famous British Buddhist, Christmas Humphreys, who utilised Buddhism as an ideological critique against communism in 1948. These people defined Buddhism as idealism (*chittaniyom*), which they argued cannot go together with communism which never takes into account the spiritual aspect of human beings.

However, Samak argued that dialectical materialism does not deny spiritual aspects as mechanical materialism does. Pridi was going to discuss this in the same way later in his *Khvam-pen-anitchang* in 1957. Dialectical materialism actually admits the existence of mind, although it places the mind in a secondary position that is always dependently defined by the material. At the same time, Samak said that Buddhist philosophy was not idealism, but rather had some aspects that coincided with dialectical materialism. Samak pointed out the materialist characteristic of Buddhism by referring to *The questions of King Milinda* (Pali: *Milinda-pañha*), a classic Buddhist scripture. The classical text suggests, according to Samak, that as well as dialectical materialism, Buddhist epistemology also considers that the mind comes into existence through

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dynamism), *Phutthasasana* (Special issue for the tenth anniversary, 1943), pp. 112 – 120.

<sup>89</sup> Samak Burawat, "Suan Mokkh Phalaram", p. 1157.

<sup>90</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 548.

<sup>91</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, pp. 546, 548, 554 – 555.

<sup>92</sup> Kaptan Samut (pseud. Samak Burawat), "Phutthit phachoen na kap khommiunit", *Aksonsan*, Vol. 4 No. 5 (August 1952), pp. 10 – 45.

contact with outer materials. For example, visual cognition (Pali: *cakkhu viññāṇa*) is given rise to from the eye's contact with a form, and auditory cognition (Pali: *sota viññāṇa*) is given rise to from the ear's contact with a sound, and so on for the other senses.

Nevertheless, Samak also points out the difference between Buddhism and dialectical materialism. They are different in their methods of overcoming suffering. Buddhism teaches a method of idealism to pursue the liberation of mind through destroying defilements (Pali: *kilesa*). On the other hand, Marxism teaches an economic method to overcome suffering through revolution that abolishes private ownership and collectivises the economy. True Marxists who understand the philosophy of dialectical materialism, according to Samak, never refer to religion in their plan, because they regard any spiritual state as determined by material conditions so that the morality should be improved automatically by economic reform. For Samak, any Marxist who utilises Buddhism for the purpose of political propagation of their ideology under the pretence of Buddhism is a bogus Marxist. In the same way, such a Buddhist is also a bogus Buddhist who attacks Marxism as an enemy of Buddhism by arguing that Marxist materialism denies the idealist nature of Buddhism, since such a Buddhist ignores the materialist character of Buddhism in order to polarise the ideological difference for political purposes. In summary, by indicating both the commonalities and differences of Marxism and Buddhism, the Buddhist Marxist philosopher Samak criticised the politicisation of the ideological issues between Marxism and Buddhism.

In November 1952, three months after publishing this article, Samak was arrested and charged with being a communist involved in the Peace Committee, in which he had been elected a member of the working subcommittee<sup>93</sup>. However, according to his wife, Anon Burawat, he was not a communist, but was only invited to give lectures and intellectual support by leftists from Thammasat University<sup>94</sup>. After his release in 1957, Samak worked as a mining engineer in the private and military projects of strongmen, such as Phao Siyanon and Sarit Thanarat<sup>95</sup>. He seems to have avoided

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<sup>93</sup> Kasian, "Commodifying Marxism...", p. 477.

<sup>94</sup> Anon Burawat, interview, Bangkok, 23 December 1999.

<sup>95</sup> Mining seems have been a boom industry in the 1960s. The transformation of employment in mining between 1960 and 1970 was from 30,000 to 87,000 (+290%) (Table 1.2 in World Bank, "Thailand" II (Nov. 14, 1975), cited in Benedict Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms", *The spectre of comparisons: nationalism, Southeast Asia and the world* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 146).

communication with Marxists, and even quit teaching monks at the Buddhist University because he was afraid of making the monks communist suspects. Although Samak scarcely wrote books after that<sup>96</sup>, his works written before his imprisonment continued to be influential throughout the 1960s under the dictators' censorship<sup>97</sup>. This was because his books did not have explicitly Marxist titles, but the contents consisted of an account of the evolution of human beings based on Marxist history from ancient communism until capitalist society<sup>98</sup>. However, Samak was forgotten in the 1970s when students preferred the easy, ready-made tenets of the Communist Party rather than complicated Marxist philosophy. Samak died in 1975 as an isolated philosopher who had not chosen either Marxism or Buddhism for his practice<sup>99</sup>.

Those three Marxist intellectuals, Pridi, Kulap and Samak, respected Buddhadasa very much, and had friendly communication with him. Yet, in their intellectual expressions about Marxism and Buddhism, particularly on materialism, Buddhadasa's role is not very explicit. Did not Buddhadasa's thought have an impact on their discussions about materialism? Buddhadasa's contribution was significant in the way he prepared the foundation for these Marxists to see Buddhism as an ideology that could go together with Marxism. Superstitious, ritualistic Buddhism has little common ground to compare with Marxism. Without so-called 'scientific Buddhism', which is practically applied in this present lifetime, Marxists regarded Buddhism as a useless, false consciousness, or at best a political tool. Some communist governments in other Theravāda Buddhist countries such as Cambodia<sup>100</sup> and Laos<sup>101</sup> either devastated Buddhism or treated as a political tool<sup>102</sup>. On the other hand, in Sri Lanka<sup>103</sup>, Burma<sup>104</sup>,

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<sup>96</sup> Anon Burawat, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Important communist intellectuals, such as Prawut Simanta and Anut Aphaphirom, say that they studied Marxism through Samak's books (Prawut Simanta, interview, Bangkok, 16 August 1999; Anut Aphaphirom, interview, Bangkok, 17 August 1999).

<sup>98</sup> For example, Samak Burawat, *Panya wiwat phak 1, 2* (The evolution of human intellect Part 1, 2) (Bangkok: Phrae phitthaya, second edition 1982).

<sup>99</sup> As his career suggests, Samak was never involved in the political communist movement after his release from the Peace Committee case. Samak also practised *vipassanā* meditation when he was a prisoner of the Peace Committee case, and wrote his experiences of *vipassanā* in the journal, *Wipatsanasan* (See footnote 75). However when interviewed, Anon said that Samak did not practise meditation at home because he was busy working as an engineer.

<sup>100</sup> See footnote 5.

<sup>101</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>102</sup> The scientific aspects of Buddhism were analysed in the few studies on the topic of Marxism and Buddhism in these two countries cited above. A possible reason why such discussion cannot be found in these two countries might be that researchers have not yet found anything relevant.



and Thailand, where scientific Buddhism had a considerable impact through the *Maha-Bodhi journal* published by Dhammapala from Sri Lanka, Marxist intellectuals found commonality between Marxism and Buddhism, just as Pridi and Samak presented in their works. In Thailand, it was Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana* which first published Thai translations of articles from the *Maha-Bodhi journal* after 1933. Through the translations and his own discussions of scientific Buddhism, Buddhadasa prepared the preconditions which meant Buddhism could be considered in relation to Marxist theory.

Was Buddhadasa himself then ever involved in the discussion about whether Buddhism was materialism or not? The answer is yes, but at the present stage of my collecting and reading of Buddhadasa's works, I have only found his remarks on this issue in the late 1960s<sup>105</sup>, which is more than ten years after Pridi and Samak dealt with it. As I will examine more precisely in the next chapter, Buddhadasa criticised *watthuniyom*, or materialism, as material reductionism, and argued that Buddhism should be *manoniyom*, or idealism. However, Buddhadasa's *manomiyom* is distinguished from the ascetic idealism that rejects the material aspects of human life. For Buddhadasa, the Buddhist path is the middle way that integrates both the material

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However, it is also quite probable that for these two French colonies there was little impact from the *Maha-Bodhi journal* that introduced scientific Buddhism to Thai intellectuals, because it was written in English which seemed to have been less familiar for them than French.

<sup>103</sup> In Sri Lanka, the modern Buddhism that Dhammapala presented in his *Maha-Bodhi journal* connected with the aspiration of eliminating social suffering, such as the dominating British colonialism, Protestantism, and capitalism. There were also discussions on the ancient Buddhist community which resembled the abolishing of private property in communist ideology (E. Sarkisyanz, "Buddhist background of Burmese Socialism", Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and legitimation of power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA Books, 1978), pp. 87 – 99).

<sup>104</sup> Burmese intellectuals had found common elements in Marxism and Buddhism since the independence struggle in the 1930s. 'Nirvana within life', which was discussed in the *Maha-Bodi journal*, had a revolutionary meaning, and the highest enlightenment stage was compared with the political struggle for independence in Burma (E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist background of Burmese revolution* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965)). Thakin Soe, one of the most orthodox theorists of Burmese Leninism, explained dialectical materialism as *anicca*, or "the Buddhist term for cyclical generation and destruction of worlds", just like Pridi Phanomyong did in Thailand. The resemblance of Buddhism and Marxism was often discussed among the members of the Thakin Group of the Dobama Asiayon Party, and established an actual political system as 'Buddhist Socialism' by U Nu until 1962 when the military coup took over from the freely elected U Nu Regime (E. Sarkisyanz, "Buddhist background of Burmese Socialism", p. 93 – 95).

<sup>105</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Ruang watthuniyom kap manoniyom" (On materialism and idealism), *Boromatham phak ton: oprom phiksu nisit chulalongkon mahawitthayalai phansa pi 2512* (Supreme dhamma volume I: training for student monks from Chulalongkorn University in the 1969 rain retreat) (Chaiya: Dhammadāna Foundation, 2525 [1982]), pp. 41 – 60.

and spiritual reality of human beings, but it has to be the righteous mind that determines the path to be taken, never the defiled mind which is always tempted by material desire<sup>106</sup>.

Buddhadasa's argument about ascetic idealism resembles the Buddhist Marxists' views on historical materialism vis-à-vis mechanical materialism. They rejected the most extreme materialism (mechanical materialism), which denies the existence of mind and insists that only the material exists, and instead proposed historical materialism, which admits the existence of mind, but considers it as dependent on the material. Buddhadasa also rejected extremist idealism, but insisted on the priority of the mind over the material. The positions of Thai socialist Marxists and that of Buddhadasa are close to the centre, but do not completely agree with each other.

The political position of Buddhadasa and those of Buddhist Marxists is quite complex concerning the discussion of 'materialism' and 'idealism'. As Samak Burawat presented in his article in *Aksonsan*, the conservative anti-communist Buddhists insisted that Buddhism was *chittaniyom* or idealism that had to be protected from the threat of materialist communism or Marxism. Although Buddhadasa also insisted that Buddhism was idealism, his idealism is carefully given his own Thai translation, *manoniyom*, instead of *chittaniyom*, which has been a more common translation of idealism. Buddhadasa seems to have avoided putting himself on the side of the anti-communist campaign by referring to the materialist communist view towards Buddhism, but he never gave in to the Marxist side either. Buddhadasa insisted on his own view as a Buddhist, the mind was supposed to have control over the outer material world without being defiled by material desire. Whilst, the three Buddhist Marxist followers of Buddhadasa defended the materialist philosophy of Marxism by indicating that dialectical materialism should be distinguished from the simple rejection of spirituality as mechanical materialism defines it. However, they rather paid attention to the commonalities found in the Buddhist concept of impermanence and in its epistemology. However, their understandings of common aspects of Marxist dialectical materialism and Buddhism never became political propaganda used to persuade Buddhists to believe in Marxism. For one reason, such argument about dialectical materialism and Buddhism

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<sup>106</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Ruang wathuniyom kap manoniyom", pp. 50 – 51.

is highly philosophical, and too difficult for ordinary people, or even educated people who do not make intellectual inquiries, to understand in all its philosophical complexity. It was also because these Buddhist Marxist intellectuals did not belong to the Communist Party of Thailand nor own any political group to actualise their Marxist ideology after this discussion had taken place. The Communist Party of Thailand, whose members always sought to maintain a correct ideological position, seems also to have been indifferent to such philosophical questions of materialism and Buddhism and indeed even to have been indifferent to Buddhism itself<sup>107</sup>.

Into the 1960s and 1970s the more simplified formula of Marxist materialism versus idealist Buddhism spread among students and intellectuals. The complicated arguments by Buddhadasa and the Buddhist Marxist intellectuals were ignored or forgotten, except for a few non-communist Marxist disciples of Pridi Phanomyong who took up this issue in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>108</sup>. However, this was a unique intellectual

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<sup>107</sup> Prawut Simanta, interview, Bangkok, 16 August 1999. According to Prawut, who was nominated to be a candidate for a member of the central committee (Thai: *kammakan klang samrong*) of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in 1983, and who was the number two man at the CPT's capital area division for organising intellectuals into the Party, the CPT's religious policy was influenced by that of the Chinese Communist Party. They thought that people can believe in religion, and also allowed criticism of religion. From Prawut's point of view, the dominant Chinese executive of the Party understood neither Buddhism nor Marxist philosophy, and sometimes even believed in superstitious spirits. Prawut himself, had a different view from those Buddhist Marxist thinkers who had never become members of the CPT. Although Prawut was from an ethnic Thai Buddhist village in Yasothon Province, he found that Buddhism was not necessary for him to adhere to after he became fully enlightened about the relationship between matter and ideas by studying the law of conservation of matter. Since Prawut was convinced by the materialist philosophy and became fully a Marxist, he no longer believed in Buddhism, which had disappointed him with the indulgent practices of Buddhist monks. In Prawut's own words, "I respect religion, but I do not believe in religion. I completely believe in Marxism".

<sup>108</sup> There are at least two Buddhist Marxist thinkers: Suphot Dantrakun and Suphat Sukhonthaphirom, who were not Communist Party members, but rather disciples of Pridi Phanomyong. Suphot first discussed the issues between Marxism and Buddhism in his book, *Lok khommiunit* (Communist world), which was first published in 1975, but this book was banned and confiscated after the 6 October reactionary coup in 1976. Suphot republished it in 1986 by changing its title to *Phutthasasana kap khommiunit* (Buddhism and the communist) under the pseudonym, Sawok, which means a male Buddhist disciple. The third edition of this book is published as: Suphot Dantrakun, *Phutthasasana kap khommiunit* (Bangkok: Samnakphim sukkhaphap chai, 2000) (Suphot Dantrakun, "Kham khun ton" (Forward), *Phutthasasana kap khommiunit*, p. 3). In the book, Suphot responded to a question whether communism would destroy religion, as anti-communist government propaganda had been advertised. Suphot developed his argument on the philosophical question of Marxism and Buddhism by referring to Pridi Phanomyong and Samak Burawat. Suphot is also a follower of Buddhadasa, and defended Buddhadasa from Anan Senakhan's abuse against him by publishing a book: Sawok, *To phra? anan senakhan lae khana ruang khamson diardhi* (Arguing against Phra? Anan Senakhan and his group on the heretical teaching) (Bangkok: Rongphim Suwannaphum). The other Buddhist Marxist, Suphat Sukhonthaphirom published a book, *Phuttha-pratchaya kap pratchaya maksit* (Buddhist philosophy and philosophy of Marxism) first in 1981, it was reprinted in 1998 (Suphat Sukhonthaphirom, *Phuttha pratchaya kap pratchaya maksit*

encounter when Marxism and Buddhism met each other in Thailand, and it actually indicated alternative ways of viewing Marxism and religion instead of polarising and radicalising this issue for political conflict.

#### 4. Political position of Buddhadasa

As we have examined above, Buddhadasa had contacts with a number of the most famous Marxists in Thailand. However, because of these personal relationships, Buddhadasa's thought cannot be simply labelled as sympathetic to Marxism. The thought of Buddhadasa is even paradoxically characterised as "Radical conservatism" by his social activist followers<sup>109</sup>. In order to clarify Buddhadasa's political position, I will examine: first, the four political groups in the 1950s; second, his relationship with the Peace Committee movement; and third, his being a communist suspect as a defamatory campaign by his opponents.

In the post-World War II period through to almost the end of the 1950s, there were mainly four political groups in Thailand: the military group of Phibun; the anti-communist liberal royalists such as Khwan Aphaiwong, Seni and Kukrit Pramoj brothers; the socialists, or non-CPT Marxists including the Pridi-Free Thai group; and the Communist Party<sup>110</sup>. Buddhadasa had few contacts with the military group, whose taste in Buddhism seemed not to be of the school of Buddhadasa. With the liberal royalist group, some of whose members held important positions in Buddhist intellectual circles<sup>111</sup>, Buddhadasa had difficulty in finding ideological agreement, as happened in the famous panel discussions of Buddhadasa and Kukrit Pramoj in 1963

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(Nonthaburi: Sathaban witthayasat sangkhom, 1998)). In this book Suphat detailed the relationship between mind and matter in Buddhist and Marxist philosophy. Suphat also referred to Buddhadasa's works.

<sup>109</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa et. al. (eds.), *Radical conservatism: Buddhism in the contemporary world* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, and International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 1990). This book is dedicated for Buddhadasa and contributed by Buddhist activists and scholars who were concerned with Buddhadasa's thoughts.

<sup>110</sup> cf. Kasian Tejapira, "Commodifying Marxism...", p. 259.

<sup>111</sup> Kukrit was a member of the advisory board of Mahamakut Buddhist University around 1962 – 1966, and he often published his articles in *Thammachaksu*, the journal of Mahamakut Buddhist University. His brother, Seni was also a member of the advisory board in 1962. (*Thammachaksu* vol. 41 No. 1 (October 1962) – vol. 43 No. 3 (December 1966)). Later Kukrit owned a daily newspaper, *Sayam rat*, and had a column to express his views on Buddhism. Kukrit should be considered as a vocal lay Buddhist intellectual.

and 1964<sup>112</sup>. The socialist group (which was ideologically less radical than the communists on the left, but was more progressive than the royalists and the military on the right) was most closely associated with Buddhadasa. In Thailand, a socialist is usually defined as someone who is ideologically an adherent of Marxism, but who is not a Communist Party member. If we regard Prasoet Sapsunthon as an exception due to his unique career, Buddhist Marxist intellectuals who were closely associated with Buddhadasa, including Pridi Phanomyong, Kualp Saipradit, and Samak Burawat, are all called “socialists”. However, Buddhadasa’s relationship with those socialist Marxists did not damage his reputation, because they have been highly respected as progressives by the public. Instead, his link to them gave Buddhadasa a favourable progressive image rather than implicating him in a dangerous conspiracy. Among members of the Communist Party of Thailand, there are several executives who respected Buddhadasa from reading his works<sup>113</sup>. Their respect for Buddhadasa was private faith in Buddhadasa’s teaching outside the Party’s policy as far as the Bangkok-based Communist Party cadres knew<sup>114</sup>. In summary, among the four ideological groups in the

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<sup>112</sup> About the panel discussion, see Chapter III.

<sup>113</sup> Samphat Phungprasoet (1928 – ), who used to be a member of the political bureau of the CPT but who quit the Party to return to his career as a lawyer in 1971, has respected Buddhadasa and his works since around 1982. Pluang Wannasi (1922 – 1996), who was a Central Committee member, also respected Buddhadasa since he was involved in student activities. Both Samphat and Pluang are from Buddhist background, and did not abandon Buddhism when they became communists (Samphat Phungprasoet, interview, Bangkok, 6 April 2000; Khana kammakan chat ngan ramluk Pluang Wannasi (ed.), *Prawat phonngan lae kham ramluk pluang wannasi: kwi-nakkhian-naksu* (History, work of and word of condolence for Pluang Wannasi: a poet, writer, and fighter) (Bangkok: Chonniyom, 1597), p. 20). Wirot Ampai, one of the five supreme executives who founded the CPT, also respects Buddhadasa, and was recently preparing to publish a Chinese translation of one of Buddhadasa’s works from Sukkhaphap Chai publishing (Bancha Chaloechaikit, the owner of the Sukkhaphap Chai publishing, telephone conversation, April 2000).

<sup>114</sup> The operation of the Communist Party was divided by regions, and intra-Party communication was very difficult. According to Prawut Simanta (a candidate for a member of the Central Committee in 1983), and Phirun Chatrawanitchakun (a member of the Central Committee in 1983), who used to do their Party activities in Bangkok and in the jungle in the Northern region, their units have never contacted Buddhadasa for co-operation. They are not sure whether the unit of the Party in the Southern region might have contacted Suan Mokkh (Prawut, interview; Phirun Chatrawanitchakun, interview, Bangkok, 1 September 1999). Kanya Lilalai, one of the CPT members who worked for the Voice of the Thai People Radio Broadcasting in Yunnan, which was one of the propagation and intellectual centres of the CPT, says that Buddhadasa cannot even be regarded as a united front of the Party. On Buddhist holidays, there were some monks who gave sermons from the Voice of the Thai People, but those were not related to Buddhadasa (Kanya Lilalai, interview, Bangkok, 18 December 1999). According to Buddhadasa, a monk communist once visited him, and confessed that he was the member. The monk thought that Buddhadasa was a communist or a communist sympathiser from the beginning of their work. As soon as Buddhadasa denied this, the monk left Suan Mokkh in less than an hour (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 339). This visit seems to be a personal rather than an official contact, because the monk did not disturb Buddhadasa as soon as he

1950s, Buddhadasa was more respected by, and personally closer to the leftists rather than the rightists.

Buddhadasa's distance from the political movement of communism became most obvious by his non-involvement in the Peace Committee activities, which was under the guidance of the Soviet Union. An invitation letter from the Peace Committee of Thailand dating from July 1952 was found at the Suan Mokkh Archives. Buddhadasa wrote a short note in the margin of the invitation letter from the Committee chair, Charoen Supsaeng, "I am not able to co-operate with you because [for me] the meaning of peace is different". The Peace Committee's involvement was a significant indicator of whether an intellectual concern in Marxism had developed into political activism or not. A famous Marxist intellectual, Supha Sirimanon, also declined to sign his name to the campaign against the Korean War, which was organised by the Peace Committee and through which the Communist Party intended to expand its influence. Contrary to Supha, many other Marxist colleagues of Supha's journal, *Aksonsan*, such as Kulap Saipradit, Samak Burawat, and Atsani Phonlathan, participated in it, and were arrested, charged with being communists<sup>115</sup>. Buddhadasa, who did not become involved in it, did not share the fate of those intellectuals in the Peace Committee Movement.

Although all these hints suggest that Buddhadasa did not have a role in the political activism of either the communist or socialist movements, he was still accused of being a communist. The first such accusation against Buddhadasa derived from his lecture in June 1948 at the Buddhist Association of Thailand. The lecture was titled "Mountainous hindrance on the way of the Buddha-Dhamma". Buddhadasa declared in the lecture that if we were attached to our own views of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, this would block the way to reach the truth<sup>116</sup>. Phra Thipparinya (Thup Klamphasut)<sup>117</sup>, an ex-judge of the court of appeal, who had passed the sixth grade of

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discovered his misunderstanding.

<sup>115</sup> See, Kasian Tejapira, "Commodifying Marxism...", pp. 449 – 494.

<sup>116</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Phukhao haeng withi phuttha-tham" (Mountainous hindrance on the way of the Buddha-Dhamma), *Chumnum patthakatha chut phuttha-tham* (The collection of lectures on the Buddha dhamma) (Bangkok: Sukkaphap chai, 1992), pp. 126 – 169.

<sup>117</sup> The title, 'Phra' of Phra Thipparinya does not indicate his being a monk, but instead, was a *bandasak*, which is a nonhereditary title conferred by the sovereign mostly on government officials. Phra Thipparinya (Thup Klamphasut) (1890 – 1977) had been a monk at Wat Rakhang and Wat Mahathat. After disrobing at the age of twenty-two, he started studying law and became a judge. As a judge, he was socially respected, and earned a good salary so that he was able to be an influential supporter of Wat Mahathat. He was also one of the first generation of Abhidhamma teachers in

the Pali ecclesiastical examinations, got very angry for the sake of the Lord Buddha that Buddhadasa's lecture was irreverent. Phra Thipparinya brought both civil and monastic charges against Buddhadasa as being a communist<sup>118</sup>. For the civil charge, Phra Thipparinya brought the case to Luang Katsongkhram, then a confidant of Phibun Songkhram<sup>119</sup> to make the authorities arrest Buddhadasa. Phra Thipparinya argued that Buddhadasa intended to destroy Buddhism by receiving benefit from communists. However, Luang Katsongkhram did not take the charge very seriously<sup>120</sup>.

Phra Thipparinya brought the monastic charge against Buddhadasa to the Supreme Patriarch and the Ecclesiastical Minister of Education<sup>121</sup>. The Supreme Patriarch Klom Luang Wachirayanawong abiding at Wat Bowonniwet never took the charge seriously. Phra Sasanasophon at Wat Rachathiwat, the monastic head of the southern provinces, who was "responsible" for Buddhadasa in terms of the monastic administration, took Buddhadasa to the Supreme Patriarch to defend himself. However, the Supreme Patriarch did not pick up the charge in his conversation, but said instead, "I

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Thailand. Later, he and Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu co-operated to attack Buddhadasa's concept of *chit wang* (empty mind) (*Anuson ngan phra racha than phloeng sop: phra thipparinya (thup klamphasut)* (Commemoration for the cremation: Phra Thipparinya) (21 May 1977); Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko interview, Nonthaburi, 30 April 1999). See also Chapter IV, p. 194.

<sup>118</sup> Excerpts from Phra Thipparinya's leaflet that accused Buddhadasa were reprinted in *Ha sip pi suan mok: phak nung mua khao phut thung rao* (Fifty years of Suan Mokkh: Part I When they spoke of us) (Bangkok: Suan usom mulanithi, 1982), pp. 747 – 762. According to his leaflets, Phra Thipparinya worked intensively to criticise Buddhadasa. First, he sent a letter containing questions to Buddhadasa in July 1948, a month after his lecture. On 4 – 6 August 1948, at Wat Thammathipatai, he gave lectures on meditation, which included an accusation against Buddhadasa. Those lectures were published in *Phutthacak*, the journal of the Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University. On 28 August 1948, he produced a leaflet, "Sarup yo naew wipatsana" (Summary of styles of *vipassanā* meditation), which he extracted from his lectures. On 17 July 1949, he produced a leaflet of seven questions and his answers about Buddhadasa's interpretation. In 1949, Phra Thipparinya and Phraya Achayachak distributed a leaflet, "Raboet phukhao himalai: khan kho thi phutthathat phikkhu klao thet sai rai phra phut, phra tham, phra song wa pen phu khao himalai bang mai hai hen phra nipphan" (Blasting the Himalayan mountains: Opposing Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's wrong argument which said that the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha are Himalayan mountains that hinder to attainment of *nibbāna*). They sent the leaflet to each monastic head of province, and to the public at Wat Samphraya in Bangkok.

<sup>119</sup> Luang Katsongkhram was a military member of the People's Party, who participated in the Constitutional Revolution in 1932. He was the ringleader of the coup in November 1947, which brought Phibun Songkhram back to power after World War II. As a result of his actions, Luang Katsongkhram was appointed the deputy chief commander of the military. However, some years later, Luang Katsongkhram fled into exile because of a suspected attempt to overthrow Phibun (Eiji Murashima, personal communication, 16 July 1999).

<sup>120</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 322.

<sup>121</sup> In 1948 – 1951, when Buddhadasa was sued by Phra Thipparinya, the Supreme Patriarch was Krom Luang Wachirayanawong at Wat Bowongniwet, and the Ecclesiastical Ministry of Education was Somdet Plot Kittisophon at Wat Benchamabophit. After Wachirayanawong died in 1958, Somdet Plot succeeded to the position of the Supreme Patriarch.

want to live in Suan Mokkh with you; it is busy living here”<sup>122</sup>. On the other hand, the Ecclesiastical Minister of Education, Somdet Plot Kittisophano at Wat Benchamabophit, believed the charge of Phra Thipparinya. Phra Sasanasophon at Wat Rachathiwat (then Phra Thammakosachan), again, took Buddhadasa to Somdet Plot to defend himself. Somdet Plot reprimanded Buddhadasa as to why he did not use the principles given in the *Visuddhimagga*, the classical Buddhist doctrinal exegetical text by Buddhaghosa written in fifth century Sri Lanka. Somdet Plot asked for the basis of Buddhadasa’s interpretation that made the Buddha an obstacle to reach the truth. Somdet Plot listened to Buddhadasa’s defence for less than an hour, and let him go without charging him with any penalty. Buddhadasa understood that Somdet Plot could not lay any penalty on him because there was no evidence of him being hired by communists since the charge was solely based on a conjecture by Phra Thipparinya<sup>123</sup>.

In Thailand, the accusation of being a communist has been a very common means to attack opponents or someone with whom one is at odds. Even though Phra Thipparinya sued Buddhadasa as a communist because of his radical sermon, there were no actual relationships cited as evidence of Buddhadasa’s political affiliation with the Communist Party. Buddhadasa’s close relationship with socialist Marxists, such as Pridi, Kulap and Samak, was not referred to as supporting the charge of being a “communist” or Marxist either. The accusation of Buddhadasa’s being a communist was never seriously considered as a fact by influential elder monks in the Sangha<sup>124</sup>, and it was

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<sup>122</sup> Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanawong knew of Buddhadasa through Maha Thongsup Suphamak at the textbook bureau of the Mahamakut Buddhist University. Buddhadasa had once met the Supreme Patriarch before this defence. The Supreme Patriarch had already made a good remark about Buddhadasa’s work (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 301).

<sup>123</sup> In the defence, Chamnan Luprasoet, a celebrity follower of Buddhadasa, attended to assist Buddhadasa, as did Phra Sasanasophon (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 323). According to Sanya Thammakriat, Sanya sent Buddhadasa to defend himself to Somdet Plot at Wat Benchamabophit, the latter had not yet become the Supreme Patriarch. Sanya was so afraid that he could not attend the meeting in Buddhadasa’s defence since he anticipated Plot’s severe criticism of Buddhadasa. However, Plot agreed with Buddhadasa’s opinion after all by saying that Buddhadasa’s talk was too progressive for people to catch up with, and no penalty was given to him (Thammakriat Kan’ari, “Samphat sanya thammakriat” (Interview with Sanya Thammakriat), *Matichon sut sapda* (Weekly Matichon), Vol. 8 No. 403 (22 May 1988), pp. 18 – 20).

<sup>124</sup> Especially, the support from Phra Sasanasophon was significant for Buddhadasa’s promotion in the Sangha administration. Phra Sasanasophon (Plot), who accompanied Buddhadasa to the interview with the Supreme Patriarch, was a high-ranking monk in the Sangha administration. Phra Sasanasophon knew of Buddhadasa through Buddhadasa’s uncle ordained at Wat Rachathiwat. Phra Sasanasophon, who was charged with the administration of the southern monastic division, had jurisdiction over Buddhadasa, he always gave Buddhadasa opportunities to talk at meetings, and promoted him in the ecclesiastic echelons. Although Phra Sasanasophon belonged to the Thammayut



rather Phra Thipparinya who finally lost face after the ten years of his campaign<sup>125</sup>. This communist accusation by Phra Thipparinya should be understood as a groundless, defamatory campaign, which, for the moment at least had little effect on Buddhadasa's reputation<sup>126</sup>.

Much more harsh attacks by anonymous organisations and rumours of

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Order and Buddhadasa belonged to the Mahanikai Order, Phra Sasanasophon supervised Buddhadasa under the 1941 Sangha Act, which integrated the two separate administrations into one administrative unit (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 377; Phra Pracha and Santisuk Sophonsiri, *Phap chiwit 80 pi phutthathat phikkhu: miti mai khong phra phutthasasana* (Pictorial biography of 80 years of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: a new dimension of Buddhism) (Bangkok: Satiankoset-Nakhapraphip Foundation, 1986, 2530), p. 113).

<sup>125</sup> Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko witnessed Phra Thipparinya's losing face at the special *dhamma* colloquy with an audience of a thousand at Wat Mahathat in 1951. Chamnan Luprasoet, a notable follower of Buddhadasa, asked a question in the colloquy, "I have been thinking of the issue about the accusation against Buddhadasa, who said that the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha were the Himalayan Mountains, which would not allow *nibbāna* to those who are attached to these. Then, the opponents, who had Phra Thipparinya as their leader, censored Buddhadasa for destroying Buddhism worse than Devadatta. Phra Thipparinya has spent a huge amount of money and energy to destroy Buddhadasa so vehemently. I would like to know who is right and who is wrong." The chair of the colloquy was Phra Phimolatham (At). At said, "This is a big issue in society which has been discussed for a long time. Luang Pho Suk, answer to it." The audience became completely calm, waiting for an answer of Luang Pho Suk, or Chao Khun Phawanaphiram, the chief respondent of the colloquy. Suk admitted Buddhadasa's devoted work for Buddhism, and finally said, "I would say that Ven. Buddhadasa was not wrong. He teaches high level Buddhism correctly. Everyone knows that (the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha would be an obstacle to reach *nibbāna* if one is attached to them), but no one was ever brave enough to teach in that way as a monk. This was how monks made people attached to the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha. Most of them teach in this way. ... Because the two opponents of Buddhadasa [Phra Thipparinya and Phraya Achayachak] had understood that Buddhadasa was an enemy of Buddhism, who destroys Buddhism, they dedicated their fund of 200,000 baht to fight Buddhadasa since they had a strong belief in Buddhism. Such persons are very difficult to find. Where could we find such persons who devote a huge amount of their money and time?" After the answer of Suk, At the chair summarised the answer in beautiful words. He said, "We may have heard an old saying, there are some phrases of *dhamma* in the canon, and some enlightened monks are mistrusted because we do not understand the meaning deeply enough or correctly". Then, Chamnan stood up and said, "Let me take a note". At had to repeat his utterance several times, and Chamnan made sure of his note by repeating it loudly. Phra Thipparinya, who was then one of the most important lay supporters of Wat Mahathat, had to leave his seat. As far as Sithawat remembers, after this colloquy, Phra Thipparinya became seriously ill, and withdrew from his activities in Wat Mahathat. This colloquy was held exactly ten years after Buddhadasa's lecture of *Phukhao* at the Buddhist Association of Thailand. Sithawat recalled Buddhadasa had been saying that people would understand his intention after ten years (Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, 30 April 1999). This story suggests that the Mahanikai elders, such as At and Suk, also understood the meaning of Buddhadasa's radical sermon, and did not take the communist charge against him seriously.

<sup>126</sup> Regardless of Phra Thipparinya's charge, Buddhadasa was on the track to wider recognition and promotion during that time. Even though the communist charge was examined in the Sangha authority during 1949 and 1950, Buddhadasa was appointed in 1949 to the head of the Buddhist Mission Organisation of Region 5 or the southern provinces, and as the abbot of Wat Boromathat Chaiya, the historic temple in Buddhadasa's hometown. In 1950, he was even promoted to the monastic title, Phra Ariyananthamuni (cf. The biographical calendar in Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 701; *Ha sip pi suan mok: phak nung*, p. 762). These appointments in the ecclesiastic order suggest that the communist accusation was not considered seriously and did not affect Buddhadasa's reputation straightaway during that time.

Buddhadasa's being a communist<sup>127</sup> came after the 1960s until the end of the 1970s. Those later accusations were defamatory campaigns by the Abhidhamma School, Buddhadasa's opponents, who were also committed to anti-communist propaganda, rather than well-grounded charges. If Buddhadasa sympathised with the communists, propaganda sermons should have been delivered by him as the *yuwasong* (young monks) did<sup>128</sup>. However, Buddhadasa did not take this choice. Buddhadasa's sermons in the 1960s and the 1970s were critical both of the existing socio-political conditions and of the brutal struggles of the communist insurgency, as we are going to examine in the next chapter. Some of Buddhadasa's followers think that Buddhadasa was rumoured to be and suspected of being a communist as CIA retaliation, because he declined to give propaganda sermons against communism. He did this in order to maintain his independence from secular politics, and not to be involved in either communist or anti-communist propaganda<sup>129</sup>. Buddhadasa maintained his position as a Buddhist monk against the prevailing Marxist ideologies and political movements current in the Buddhist public sphere.

In this chapter, I have examined the ideological encounters between Marxism and Buddhism among Thai Buddhist intellectuals, such as Buddhadasa and his lay intellectual associates, in the post-World War II period. Under the relatively liberal political conditions, Marxism was studied and accepted by Thai intellectuals outside the influence of the Communist Party of Thailand (which was under the control of the Chinese Communist Party through ethnic Chinese communities in Thailand). Buddhadasa's radical sermons attracted Marxist intellectuals to expect a reform in religious understandings and practices. Some found materialist aspects in the scientific philosophy of Buddhism, which they argued were inadequate to be utilised for the

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<sup>127</sup> About the rumour, see Chapter III, p. 168.

<sup>128</sup> About *yuwasong*, see Somboon Suksamaran, *Buddhism and politics in Thailand*, especially chapter 4.

<sup>129</sup> An American from the USIS visited Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh to seek co-operation to protect Thailand and Buddhism from the threat of communism in exchange for material support. However, Buddhadasa did not accept this offer (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p.338). Some of Buddhadasa's lay followers, Arun Wetchasuwan and Suphot Dantrakun, believe that the CIA incited anti-communist campaigners, such as Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu and Anan Senakhan, to blame Buddhadasa as a communist agent. These followers of Buddhadasa say that they inferred this from the connections of Buddhadasa's opponents and their anti-communist campaign although they do not have concrete evidence (Arun Wetchasuwan, interview; Suphot Dantrakun, interview, Bangkok, 8 October 1998).

anti-communist campaign. Although Buddhadasa studied and discussed Marxism from a Buddhist perspective, he maintained the position of a Buddhist monk, and was never totally convinced by Marxist ideologies nor did he take part in the political movement of communism.

Such discussions between Marxism and Buddhism were significant for Thai Buddhist intellectuals in the public sphere. It is true that Buddhism as an institution, including individual monks who belong to the institution, are supposed to be distinct from politics, and the Sangha was neither involved in the discussions of Marxism nor announced any official view on ideological and political conflicts. Nevertheless, Buddhism was an important intellectual frame of reference for Thai intellectuals from a Buddhist backgrounds. Discussions about Buddhist truth were not restricted to the religious, doctrinal issues. A new secular ideology was also brought to the Buddhist public sphere for discussion, and it urged individual Buddhist intellectuals, ordained and lay to decide on a political attitude.

By the end of the 1950s, Buddhist philosophy was understood by Thai Buddhist Marxists as coherent with Marxism materialism, but one question remained. Had Buddhism anything to do with social problems, i.e. could it suggest a possible solution? Buddhadasa and other Thai Buddhist intellectuals who declined to convert to Marxism had to work on this question from a Buddhist point of view over the next decades.

## Chapter VI Dhammic Socialism: development of social aspects in Thai Buddhism through discussions with Marxism in the 1960s – 1990s

A common goal of both Buddhism and Marxism is the achievement of justice. Apart from the complicated philosophical coincidence of Marxist dialectical materialism and Buddhist epistemology and the law of impermanence, pointed out by the Buddhist Marxist intellectuals in the 1950s, neither Marxist nor Buddhist disagrees with the broad sense of what justice means. The Thai word for justice, *khwam-pen-tham*, was always in the daily newspapers and in leftist journals throughout the period of political turmoil in the 1970s. Although the word *khwam-pen-tham* is used as a general noun in non-religious, secular contexts, it is not difficult for Thai people to be reminded of the Buddhist origin of the word, the *dhamma*. Especially for Buddhadasa's followers, who had learnt about the *dhamma* of which the fruit should be obtained here and now in the present life, contemporary society and politics could become one of their concerns as something that always has to be consistent with the *dhamma*.

Buddhadasa's "Dhammic Socialism" was a Buddhist perspective of a just social order supported by some Marxist concepts. Based on the Pali scriptures and the early history of Buddhism, Buddhadasa indicated that there was evidence of social, economic and political orders that coincided with the ideal society of socialism. Buddhadasa insisted that Buddhism is practical enough to be applied to achieve justice in contemporary society. It brought to the public sphere of Buddhism a social dimension to be examined in the *dhamma*.

Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism has been studied by both western and Thai scholars and activists, from academic and activist perspectives. The content of Dhammic Socialism was examined in the works of both Jackson<sup>1</sup> and Swearer<sup>2</sup>, but in their works the relationship of Buddhadasa's concept and the social context of the Thai people's discussions about Dhammic Socialism was not very clear. While Gabaude, in his study of Buddhadasa's hermeneutics, examined Buddhadasa's relationship with

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<sup>1</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa: a Buddhist thinker for the modern world* (Bangkok: Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Donald K. Swearer, "Introduction: The vision of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa", Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Dhammic Socialism* (translated and edited by Donald K. Swearer) (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1986), pp. 13 – 43.

Marxists and his interpretation of what Buddhism says about society, he did not specifically take up Dhammic Socialism<sup>3</sup>. In the same way a Thai scholar, Pricha Changkhwanyun also discussed the ideological position of Dhammic Socialism, but the contemporary Thai history that stimulated Buddhadasa to formulate his ideas was not within the scope of his study<sup>4</sup>. Chonlatee Yangtrong's M.A. thesis examined the Thai political situation and the development of Buddhadasa's thought which gave birth to his Dhammic Socialism<sup>5</sup>. However, Chonlatee's concern was to examine the relevance of Buddhadasa's concept, rather than the social background that influenced its reception.

From activist perspectives, the works of Phaisan Wongwarawisit (who is at present ordained and has the name Phra Phaisan Wisalo)<sup>6</sup>, Tavivat Puntarigvivat<sup>7</sup>, and Santikaro Bhikkhu<sup>8</sup>, for example, are intended to develop Buddhadasa's social philosophy further. Phaisan made a critical comment on the unrealistic dictatorial method of Dhammic Socialism, and urged that justice in real political and economic system and institutions be actualised. Tavivat also pointed out the limitation of Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism, its approach is too individualistic to solve socio-economic problems in the global market economy, and he presented his advanced alternative, "Buddhist economics" and "market dhammic socialism". Santikaro applied the Buddhist perspective of Dhammic Socialism to contemporary social critiques. These studies can in some ways be considered part of the intellectual current that this chapter is going to explore.

This chapter will demonstrate the dialectical conflict between Marxism and Buddhism in Thailand from the 1960s through to the 1990s, in which Buddhadasa

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Pricha Changkhwanyun, *Khwam-khit thang kanmuang khong than phutthathat phikkhu* (Buddhadasa's thought on politics) (Bangkok: Samnakphim Chulalongkon Mahawitthayalai, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Chonlatee Yangtrong, "Khwam-khit thang kanmuang khong phutthathat phikkhu" (The political thoughts of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), M.A. thesis, Department of Government, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Phaisan Wongwarawisit, "Than phutthathat kap thammika sangkhomniyom" (Buddhadasa and Dhammic Socialism), *Phutthathat kap khon run mai: mua khon num sao tham thung rak khong khwam-pen-thai* (Buddhadasa and the new generation: when youth asks about the root of Thainess) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1983), pp. 60 – 93.

<sup>7</sup> Tavivat Puntarigvivat, "Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism in dialogue with Latin American liberation theology", Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Santikaro Bhikkhu, "Four noble truths of Dhammic Socialism", Jonathan Watts, Alan Senauke, and Santikaro Bhikkhu (eds.), *Entering the realm of reality: towards dhammic societies* (Bangkok: INEB, 1997), pp. 89 – 161.

developed his concept of Dhammic Socialism. His civic-minded followers explored the concept's application to real society. Regarding social issues, the two ideological systems were in conflict over the priority of three contradicting values or methodologies: material vs. spiritual development; social structure vs. the individual to be reformed for a better society; and armed struggle vs. non-violent methods to be used for radical change. The main factor that determined whether Marxism or Buddhism became a dominant intellectual current was the strength or impetus of domestic and international communist movements in each period. Through these intellectual conflicts with Marxism, Thai Buddhists, such as Buddhadasa and his lay followers, developed social aspects of Buddhism from a Buddhist scriptural, philosophical tradition to create guiding principles for contemporary social reform.

The development of social aspects in Thai Buddhism during the 1960s and the 1990s can be divided into three periods according to its relation with the communist movement. The first period is from the 1960s through to the 14 October 1973 uprising. Under the military dictatorship in this period, not only were the political activities of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) suppressed, but also critical social analysis based on Marxism was banned from discussion in the public sphere. Buddhist intellectuals, including Buddhadasa, developed a critical view of society in the absence of Marxism. The second period began with the expulsion of the military dictators on 14 October 1973 and faded out in the early 1980s. With the abrupt liberalisation of political expression, the influence of the CPT spread rapidly within the student activist movement during this period. The more radicalising the insurgency conflict, the more students of dogmatic Marxism were likely to be attached to it. In this trend, Buddhist students ignored or even abandoned Buddhism as well as Buddhadasa's proposal of Dhammic Socialism in order to take part in the revolutionary movement, which ideologically did not go together with Buddhism. However, some of these students returned to Buddhism after their radical experiences. This was the third period from the late 1970s into the 1990s. Student activists became disappointed with the uncritical attitudes of the CPT's executives toward the Chinese Communist Party, and sought complementing viewpoints in Buddhism, which Marxism had dismissed. In this process, Buddhist intellectuals and activists developed the social dimensions of Buddhism into concrete projects of social reform. Such as Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism, which

was more discussed by his followers for application in practical situations.

Based on a broad outline of ideological currents in Thailand from the 1960s to the 1990s, first I will examine Buddhadasa's social thought, which was elaborated to overcome the perceived defects of Buddhism in the face of Marxism, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Second, I will present how Buddhadasa's lay followers struggled with ideological challenges from Marxism, and the way they explored their social engagement from Buddhist perspectives on this dialectic. Through Buddhadasa and his lay followers, called "engaged Buddhists", this chapter will demonstrate one of the most significant discussions and activities in the recent Buddhist public sphere and also in the contemporary intellectual history of Thailand.

### 1. Development of Buddhadasa's social thought and Dhammic Socialism

The "revolution" in October 1958 had a great impact on the public sphere in Thailand. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who seized power in September 1957, needed yet another coup to shut down the "noise" in the system of democracy, such matters as legislators' corruption, the critical press, and demand of labour welfare, which was promoted by Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram for the legitimacy of his government. In the scenario of the "revolution" in October 1958, Sarit played the role of a paternalistic leader who had come to reinstall indigenous values and authority in place of the alien system of parliamentary democracy and the constitution. Sarit enacted martial law, ushered in a military dictatorship, and oppressed any critical intellectuals by accusing them of being "communist"<sup>9</sup>. This meant the end of the relatively liberal period, during which a lot of Marxist literature was produced by Thai intellectuals. Marxism was expelled from the public sphere of Thailand by the military dictatorship of Sarit and his successors, Thanom Kittikachon and Praphat Charusathian.

Although the social criticism of Marxism was strictly restricted, Thai economy and society were transformed. Under the rule of Sarit's "revolutionary council", "materialism" in the sense of consumerism was promoted in Thailand more greatly than

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<sup>9</sup> Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: the politics of despotic paternalism* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University, 1979); Wyatt, David K., *Thailand: a short history* (Chiangmai: Silkworm books, 1982, 1984), pp. 278 – 285.

ever. Allied with the United States, the Thai military provided the Americans with a key strategic base for the Vietnam War against the communist insurgency in Indochina, and in exchange, sought resources for their commercial opportunity based on US investment. For the domestic campaign, the anti-communist military dictatorship propagated slogans such as “work is money, money is work which creates happiness”, and advertised its success in vivid material improvement with slogans such as “flowing water, bright electricity, and good highways”<sup>10</sup>. Because of the US military presence, the Thai economy rapidly expanded not only in the construction but also in the service sectors such as the sex industry to meet the demands of foreigners. In addition to strategic investment from the United States, Japanese investment increased rapidly from the late 1960s due to the Japanese domestic wage rise, which pushed them to seek cheaper labour for labour-intensive operations<sup>11</sup>. As a result, Japanese consumer goods flooded Thai markets. It was during the period of Sarit and the succeeding Thanon-Praphat regimes that great changes in material life took place in Thailand. The social and economic transformation provoked a critical discourse against these changes. Buddhism fulfilled this role by supplying a vocabulary and ideas for critical discourse.

#### Buddhadasa’s understanding of *watthuniyom*

Buddhadasa was one of the Buddhist intellectuals who developed social criticism from Buddhist philosophical foundations. Buddhadasa began intensively discussing social issues in his lecture series, *Boromatham*<sup>12</sup> (the supreme *dhamma*), given in 1969 to a group of Chulalongkorn University students who were temporarily ordained as monks. In those lectures, *watthuniyom* or “materialism” was one of the key issues that Buddhadasa criticised in the way that he understood the term<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: economy and politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 130.

<sup>11</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thailand: economy and politics*, pp. 137 – 138.

<sup>12</sup> The record of the Boromatham lecture series is published in two volumes of Buddhadasa’s series of works, *Thammakhot*: Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham: oprom phiksu nisit chulalongkon mahawitthayalai phansa pi 2512* (Supreme *dhamma*: training for student monks from Chulalongkorn University in the 1969 rain retreat) (Chaiya: Mulanithi thammathan, 1982), part I, II.

<sup>13</sup> *Watthuniyom* is a very confusing word in Thai. Originally the Thai term, *watthuniyom*, was coined for more specifically representing Marxism’s “historical materialism”, which is academically defined as: “the causal primacy of men’s and women’s mode of production and reproduction of their natural (physical) being, or of the labour process more generally, in the development of human history” (Roy Bhaskar, “Materialism”, Tom Bottomore, Laurence Harris, V. G. Kiernan and Ralph



In the lectures of *Boromatham*, Buddhadasa rejected *watthuniyom* or any kind of material reductionism<sup>14</sup>, including both ideas of *watthu-niyom* (Marxist idea of materialism) and *niyom-watthu* (favouring in material pleasures)<sup>15</sup>. In Buddhadasa's idea it must be *manoniyom* or idealism<sup>16</sup> instead of *watthuniyom* that people needed to hold as a principle. Buddhadasa defined *manoniyom* as “the knowledge of mind that can control both body and mind”<sup>17</sup>. The *manoniyom* of Buddhadasa has to be distinguished from those of ascetics who despise their body<sup>18</sup>. It should be in the “middle way” (Pali: *majjhimā-patipadā*) of body and mind, but always under the control of the mind<sup>19</sup>.

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Miliband (eds.), *A dictionary of Marxist thought: second edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 369).

<sup>14</sup> Buddhadasa did not always use the term, *watthuniyom* as the ‘historical materialism’ of Marxism. Buddhadasa used the term *watthuniyom* more broadly than historical materialism, a way of thinking that gives priority to the material to make a decision. In fact, Buddhadasa's understanding agrees with a dictionary definition of “materialism”, which is defined in its broadest sense, “whatever exists just is, or at least depends upon, matter” (Roy Bhaskar, “Materialism”, p. 369). Buddhadasa's understanding of *watthuniyom* was criticised as confusion with *niyom-watthu*, which means favouring material pleasure. Some of Buddhadasa's followers who had contact with Marxism, such as Suphot Dantrakun, Naowarat Phongphaibun, and Prasoet Sapsunthon pointed out that Buddhadasa misused the Marxist notion of “materialism” as *niyom-watthu*, or “favouring materials”. Naowarat wrote a letter to Buddhadasa to suggest this misuse, but Buddhadasa did not answer Naowarat (Suphot Dantrakun, interview, Bangkok, 8 October 1998; Naowarat Phongphaibun, interview, Kanchanaburi, 2 February 1999. See also Naowarat Phongphaibun, “Watthuniyom – chittaniyom kap phutthasasana” (Materialism – spiritualism and Buddhism) in Naowarat Phongphaibun, *Dap thi mok yu nai chiwon* (A sword hidden under the yellow robe) (Bangkok: Suan nangsū, 1978), pp. 231 – 237). Buddhadasa mentioned the same suggestion of Prasoet in his interview with Phra Pracha (Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya: atchiwaprawat khong than phutthathat* (Talking in the twilight years: an autobiography of Venerable Buddhadasa) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1988), p.340). On the other hand, Pracha Hutaniwat supported Buddhadasa's criticism of *watthuniyom* including the notion of Marxism and addiction in material satisfaction (Pracha Pasannathammo, Phra, “Than phutthathat kap kanpatiwat watthanatham” (Ven. Buddhadasa and revolution in culture), *Phutthathat kap khon run mai*, pp. 161 – 162).

<sup>15</sup> *Watthuniyom* or the Thai translation of materialism is often not understood as “historical materialism” because of the word, *niyom*. As a verb *niyom* means “to define, to prescribe”, and “to like, to favour”, whereas as a suffix, *niyom* makes a compound noun that indicates an ideology, just like “-ism” in English. In combination with the Thai word, *watthu*, which means “materials” and the suffix, *niyom*, *watthu-niyom* could be read as a tendency that people indulge themselves in material happiness.

<sup>16</sup> For the Thai translation of “idealism”, Buddhadasa used the word, *manoniyom*, but *chittaniyom* is more often used in general. This could be because Buddhadasa wanted to distinguish his position from those anti-communist Buddhist elites who insisted on Buddhism as *chittaniyom* as Samak Burawat criticised in his article. See Chapter V, pp. 239 – 240.

<sup>17</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, pp. 46, 60. Buddhadasa presented a concept of *Thamma-niyom* (Dhamma-ism) as the middle way of the body and mind, or of materialism and spiritualism. However, the concept of *thammaniyom* can be represented by *manoniyom* since through the concept of *thamma-niyom*, Buddhadasa insisted a position of *manoniyom*, which did hold both the material or body and the mind in control under the supervision of the mind. However, Buddhadasa's idea of material poverty, which is reduced to the mental attitude, such as idleness, is questioned by Marxists and social thinkers (Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, pp. 175 –

Buddhadasa insisted that *watthuniyom* means the system of ideas that gave *kilesa*, or one's never satisfied desire, a decisive authority to control the world. In the ideological system of *watthuniyom*, people are only concerned with the happiness coming from material satiation and sensual pleasure. The heavenly happiness, according to Buddhadasa, also belonged to *watthuniyom* rather than *manoniyom*, although people often took it reversed, and made it a reason not to listen to religion, which is on the side of *manoniyom*. People tended to think that the heaven was a lie, which deceived the people to expect a nonexistent dream. Because the materialists accordingly considered *nibbāna* like a materialistic paradise of total satisfaction of their desires, they did not believe in religion. Buddhadasa strongly censured them,

They do not understand as the scripture meant. It is because they do not expect anything else but *kāmārammaṇa* (sense-desire)<sup>20</sup>.

This claim of *manoniyom* was connected with his insistence of *boromatham*<sup>21</sup>, or the highest ethics that should rule all areas of the world. Ethics or morality should not be one of the subjects that school children have to learn at school to move up a grade<sup>22</sup>. Politics, economics, education, and everything in the world must be commanded by *boromatham*, or the ethics of a human being knowing justice. Buddhadasa rejected all methods to solve contemporary social problems. His point was that people only looked at the immediate cause of the problems without considering the most fundamental cause. For example, insufficient food, shelter, and oil were merely immediate causes of problems, but the fundamental cause could not be solved by supplying materials. Spending a lot of money on distributing food cannot solve poverty<sup>23</sup>. Buddhadasa argued that these materials were insufficient, since the desire of human beings was

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176).

<sup>20</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, pp. 50 – 51.

<sup>21</sup> The key word of the lecture, *boromatham*, was dug up from the Pali scriptures in order to find an expression, which corresponded to a Latin word, *Summum Bonum*. According to Buddhadasa, *Summum Bonum* means 'the utmost goodness that man can get in this very life'. It entails four things: happiness, perfectness, duty for duty's sake, and universal love (Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, p. 65). Buddhadasa admitted that the word *boromatham* was not common in ordinary Thai, but had been used in Buddhism. Buddhadasa quoted the word *boromatham* from a saying of the Buddha, *nibbanaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā* (The buddhas say *nibbāna* is *boromatham*, or the supreme *dhamma*); and an ancient Indian saying, *ahusā paramo dhammo* (*Ahimsa* is the *boromatham*, or the supreme *dhamma*) (*Boromatham phak ton*, p. 61, 71). In the state of *boromatham*, any kinds of suffering are extinguished both within oneself and in the community of people.

<sup>22</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, p. 205.

<sup>23</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, pp. 192 – 193.

never ending because of “materialism”. He believed that if people paid respect to the *dhamma*, they did not desire unnecessary luxury, and then materials in the world would be in surplus. Buddhadasa insisted that we had to look at the fundamental cause of materialism in egoism<sup>24</sup>. People seek something novel, which can satisfy their *kilesa* (defilement) that is heading towards materialism. They produce materials to take advantage of others. They consider the material as a god or a good thing to hold. No one ever looked at *boromatham* for the happiness and fulfilment of a human being<sup>25</sup>. Buddhadasa insisted that without *boromatham*, the world would be in chaos no matter how materials were developed by sensual desire. *Boromatham* is the underlying message of Buddhadasa to warn the contemporary world from his fundamentally religious view.

Buddhadasa’s strong critique of materialism was a product of his contemporary society in the late 1960s. Even though Buddhadasa was living in the forest in Southern Thailand, which was far from the obscenely transformed capital and American military bases in the Northeast, Buddhadasa did not shut out worldly issues, unlike less educated forest meditation monks. Although other monks in Suan Mokkh, such as Kowit Khemanantha, an educated artist monk who graduated from Sinlapakorn University, even did not know what happened on 14 October 1973, Buddhadasa caught upon contemporary events by newspapers and radio<sup>26</sup>. “Materialism”, an ideological system in which people only seek material and sensual comfort, was a reality in Thailand since the Cold War policy of the American-allied Thai military regimes affected the values of Thai people. In this condition, even though he opposed any materialism, including that of Marxism, Buddhadasa’s ideological position could never be regarded as conservative right against the Marxist left. Because of his characteristic criticism of the existing social and political conditions, the Buddhist teaching of Buddhadasa was an alternative critical discourse when Marxism was absent in the Thai public sphere during the period of strong censorship<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, pp. 196 – 198.

<sup>25</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Boromatham phak ton*, pp.203 – 205.

<sup>26</sup> Kowit Khemanantha, interview, 29 January 1999; Phra Pracha, *Lao wai...*, p. 563.

<sup>27</sup> The tendency to intoxicating material pleasure did not end with Vietnam War; nor with the end of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Buddhadasa kept placing emphasis on ‘retrieving the world from the power of materialism’ as one of the three wishes (Thai: *panithan 3 prakan*) that he would like himself and other people to pursue in his later years. According to Seri Phongphit, Buddhadasa’s

## The development of Dhammic Socialism

The 14 October uprising in 1973 was led by students' and people's demands for the permanent constitution, which was abolished by Thanom's "revolution" in November 1971. People's demonstrations finally expelled the dictators, Thanom and Praphat, who were also denied support by both the military and the King. This event brought a great change in the Thai public sphere. Under the Sanya Dhammasakdi interim government, which was selected and appointed by the King, and under the succeeding governments established by parliamentary procedure defined in the new constitution of October 1974, Marxist literature written in the late 1940s and the 1950s was allowed to be republished. Those Marxist publications gained popularity amongst the Thai people who had been kept away from political critiques. Based on the increasing popularity of Marxism, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) incorporated socially concerned students to its youth organisations through the network of its agent students and intellectuals<sup>28</sup>. This powerful current of Marxism and the CPT had a great impact on Buddhadasa who had been, in his thought, attempting to cultivate a social dimension.

In the background of Buddhadasa's extensive propagation of Dhammic Socialism after the 14 October 1973 uprising, it was perceived to be fashionable or progressive to use the terms, *sangkhom-niyom* (socialism) and *sangkhom* (society) in Thai intellectual society during this time. These words reminded people of the good image of a welfare state, which considers the life of people in society, contrary to the military dictatorship before the uprising. In the mid-1970s Thailand the words *sangkhom* or *sangkhomniyom* were not a symbol of a subversive left, but were perceived as progressive, not as radical as *prachachon* or *muanchon*, which means the

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famous three wishes were first presented in the preface of a book, *Phut-khrit nai thatsana than phutthathat: chaikhwam haeng sasana khrit thi chaw phut khwan ruchak* (Buddhist and Christian in the view of Ven. Buddhadasa: the meaning of Christianity that Buddhists have to know) (Bangkok: Samnakphim thianwan, 1984), which was transcribed and published from Buddhadasa's lecture in 1979 (Seri Phongphit, interview, Bangkok, 5 May 1999). The three wishes include: 1. Each person, without asking whether they are a Buddhist or believer of other religion, should understand his/her own religion most deeply; 2. People in different religions should understand each other well; and 3. They should retrieve friend human beings from the influence of materialism (*Phut-khrit nai thatsana than Phutthathat*, p. (5)).

<sup>28</sup> Morell and Chai-anan, *Political conflict in Thailand*, pp. 137 – 180.

people or the “masses”<sup>29</sup>. Based on this popular image of *sangkhomniyom*, some liberal but conservative politicians, such as Seni Pramoj, the first Prime Minister in the elected parliament after 14 October, insisted that Thailand should be *sangkhomniyom* even though he opposed communism<sup>30</sup>. In these conditions, Buddhadasa, as well as other intellectuals, would have had a positive image of the concept of *sangkhomniyom*, not necessarily because Buddhadasa was inclined to leftist ideologies. In the 1970s, Buddhadasa propagated his concept of *thammika-sangkhomniyom* (i.e., Dhammic Socialism), or a kind of socialism ruled by the *dhamma*, through which he presented a picture of an ideal society.

Although it is very difficult to determine the first time Buddhadasa presented the concept of Dhammic Socialism, Buddhadasa gave numerous sermons on this topic after the 14 October 1973 uprising<sup>31</sup>. Whatever the date, pocketbooks containing

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<sup>29</sup> Anut Aphaphirom, interview, Bangkok, 17 August 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Another politician, Kukrit Pramoj, who became the Prime Minister after Seni Pramoj, preferred the word, *sangkhom*, even though he opposed communism from a liberal conservative point of view. Kukrit named his party *Phak kit sangkhom* or the Social Action Party, which was modelled after the People’s Action Party in Singapore. In order to give a progressive, welfare oriented meaning to his party, but to avoid the radical connotation of the word, ‘people’, Kukrit chose the word, *sangkhom* for the name of his party. The example of Kukrit also suggests that the word *sangkhom* or *sangkhomniyom* was perceived as a good progressive image even by a conservative politician, who was not a leftist (Anut Aphaphirom, interview).

<sup>31</sup> This is because of the incomplete collections of Buddhadasa’s sermons available for my research, as well as those of his disciples. Dhammic Socialism seems to be Buddhadasa’s coinage, although there was ‘Buddhist Socialism’ in U Nu’s Burma in the 1950s and Prince Sihanouk’s Cambodia in the 1960s. Buddhadasa actually witnessed Buddhist socialism in Burma under the U Nu regime when he attended the *Sangayanā* convocation for settling canonical questions on the *Tipitaka* in Burma in 1957 C.E. or in the year 2500 of the Buddhist calendar. At least Buddhadasa had an interest in U Nu’s thought as he translated and published a speech of U Nu in his journal, *Phutthasasana* in February 1954, if not specifically on ‘Buddhist Socialism’. The original title of this speech of U Nu was given as “a new method”, and it was delivered on 29 November 1953 at the conference for International Buddhist Culture. In the conference, there was a ceremony for relocating relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two best disciples of the Buddha, in Sanchi, India (U Nu, “Kanbanru makphon samai kung phutthakan” (the original English title: “Accomplishing the enlightenment in the half Buddhist era”), *Phutthasasana*, Vol. 22 No. 1 (February 1954), pp. 33 – 34). There are some hints of Buddhadasa’s search for social dimensions in Buddhism, although it is very hard to assert the beginning of his Dhammic Socialism. Buddhadasa preached on *dhamma*’s relevance to contemporary society and politics, at least from 1947 onwards, when he lectured on “Buddha-Dhamma and the spirit of Democracy” at the Buddhist Association of Thailand with an audience of Pridi Phanomyong, the former regent of King Rama VIII. In this lecture, Dhammic Socialism had not yet appeared, the lecture interestingly indicates Buddhadasa’s sources of ideas on society in the *Aggañña sutta*, a Buddhist scripture, which he continued referring to in his Dhammic Socialism. In this lecture, Buddhadasa did not intend to teach democracy, but instead, to teach the *Buddha-Dhamma* of his religious interpretation, through the concepts of ‘democracy’ consisting of liberty, equality, and brotherhood. He was trying to call people’s attention to the essence of Buddhism by comparing the meanings of democracy and *dhamma* for those who were concerned with democracy (Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Phuttha-tham kap chetanarom khong prachathipatai* (Buddha-Dhamma and the spirit of Democracy) (Nonthaburi: Kong thun wutthi tham)). In

collections of his sermons on Dhammic Socialism appeared from November 1973 onwards<sup>32</sup>. There are 3,500 pages of his lectures on society, originally spoken between 1973 and 1976 in the seven volumes of *Thammakhot* (*Dhamma* propagation), the series of sixty-three volumes of Buddhadasa's works<sup>33</sup>.

Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism developed simultaneously with the radicalised politics of the 1970s. When Buddhadasa gave his sermons in November 1973<sup>34</sup>, a month after the 14 October uprising, he declared that all religions were "socialist" (*sangkhomniyom*) in the sense that they taught to actualise a harmonious balance in society by reducing individual greediness, which was morally wrong to extract surplus value from people<sup>35</sup>. The historical events of the 14 October uprisings, in which the military fired on protesters, brought about the first direct intervention into politics by the current king of Thailand, King Rama IX, to settle the problem. The King asked Thanom and Prapat to leave the country, and replaced the Prime Minister with Sanya Dhammasakdi who was his own selection. The King also dismissed all the members of the constitution-drafting committee appointed by the Thanom regime, and appointed a new National Assembly. The important role of the king coincided with Buddhadasa's proposal in September 1974<sup>36</sup> for a 'dictatorship of the *dhamma*' (*padetkan doi tham*). In this lecture, Buddhadasa gave a clearer definition to his 1973

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Buddhadasa's sermon, "Buddhism and society" in 1952, he did not mention Dhammic Socialism, and his Buddhist view on society seems to have not developed as much as in his lectures on Dhammic Socialism in the 1970s. During the eight years after October 1958, Karuna Kusalasai said that he and his fellow communist-charged prisoners were delighted to listen to Buddhadasa's preaching about Dhammic Socialism when they were in jail, but I could not find a record of that sermon (Karuna Kusalasai, interview, Bangkok, 6 November 1998).

<sup>32</sup> For examples, there are such pocketbooks as: Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Kanmuang khu thamma* (Politics is the *dhamma*) (Bangkok: Arun withaya); and Phutthathat Inthapanyo, *Thammika sankhomniyom* (Bangkok: Sayam prathet, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Phaisan indicates *Mua thamma khrong lok* (When *dhamma* rules the world), *Silatham kap manusayalok* (Morality and the human world), *Thamma sacca songkhro* (Truth of *dhamma* helps), *Ariyasilatham* (Saint morality), *Kan-klap-ma haeng silatham* (Return to morality), *Thamma kap kanmuang* (*Dhamma* and politics), and *Yaowachon kap silatham* (Youth and morality). See, Phaisan Wongwarawisit, "Than Phutthathat kap thammika sangkhomniyom" (Ven. Buddhadasa and Dhammic Socialism) in *Phutthathat kap khon run mai*, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Prachathipatai baep sangkhomniyom" (Democracy in the style of socialism), Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Kanmuang khu thamma*, pp. 136 – 174. This was originally spoken in November 1973.

<sup>35</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Prachathipatai baep sangkhomniyom", p.149.

<sup>36</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Sangkhomniyom tam lak haeng phra sasana" (Socialism according to the principle of religion), *Thammika sankhomniyom*, pp. 57 – 110. This lecture was translated into English and given the title, "A dictatorial Dhammic Socialism" by Donald K. Swearer (Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Dhammic Socialism* (Bangkok: Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1986), pp. 77 – 100). This was originally spoken in September 1974.

sermon about Dhammic Socialism, which entailed simply adding the '*dhamma*' to his idea of 'socialism' to distinguish it from communism and its negative associations. When the situation became more devastating after the people's victory over the military dictatorship, the communist camp itself was splitting and fighting with in itself in the name of respective ideologies. Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism became an ideology to protect from bloody, dogmatic socialism<sup>37</sup>. Buddhadasa started criticising worldly socialism after 1975, when the communist victory in Vietnam stimulated an escalation of turbulence within Thailand. A lot of suspected political activists were assassinated by right-wing vigilante groups and security forces until the firefight at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976. During 1976, Buddhadasa spoke only a little about "socialism" or Dhammic Socialism even though he kept teaching about a righteous political rule<sup>38</sup>. Possibly this was because of the policy of brutal assassination of communist suspects in the lead up to the 6 October massacre. Buddhadasa returned to speaking about Dhammic Socialism in public in September 1979 in a radio broadcast<sup>39</sup>. By 1979, the social confusion in Thailand had settled with the army regaining power, and students had started returning home from the jungle where they had fought in the armed struggle for the Communist Party of Thailand. Buddhadasa's social thought became more popular after that time.

Dhammic Socialism contains three aspects: (1) Buddhadasa's reflections on the social aspects of Buddhism inspired by socialism; (2) the dictatorship of the *dhamma*, or righteousness; and (3) Dhammic Socialism in contrast with worldly socialism.

#### (1) Discovering the social aspects of Buddhism

Buddhadasa discovered that 'socialism' is in accord with the teaching of non-egoism in Buddhism. For Buddhadasa, *sangkhomniyom* (socialism) means to love society, not solely to love oneself<sup>40</sup>. The love of others worked out in socialism

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<sup>37</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Sangkhomniyom chanit thi chuai lok dai" (A kind of socialism that can help the world), *Thammika sangkhomniyom*, pp. 111 – 150. This was originally spoken in May 1975.

<sup>38</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Thamma kap kanmuang, kanmuang kap thamma" (*Dhamma* and politics, politics and *dhamma*), *Kanmuang khu thamma*, pp. 1 – 76; Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Kanmuang chanit chuai lok dai" (A kind of politics that can help the world), *Kanmuang khu thamma*, pp. 89 – 135. These lectures were originally given in July 1976.

<sup>39</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Thamma nai thana latthi kanmuang" (*Dhamma* as an ideology of politics), *Kanmuang khu thamma*, pp. 77 – 88. This was originally spoken in 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Thamma nai thana latthi kanmuang", p. 85. As Pricha indicated, the

coincided with religion teaching the destruction of egoism (*khwam-hen-kae-tua*), which tends to follow the way of *kilesa*<sup>41</sup>. When people do not think of taking advantage for themselves, they can consider others (*hen kae phu un*) in society at large. In this sense, all religions that teach not to be egoistic are socialistic in that they give priority to the community over the individual.

Buddhadasa named the socialism that he discovered in Buddhism, Dhammic Socialism. That is the socialism containing the *dhamma*. Buddhadasa defined the *dhamma* as having four meanings: 1) *dhammajāti* (nature) itself, or phenomena; 2) the laws of nature; 3) duty in accordance with the law of nature; and 4) fruit from duty in accordance with the law of nature. By nature, according to Buddhadasa, all creatures do not need a surplus, which is in excess of their requirements for living. They just need the amount that can fill their stomachs. Nature has a harmonious balance of coexistence with everyone consuming just what they need. This is the spirit of socialism with the “*dhamma* of *dhammajāti*”, the law of nature that naturally (Thai: *doi thammachat*; Pali: *dhammajāti*)<sup>42</sup> exists.

Buddhadasa explained that this natural balance of ‘socialism’, in which no one has to accumulate more than necessary, collapsed when some individual started accumulating a surplus for their own use. This incident coincided with the birth of *kilesa* (defilement), to take advantage for oneself at the expense of others. Food and commodities became insufficient because of people’s egoism, which was stimulated by *kilesa*, when they accumulated a ‘surplus’ unnecessary for their survival<sup>43</sup>. The way to restore the original socialism of nature, Buddhadasa argued, was to restrict the *kilesa*, the fundamental cause of problems in society. This was Buddhadasa’s invention to combine the notion of surplus value in Marxism with non-egoism in Buddhism.

## (2) The dictatorship of the *dhamma* (*padetkan doi tham*)

Buddhadasa asserted the dictatorship of the *dhamma*, or righteousness as a

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‘socialism’ that Buddhadasa meant was a kind of collectivism (*latthi suan ruam*), an antonym of individualism (*latthi ekkathet*). Buddhadasa preached that socialism should place emphasis on society rather than individuals (Pricha Changkhwanyun, *Khwa-m-khit thang kanmuang khong than phutthathat phikkhu*, p. 93).

<sup>41</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, “Prachathipatai baep sangkhomniyom”, p.149.

<sup>42</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, “Prachathipatai baep sangkhomniyom”, p. 153.

<sup>43</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Sangkhomniyom chanit thi chuai lok dai”, p. 124.



means for restoring Dhammic Socialism, or the harmonious balance of nature. For Buddhadasa, a dictatorship of righteousness was the most effective method to actualise the good in this world. Buddhadasa found the ideal dictatorship of the *dhamma* in the Buddhist scriptures and ancient history.

In the Buddhist scripture, an ideal monarch should have ten virtues, called *dasarājadhamma*, which are, Buddhadasa believed, filled with the spirit of Dhammic Socialism. *Dasarājadhamma* comprises the ten rules of the *dhamma* for a ruler of the world as defined in Buddhist scripture. The ten rules include alms-giving (Pali: *dāna*), morality (*sīla*), liberality (*pariccaga*), straightness (*ajjava*), gentleness (*maddava*), self-restriction (*tapo*), non-anger (*akkodha*), non-hurtfulness (*avihimsa*), forbearance (*khanti*), and non-opposition (*avirodhana*).

Buddhadasa argued that there is no reason for such a monarchy with this *dasarājadhamma*, which embodies the spirit of socialism, to be abolished as was the Thai absolute monarchy in the constitutional reform of 1932. A monarchy with *dasarājadhamma* would immediately actualise good in the world, and no misconduct would ever take place<sup>44</sup>. For Buddhadasa, it was to be a monarchy such that within the individual bad personality traits would be expelled<sup>45</sup>. Buddhadasa insisted that the system of monarchy over the country should be maintained, but that appropriate virtue be fostered in the person of the king.

### (3) Dhammic Socialism in contrast to worldly socialism

The difference between Dhammic Socialism and Marxist socialism became apparent when Buddhadasa contrasted Dhammic Socialism with worldly socialism. Buddhadasa's socialism, which is supported by the law of nature and Buddhist virtues, should be distinguished from Marxist socialism in three ways<sup>46</sup>.

First, Buddhadasa's socialism is a system of morality, which has little to do

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<sup>44</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Sangkhomniyom tam lak haeng phra sasana", pp. 97 – 99.

<sup>45</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Sangkhomniyom tam lak haeng phra sasana", pp. 86 – 88.

<sup>46</sup> There is actually a fourth difference between Buddhadasa and orthodox Marxism, concerned with historical materialism, which I have already argued in the above discussion. In short, Buddhadasa's socialism is not economic determinism in accordance with historical materialism of Marx. Buddhadasa's socialism is even distinguished from the common definition of 'socialism' among Thai intellectuals, which usually means justice in distribution without threatening the monarchy and religion. Buddhadasa's socialism aims at a fundamental order of righteousness without favouring either the poor or the rich.

with the economic exploitation that Marxist socialism attempts to overcome by structural economic remedies. Any kind of disequilibrium is caused by the lack of morality. Buddhadasa insisted that nothing could exist normally without having morality. In a system of politics, which is 'concerned with many people', and thus has an inclination towards trouble, morality exists if people can solve problems properly. The economic system is also a system of morality relating to consumption<sup>47</sup>. In short, socialism in Buddhadasa's thought is a system of morality in every arena of human activity – a system that gives society normality or the happiness of normality.

Second, Buddhadasa's socialism is completely different from Marxism with regard to class. It has no mention of a class conflict over the modes of production. Buddhadasa understood that it was natural that classes come about according to people's deeds and depending upon their different capabilities and wisdom<sup>48</sup>. When Buddhadasa looked at poverty, he did not seek its reasons in structural economic relationship and in its historical development as Marxism explored. Rather, he considered the reason for poverty to be in individual deeds in the past, for example, not being diligent enough, and spending a lot of money on gambling and drinking. Buddhadasa reduced all the causes of poverty to moral problems. Some of his followers, such as Prawase Wasi, did not agree with this, however, and later re-examined this issue.

Thirdly, Buddhadasa's socialism denied a punishment or violent sanction (*atchaya*) that would eventually take people's lives<sup>49</sup>. This is in contrast to the communist strategy of armed struggle. He urged Buddhists to learn harmonious socialism arising from tradition, which was part of their very being, so as to make it their weapon with which to protect their country against the bloodthirstiness and dogmatism of worldly socialism<sup>50</sup>. Buddhadasa compared his Dhammic Socialism with the situation of back-burning a fire around a house to protect it against a bush fire, which was worldly socialism. The *dhamma* is the weapon to intercept this socialism which caused people to be divided and at each other's throats due to conflicts over

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<sup>47</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Sangkhomniyom tam lak haeng phra sasana", pp. 59 – 63.

<sup>48</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, *Kan to tan kae khai khwam-wiparit khong lok (2519)* (a booklet for free distribution; 27 May 1977), p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Kanmuang chanit thi chuai lok dai", p. 90.; Phutthathat Phikkhu, "Thamma nai thana latthi kanmuang", pp. 85 – 86.

<sup>50</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Sangkhomniyom chanit thi chuai lok dai", p. 115.

dogma<sup>51</sup>. Dhammic Socialism was a counter to socialism as it was being expounded at that time, rather than an affirmation of communism.

Among these three characteristics of Dhammic Socialism: (1) the harmonious order of nature, which coincided with socialism; (2) the dictatorship of the *dhamma* or kingly virtues; (3) differences with worldly socialism, Buddhadasa's disciples who call themselves 'engaged Buddhists' took on the significance of Dhammic Socialism selectively. The first characteristic is understood and accepted as a foundation to look at social order from a Buddhist philosophical perspective presented in the Pali scriptures<sup>52</sup>. However, probably few of Buddhadasa's disciples were totally convinced by the second, dictatorial character of Dhammic Socialism<sup>53</sup>. Those who experienced the overthrow of the military dictatorship in the 14 October uprising did not weigh up dictatorship against democracy, even though they understood that the *dhamma*, which is perfectly just and right, should rule the world. Some agree that Buddhadasa was able to govern Suan Mokkh in a dictatorial method, and everybody approved his decisions as consistent with the *dhamma*, but no one except Buddhadasa is confident or respected enough to administer such a group of people<sup>54</sup>. The most significant insights of Dhammic Socialism were contained in the third characteristic, which Buddhadasa contrasted with worldly socialism. All Buddhadasa's followers, who call themselves 'engaged Buddhists', had to confront Marxism, which was leaning more and more towards the Communist Party of Thailand, during and after the radicalised political conflict in the 1970s and 1980s. Dhammic Socialism or Buddhism provided complementary perspectives, which were absent in Marxist philosophy or the Marxist project of socio-economic revolution. Marxism misses such perspectives as the necessity of morality in any kind of administration, the common social goals beyond the conflicting class interests, and the non-violent approach to the social problems, but these significant points can be extracted from Dhammic Socialism or Buddhism. The socially engaged Buddhists explored these points in Buddhism, and developed them further in their activities, especially after the end of the 1970s.

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<sup>51</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, "Sangkhomniyom chanit thi chuai lok dai", p. 130.

<sup>52</sup> Santikaro Bhikkhu, "Four noble truths of Dhammic Socialism".

<sup>53</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, Bangkok, 19 March 1999; Phaisan Wisalo, Phra, Bangkok, 25 August 1999.

## Response to Dhammic Socialism and Buddhadasa

Contrary to what one might expect, Dhammic Socialism was not in any way popular among real communists or students who were attracted to Marxist ideologies during the 1970s. Instead, Dhammic Socialism gained the support of conservative elite Buddhists of good will, though they were never ultra-rightists against communism. Buddhadasa was requested by the Ministry of Justice to preach “socialism” that had been incorporated into religion to their new assistant judges in September 1974<sup>55</sup>. The journal, *Phuttha-tham* (Buddha-dhamma), the monthly publication of the Buddhist Association of Thailand, which included high-ranking officials and rich Buddhist celebrities as core members, extensively reprinted Buddhadasa’s teaching on socialism and social justice from August 1974 to September 1976<sup>56</sup>. It seems to have been the influence of Sanya Dhammasakdi that explains why these elite organisations accepted Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism. Sanya was an important lay disciple of Buddhadasa from the beginning of Buddhadasa’s work, and influential both in the Ministry of Justice and the Buddhist Association of Thailand as its president. Acceptance of Dhammic Socialism in conservative elite organisations was based on the good public perception about socialism in the early 1970s, as I have presented above.

Buddhadasa was not only popular among the progressive, tolerant elite, but once an attempt was made to have him preach against communism. Since Buddhadasa was one of the most influential preaching monks among his contemporaries, he was approached by an American, who had possibly been sent by the CIA, to oppose communists in his sermons. The American introduced himself to Buddhadasa as Professor Dairekkoe from the Cultural Assistant of the USIS (the United States Information Service)<sup>57</sup>. USIS was an American agency for anti-communist propagation in Thailand operating since 1949. It hired “fairly prominent Thai” to translate anti-communist literature from the Buddhist Society of London, for example<sup>58</sup>. The

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<sup>54</sup> Kittisak Kittisophano, Phra, Bangkok, 25 August 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Phutthathat Inthapanyo, “Sankhomniyom tam lak haeng phra sasana”, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> Sanya Thammasak, who was the President of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister (14 October 1973 – 15 February 1975) appointed by the King, and also a devoted follower of Buddhadasa, was in charge of both the Ministry of Justice and the Buddhist Association of Thailand. Sanya might have assisted the propagation of Buddhadasa’s idea of ‘socialism’.

<sup>57</sup> This spelling of the name is transcribed from Thai script. His correct name in English cannot be ascertained (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 338).

<sup>58</sup> Daniel Fineman, *A special relationship: the United States and military government in Thailand*, 269

American man from USIS explained to Buddhadasa that Thailand had a duty to resist communism, and Thailand would lose Buddhism if communists took over the country. Buddhadasa answered the American, "We are more afraid of *kilesa* (defilement) than communists", but the American did not easily give up. The American stayed overnight, and continued negotiating with several offers, such as loudspeakers and papers for printing. However, Buddhadasa declined the American's offers politely in order not to make further communication with him. After the American left, Buddhadasa received no further offers of this kind<sup>59</sup>.

As mentioned in Chapter V, some people believe that the CIA approached Kittiwuttho after Buddhadasa declined to co-operate. Kittiwuttho was a young, capable Abhidhamma preacher, who had been very popular on TV and radio since 1960<sup>60</sup>. They say that the CIA incited Kittiwuttho to attack Buddhadasa in his anti-communist sermons<sup>61</sup>. Others believe that the CIA used Anan Senakhan to attack Buddhadasa in retaliation for his lack of co-operation<sup>62</sup>. Phra Anan Chayanantho, or ordained Anan Senakhan, criticised Buddhadasa for attracting the "New Left" of materialism, and their characteristics were socialist rather than democratic idealism<sup>63</sup>. These opponents of

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1947 – 1958 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 120.

<sup>59</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 338.

<sup>60</sup> Kittiwuttho started his preaching after he was ordained in 1957 because he had already studied Buddhist scriptures before his ordination. He began appearing on TV and radio in 1960, and had his own radio station for propagation, the frequency he had obtained from the government, in 1967. In my interview with Kittiwuttho, he denied any assistance or co-operation from American agencies. He believes that Americans were happy to find his activities that taught people the danger of communism, and the principles to maintain social order. He says that there is something that he cannot propagate yet. He thinks that his devotion to protect the country should be appreciated because it prevented the country following the confusion of Laos and Cambodia. He says that he did his duty without receiving any benefit from anyone, and as a monk spent less than other people (Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, interview, Chonburi, 29 April 1999). Sithawat, who lived in the Wat Mahathat with Kittiwuttho in the late 1950s, admits that Kittiwuttho had an excellent memory, fluent speech, and attractiveness. Kittiwuttho was very good at memorising details of *Abhidhamma* theory when they studied together. It was his capability that allowed Kittiwuttho to work since he was a very young monk without any certificate of ecclesiastical education (Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Bangkok, 30 April 1999).

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter III, p. 168. Arun Wetchasuwan, who was ordained from 1962 to 1974, often saw handbills accusing Buddhadasa of being a communist in 1975 and 1976 at his temple, the Wat Chiangwai in Bangkok. Those monks who relied on superstitious magic put the handbills on the notice board of their temple, because Buddhadasa's teachings went against their activities. Those handbills were believed to be produced by Kittiwuttho, although Arun does not have any concrete evidence (Arun Wetchasuwan, interview, Bangkok, 2 March 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Suphot Dantrakun, interview, Bangkok, 8 October 1998. Suphot says that he does not have any evidence, but he inferred this from Anan's anticommunist activities.

<sup>63</sup> Phikkhu Chayanantho (Phra Anan Senakhan) (ed.), *Khamson khong diarathi* (Teachings of a heretic) (Bangkok: Ongkan phithak phutthasat, 1979), p. 2.

Buddhadasa were involved with the anti-communist campaign anyway.

Even though Buddhadasa had never been a communist, neither politically nor philosophically, Buddhadasa had been suspected as a communist by the CIA, by the Thai secret police and even by real communists<sup>64</sup>. When Khemanantha stayed at Suan Mokkh from 1967 to 1971, there was a foreign monk, who was ordained in Songkhla province. The foreign monk was conducting research in the library of Suan Mokkh, and investigating other monks there. The foreign monk did not deny it when someone asked him whether he was from the CIA<sup>65</sup>. There was also a Thai secret policeman watching Suan Mokkh. Police Colonel Chalot Saengchuthong was sent to watch Suan Mokkh from the 1950s. However, Chalot later became a disciple of Buddhadasa because of his job attending Buddhadasa very closely<sup>66</sup>. Buddhadasa also had a contact from a real communist. A monk came to see Buddhadasa, and confessed that he was a member. The monk thought that Buddhadasa was a communist or a communist sympathiser from the beginning of their work. As soon as Buddhadasa denied this, the monk left Suan Mokkh within less than an hour<sup>67</sup>.

The suspicions that he was a communist damaged Buddhadasa's reputation, compared to the celebrated early days of his activities. People kept some distance from him even though his preaching continued to be attractive for those who sought the *dhamma*<sup>68</sup>. It took people a while, at most by the end of the 1980s, to recover from the negative impression arising from the suspicion that Buddhadasa was a communist<sup>69</sup>.

In summary, Buddhadasa sought to provide the social aspect of Buddhism while the powerful critique of Marxism was banned, but Thai society suffered from the rapid economic change brought by the American-allied military government in the 1960s. Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism was elaborated and extensively promoted

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<sup>64</sup> About the first communist suspicions by Phra Thipparinya in 1948, see Chapter V, pp. 247 – 250.

<sup>65</sup> Kowit Kemanantha, interview.

<sup>66</sup> Phra Sithawat Waniwattiko, interview, Bangkok, 30 April 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 339.

<sup>68</sup> According to a conversation with Chitsai Padungrat on 21 May 1998, Chitsai was interested in visiting Suan Mokkh when she first came to Chaiya for her job as a school inspector in the late 1960s. However, she could not find anyone who would take her to Suan Mokkh, because people were afraid of being suspected as communists.

<sup>69</sup> Buddhadasa's regaining of social recognition is symbolised by the approval for building the Suan Mokkh International as one of the celebration projects by the government of the sixtieth birthday of King Rama IX in 1987. The land for the Suan Mokkh International was purchased within a few months in 1982, and its construction was completed in 1986 with a lot of assistance from the public,

after the 14 October 1973 uprising, when most progressive intellectuals, including even anti-communist intellectuals, perceived “socialism” as an order of social welfare, instead of the process of the Marxist evolution of history into the ideal communist order. Thus, Dhammic Socialism should not be understood as the propaganda of a monk who was inclined towards the left or towards communism. As the political conflict became more radical, Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism became more critical of worldly socialism, which does not generate a harmonious order of nature or the *dhamma*. However, Buddhadasa’s social thoughts, such as the critique of ‘materialism’ or ‘material fanaticism’ and Dhammic Socialism, should also not be understood as anti-communist promotion. Buddhadasa directed equally strong criticism at contemporary Thai society where a military dictatorship had installed itself, and similarly criticised the ideological conflicts between the right and left and within the left, all from a fundamental Buddhist point of view. Contrary to its name, Dhammic Socialism was even critical of secular socialist ideologues who found enemies everywhere and never ceased to struggle. This is why Dhammic Socialism was accepted by those who were in the establishment of the Thai hierarchy, and is still found to be relevant in contemporary society even after socialist states and Marxist discourse lost their popularity.

However, during the period of Buddhadasa’s extensive preaching on social issues from the 1960s to the 1990s, Thai students and activists did not always pay respect to and follow Dhammic Socialism and the elaborated social aspects of Buddhism. They had to experience Marxist ideologies and the communist movement to find relevance for Buddhism in contemporary issues.

## 2. Ideological struggles of Buddhism and Marxism: the experience of Buddhadasa’s lay followers

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the strict control of the military dictatorship, the public sphere of Thailand became vigorous, especially after June 1968 when the Thanom-Praphat government promulgated the new constitution. In December 1968,

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as well (Metta Phanit, interview, Chaiya, 5 March 1999).

students from fifteen universities organised the Student Volunteer Group to Observe the National Election in order to watch the February 1969 election, which was to be held twelve years after the previous one. In major universities around this time too there emerged small student groups for social and political discussions<sup>70</sup>. Buddhist intellectuals were also involved in these students' awareness of their contemporary society and politics right up to 14 October 1973. It was not Buddhadasa alone who discussed social issues from Buddhist perspectives. The interest and further discussions of lay Buddhist intellectuals and students were essential for Buddhism to become an influential critique of contemporary social issues. The role of Sulak Sivaraksa and his group, who call themselves "engaged Buddhists", was especially prominent. Through his publications and organising seminars and groups, students in the eve of the 14 October uprising developed their concerns about society and politics. This Buddhist networking of Sulak was one of the main ways for Marxists to return once again to be involved to the Buddhist public sphere.

#### Buddhist intellectuals and students in discussion groups on social issues

Sulak Sivaraksa (1933 – )<sup>71</sup> is from a well-to-do family of Chinese descent, wealthy enough to cover the cost of his studies in England to become a barrister, although his family fortune has not permitted him to live without engaging in an occupation. Sulak always needed to make a living using his skills and talents. Like many other Chinese descendants in Thailand, Sulak also inherited Thai culture and Buddhism because of his grandparents' inter-marriage with ethnic Thai women who were Buddhist. Although Sulak's concern with Buddhism began in his childhood and continued while he was in England, his contact with Buddhism belonged to the area of conventional Buddhist beliefs and practices, which often involved supernaturalism<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Morell and Chai-anan, *Political conflict in Thailand*, pp. 139 – 143.

<sup>71</sup> About Sulak's biography, see Sulak Sivaraksa, *Loyalty demands dissent: autobiography of an engaged Buddhist* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998); So. Siwarak, *Chuang haeng chiwit* (A period of my life) (Bangkok: Khlet Thai); So. Siwarak, *Chuang lang haeng chiwit* (The latter period of my life) (Bangkok: Khlet Thai, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Sulak, *Loyalty demands dissent*, pp. 14 – 17. Sulak gradually became interested in the 'modern Buddhism' discussed in Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*, as well as in Suchiwo's preaching, and the works of Phra Phimolatham (Choi Thanathatto) (Sulak, *Loyalty demands dissent*, pp. 26, 32). However, Sulak at first did not like Buddhadasa because of his radical teaching that the Buddha image could become a hindrance to reach the *dharmma*. When he returned from England, Sulak read a book of Buddhadasa's, *Tam roi phra arahant* (Following the footprints of *arahant*) in a new light



Sulak was made aware of the role of Buddhism in social issues by Buddhadasa<sup>73</sup>, and later also by Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto, who used to teach and work as the deputy secretary general at the Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University from 1961 to 1974<sup>74</sup>. Through his refined sensitivity towards intellectual trends, his manner of networking with high society, and his skill in a communication, Sulak became an important social critic and developed his role as an “engaged Buddhist” in the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand.

Returning from England in 1962 under the military dictatorship, Sulak demonstrated his ability as an editor of such journals as *Sangkhomsat parithat* (*Social science review*), and developed further opportunities to express his opinion as a social critic. He was also involved in promoting monastic education, especially at Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University and Wat Thongnoppakhun, which his family has continued to support. Throughout the 1960s Sulak attempted to provide social perspectives on issues such as conservation, peace and civil society. In his work on the journal editorial board and about education on social issues for monks, it later became known that Sulak had introduced funding from anti-communist agencies such as the Asia Foundation<sup>75</sup>. However, Sulak was never an ideologue of these agencies, he presented his own critical view on society which was sometimes intermingled with

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(Sulak, *Loyalty demands dissent*, p.89).

<sup>73</sup> Sulak, *Loyalty demands dissent*, pp. 87 – 92. Although Sulak’s role in promoting Buddhadasa’s social thought has been significant, Buddhadasa was not the only mentor of Sulak. In terms of personal relationship, Sulak has had stronger ties with monks at Wat Thongnoppakhun and Mahachulalongkon Buddhist University. Sulak does not hesitate to have a different view from Buddhadasa, and sometimes he makes critical comments about Buddhadasa’s view. Before their first meeting in the mid-1960s, when Sulak had just started the *Social science review*, both Buddhadasa and Sulak were impressed by each other’s reading of their respective works (Phra Pracha, *Lao wai ...*, p. 401; Sulak, *Loyalty demands dissent*, p.89). Sulak’s writings on, and interviews with Buddhadasa are collected in several books such as: S. Sivaraksa, “Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: a religious innovator of undying face”, *Siam in crisis* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1990), pp. 224 – 248; So. Siwarak, “Than phutthathat phikkhu” (Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), *Phra di thi na ruchak* (Good monks who are worth knowing) (Bangkok: Samnakphim khlet thai, 1967, 1987), pp. 149 – 176; So. Siwarak, *Itthiphon phutthathat to sangkhom* (The influence of Buddhadasa to society) (Bangkok: Khana kammakan sasana phua sangkhom, 1990); So. Siwarak, *Sonthana kap than phutthathat phikkhu* (Interview with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) (Bangkok: Khana kammakan sasana phua sangkhom, 1993).

<sup>74</sup> P. A. Payutto (1939 –) is also known by his ecclesiastical titles, Phra Siwisutthimoli (1969 – 1973); Phra Ratchawaramuni (1973 – 1987); Phra Thepwetani (1987 – 1993); and Phra Thammapidok (1993 – present). About the evaluation of P. A. Payutto by socially engaged Buddhists, see Phra Phaisan Wisalo, So. Siwarak, Prawet Wasi, and Wira Sombun, *Patthakatha khrop rop 60 pi phra thammapidok (po. o. payutto): phuttha-tham kap udomkan samrap sattawat thi 21* (The memorial lecture for sixty years of Phra Thammapidok: Buddha-Dhamma and the aim for the twenty-first century) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimuthong, 1999).

<sup>75</sup> Sulak, *Loyalty demands dissent*, p.87.

Buddhism. For example, Sulak attacked the problems of the class gap both in Thai society and in Western material civilisation, and he insisted on the significance of morality and ethics in actualising social justice<sup>76</sup>. Although Sulak was suspected as both a CIA agent and a communist because of his funding arrangements and critical opinions respectively, he was skilled at discovering the abilities of young people, and giving them a chance to develop it<sup>77</sup>. This is why Sulak has been a respected mentor in student discussion groups such as the Parithat Sewana (Critical discussion group) and the Yaowachon Sayam (Young Siamese), especially before the 14 October 1973 uprising. Before the uprising, the influence of Marxism had not yet arrived, and modern Buddhist thought, such as that of Buddhadasa and P. A. Payutto Bhikkhu, was quite influential in these discussion groups.

The Parithat Sewana was established by Buddhist students and intellectuals after the seminar on “The Social and Ethical Responsibility of Youth for Siam” at the Student Christian Centre in January 1966. This seminar, which was organised by a Protestant group headed by Koson Sisan, invited famous Buddhist intellectuals such as Sanya Dhammasakdi, Puey Ungphakorn, and Direk Chayanam to speak, and appealed to students in every university for its audience. After the seminar, some students came to Sulak for assistance in organising a group where Buddhist students would be able to have similar opportunities to discuss social issues as the Christians had been doing. The Parithat Sewana, the most famous student discussion group in the 1960s, was born from concerns with religions and society rather than with Marxism<sup>78</sup>.

In the Parithat Sewana<sup>79</sup>, there were mainly three sub-groups: a group for public panel discussion, a group for editing the journal, *Sangkomsat parithat chabap naksuksa* (Social science review student edition), and a group for study trips to provinces and ancient temples for fine art appreciation. For the public panel discussions, Sulak invited those who had graduated from universities in Europe to express their views. The student movement leaders after the 14 October uprising, including Seksan

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<sup>76</sup> For examples of Sulak’s critiques in the 1960s, see S. Sivaraksa, *Siam in crisis*, part III.

<sup>77</sup> Pracha Hutaniwat, interview, Bangkok, 1 May 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, *Loyalty demands dissent*, pp. 108 - 110; So. Siwarak, *Chuang lang haeng chiwit*, pp. 103 - 116.

<sup>79</sup> The following descriptions of Parithat Sewana are based on an interview with Phiphop Thongchai, a regular member of the Parithat Sewana from the beginning (Phiphop Thongchai, interview, Bangkok, 24 August 1999).

Prasoetkun, Weng Tochirakan, and Charan Ditthanphichai, were rather minor participants who only listened to the panel discussions. They came to the panel discussions of the Parithat Sewana in order to learn about progressive ideas in foreign countries. In the group engaged in editing the journal, there were Khanchai Bunphan, Suchit Wongthet, Nidhi Aeusrivongse, Komon Khimthong, and Phiphop Thongchai. All later became famous and active in the area of journalism, academia, and were involved in social activism. As these participants and activities suggest, the discussions in the Parithat Sewana were led by the Buddhist Sulak and the Western educated progressive elites, and the influence of Marxism and the Communist Party had arrived but had not yet overwhelmed discussions<sup>80</sup>.

Aside from Sulak, among the participants in the Parithat Sewana, Weng Tochirakan (1951 –)<sup>81</sup> was one of the most devoted promoters of Buddhadasa. Weng took part in the Parithat Sewana from the time he was in high school, and he later became the president of the Mahidol University Student Club and was one of the leaders of the May demonstration against General Suchinda in 1992. Weng was impressed by Buddhadasa's book, *Koet ma thammai (Why were we born?)* when he was in junior high school, and from that time he began propagating Buddhadasa's teachings to his friends by distributing Buddhadasa's books. Weng decided to follow as his principle Buddhadasa's saying, "not being egotistical, destroying egoism, and serving the people". When he was a Mahidol University student he started organising medical students for voluntary public health activities and helping people wounded in demonstrations<sup>82</sup>. Weng was called by his friend, "a commander of Suan Mokkh" (*mae*

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<sup>80</sup> Although in the Parithat Sewana there was some people such as Charan who had connection with the Communist Party of Thailand, neither Marxism nor the Communist Party was influential.

<sup>81</sup> When Weng entered the medical school of Mahidol University in 1968, he was seventeen years old. Since Weng entered primary school when he was five, he graduated from his high school at the age of sixteen. Weng's experience described here is based on interviews with him by the author, Bangkok, 23 December 1998 and 31 August 1999.

<sup>82</sup> Weng started voluntary activities from his first year in Mahidol University in 1968. In his first year, he was a secretary of the student body. In his second year in university, Weng became the president of the Buddhist club at Mahidol University. He was not very active as its president because he did not want to be involved in activities for Buddhist ceremonies, to which he did not want to be attached. However, it was his third year when Weng started a social activity outside university. He organised a medical volunteer group consisting of medical students to go to Khlong Toei slum. They gave children vaccinations, took physical measurements, and gave advice not to become drug addicts. In his fourth year, Weng co-ordinated a group ordination of twenty medical students. They had an ordination ceremony at Wat Chonlaprathan by receiving precepts from Panyanatha Bhikkhu, and then had training by Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh. Buddhadasa's preaching to these medical

*thap haeng suan mok*). Weng's example indicates that Buddhadasa's guiding principle for the present life was interpreted to apply to social engagement of activist students, when Marxism was not yet dominant.

The other student discussion group, the Yaowachon Sayam, was established by students at Suan Kulap High School, who sought advice from Sulak Sivaraksa. The Yaowachon Sayam came to exist because of Pracha Hutaniwat and his friends, who organised a group at a high school exhibition on society, and also a moot student election campaign which was modelled on the general election in 1969 awaited for twelve years. After their experiences in giving public speeches at these events, they invited students in other high schools to found an inter-high school student organisation, the Yaowachon Sayam<sup>83</sup>.

In the beginning Marxist elements were also few in the newly founded Yaowachon Sayam, although its members aimed at devoting themselves to the good of society<sup>84</sup>. Pracha was interested in the life of socially concerned student activists written about in Komon Khimthong's cremation volume. He got in touch with one of the editors of the volume, Sulak Sivaraksa, and later with the university students in the Parithat Sewana. As one of the first projects of the Yaowachon Sayam, Pracha organised a retreat in early 1971 at the village of Samkhok on the outskirts of Bangkok. Pracha named this retreat "Human potentiality training camp" (*Khai fuk kamlang khon*). For this project, Pracha got an idea from Komon Khimthong's book, which stated from an insight from Buddhism, namely that it is important to develop the human nature of social workers themselves before working for society. Thus, this camp did not place emphasis on constructing something for villagers, but invited lecturers to give students a talk. The

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student monks is collected in Phutthathat Phikkhu (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), *Mahidon tham (Mahitala dhamma)* (Chaiya: Mulanithi Thammatham). The Thai word *mahidon* is linked to two Sanskrit words *mahitala* (surface of the earth) and *mahidhara*, literally a mountain but by extension meaning something indestructible and strong. In his fifth year in medical school, Weng was the secretary general of the Medical Student Club of Thailand (*Chomrom nisit naksuksa phaet haeng prathet thai*). He organised medical students from Chulalongkorn University, Sirirat Hospital, and Ramathibodi Hospital to do medical examinations at Khong Toei slum every Saturday and Sunday (Weng, interview, 23 December 1998).

<sup>83</sup> Apart from Pracha, the original members of the Yaowachon Sayam included Santisuk Sophonsiri and Wisit Wongwinyu, who later established the Ahimsa Group, which launched a journal, *Pacharayasan* (Pracha Hutaniwat, interview, Bangkok, 1 May 1999).

<sup>84</sup> The later generations of the Yaowachon Sayam became more radical in political activism, and a member, Thongchai Winichakun became a student leader of 6 October 1976. Another member, Phaisan Wongwarawisit, however chose a non-violent method for his activism, and he worked with

lecturers included both non-communists, such as Sulak Sivaraksa and Ravi Bhavilai, as well as some university student activists connected to the Communist Party. Regardless of the original founders' intentions and concerns, the Communist Party agents came to recruit students in the Yaowachon Sayam from the very first retreat they had<sup>85</sup>. The influence of Marxism and the Communist Party crept into these student discussion groups also through the CPT mobilisers and students who had parents in the CPT<sup>86</sup>.

Buddhadasa's thought was significant for the students in the Yaowachon Sayam as well. Pracha Hutaniwat<sup>87</sup>, one of its founders, was a prominent follower of Buddhadasa. Pracha became interested in Buddhadasa's books when he felt bored with his elite high school life, though he was a selected student in the "King's room" at Suan Kulap High School. Pracha was deeply impressed by the book, *Chit wang* (Empty mind), which was a summary of Buddhadasa's teaching written by Pun Chongprasoet. After reading this book, Pracha bought all of Buddhadasa's books at the Thammabucha Bookshop, and even visited Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh by temporarily escaping school. Pracha gave some public speeches on Buddhadasa's teaching in his high school, and received a good response from his friends, who then developed their network into the Yaowachon Sayam.

Kanya Lilalai (1955 –)<sup>88</sup>, a schoolgirl junior to Pracha, became interested in Buddhadasa's thought through the speech of Pracha at Suan Kulap. From Pracha, Kanya borrowed a book by Buddhadasa, *Tua ku khong ku* (Me and mine), and understood the essence of Buddhism. After reading this book, just like Pracha, Kanya also became a regular customer of the Thammabucha Bookshop, which deals specifically with Buddhadasa's books<sup>89</sup>. Kanya also became a member of the Yaowachon Sayam.

These students in the discussion groups in the 1960s were very good academically. Their intellectual pursuit went far beyond the school curriculum, and they sought new knowledge and the path to take for their life, society, and politics. Even

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the Ahimsa Group (Pracha, interview).

<sup>85</sup> Pracha, interview.

<sup>86</sup> Phra Phaisan Wisalo, interview, Bangkok, 25 August 1999. Phaisan (1953 –) was a member of the Yaowachon Sayam, he is a year younger than Pracha.

<sup>87</sup> The story of Pracha's experience is based on an interview with him.

<sup>88</sup> The story of Kanya's experience is based on: Kanya Lilalai, interview, Bangkok, 18 December 1999; and Rudi Roengchai (pseudonym of Kanya Lilalai), *Yot nung nai krasae than* (A drop of water in the stream) (Bangkok: Ming mit, 1996).

<sup>89</sup> About Thammabucha Bookshop, see Chapter II, p. 129.

though Marxism was banned by the military dictatorship, they read whatever books were available to them<sup>90</sup>. They found inspiring ideas in the works of the “new left” and the student movement in Europe<sup>91</sup>, as well as in the life of Komon Khimthong<sup>92</sup>. Komon dedicated his life to serving society by becoming a teacher in a rural area rather than choosing an elite career, even though he graduated from Chulalongkorn University, the most elite university in Thailand<sup>93</sup>.

For the students during their period of exploration (*yuk sawaeng ha*)<sup>94</sup>, the role of Buddhist intellectuals was significant. Buddhadasa gave them an insight into life, which did not arise from their success in elite high schools and universities, and he also showed them the significance of training their minds in order to develop their social engagement. For the intellectual inquiry of these students, Sulak Sivaraksa contributed a lot in terms of preparing opportunities for them to acquire and to exchange knowledge outside school. When the public sphere became enlivened again under the military dictatorship, Buddhist intellectuals were developing a new role, which was largely unknown in the conventional Buddhism that had been maintained in temple activities, such as rituals, scriptural studies, and meditation. However, the development of this role of Buddhism stopped after the 14 October 1973 uprising with the return of Marxism in the public sphere and the radicalising political conflict.

#### Buddhadasa’s disciples and the experience of communism

The rapidly changing intellectual currents after 14 October 1973 greatly affected students’ and activists’ view on Buddhism. The more they were attached to the Marxist tenets of the Communist Party, the more the differences between Marxism and Buddhism became sharply contrasted. Buddhism was either ignored or abandoned, even

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<sup>90</sup> Kanya Lilalai, interview.

<sup>91</sup> Kanya Lilalai, interview with author, Bangkok, 18 December 1999.

<sup>92</sup> Pracha Hutaniwat, interview; Weng Tochirakan, interview, 31 August 1999; Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae tan*, p. 104.

<sup>93</sup> Pracha, who received the highest marks in his university entrance exam among those who applied for the social science and humanities, chose to study in the Faculty of Education at Chulalongkorn University in order to follow the path of Komon (Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae tan*, p. 104). Even after Komon’s tragic murder, his aim and path has been respected by his junior student activists, and Sulak founded the Komon Khimthong Foundation for publishing books and organising public lectures that shared the same purpose (Sulak Sivaraksa, *Loyalty demands dissent*, pp. 116 – 118).

<sup>94</sup> My impression is that this Thai phrase is used for young people in the late 1960s in the period before student activism, and so prior to the strong influence of Marxism. Marxism was banned at

though it had developed a social dimension during the period of Marxism's absence from the public sphere.

After the 14 October event, Sulak, who was rumoured to be connected with the CIA, was abandoned by student activists, and the Parithat Sewana did not meet again. A participant in the Parithat Sewana, Seksan Prasotkun, suddenly became a hero of the people who had won the dramatic victory over the military dictators. Students who used to attend the Parithat Sewana, including Seksan Prasotkun, Charan Ditthanphichai, Pridi Bunsu, and even Weng, the devoted Buddhadasa follower, began meeting outside the Parithat Sewana and were involved deeper in reading Marxist literature. Weng felt that he could not express his faith in Buddhism, because his friends called him sarcastically *mae thap tham* (commander of the *dhamma*)<sup>95</sup>. When the assassinations of students by the authorities and by rightist organisations escalated, all these students were forced into the jungle for the communist struggle<sup>96</sup>.

While the Yaowachon Sayam did not disappear after the 14 October event, its character changed. Buddhism was either abandoned or ignored when the influence of the Communist Party rapidly penetrated its membership, and members became connected to the CPT youth network. Early in 1973, even before the 14 October uprising, Pracha was convinced that Marxism had a better approach to social change than Buddhism, and he became a member of the Communist Youth League (*Sannibat yaowachon khommiunit haeng prathet thai*; Thai abbr.: So. Yo. Tho.), which was under the guidance of the Communist Party of Thailand<sup>97</sup>. The strong intellectual trend of Marxism also overwhelmed Kanya's faith in Buddhism, and she chose to be a Maoist, abandoning Buddhism. She also became involved in the CPT as a full party member, and worked for the Voice of the People of Thailand radio station of the CPT located in Yunnan, which was an intellectual centre of the CPT<sup>98</sup>.

It was not because of the religious policy of the CPT that these student

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that time, they were working for a way to improve the world but they had not yet found an answer.

<sup>95</sup> Weng, interview, 31 August 1999.

<sup>96</sup> Weng Tochirakan, interview, 23 December 1998 and 31 August 1999.

<sup>97</sup> Pracha was already a member of the League before the 14 October uprising. During that, Pracha and his cell members were able to escape to a province because they had information from the Party in advance.

<sup>98</sup> Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae than*, p. 147.

followers of Buddhadasa abandoned Buddhism in the face of Marxism and the CPT<sup>99</sup>. It was rather an ideological defect of Buddhism that these students had perceived. Compared with the materialist theory and the actual operation of the communist revolution, Buddhism looked very idealistic and thus ineffectual for social change. Even if religion could help people, these students considered that religion could only help individuals, but had no answer to social problems<sup>100</sup>. Furthermore, Kanya felt that she had to abandon Buddhism when she decided to join the armed struggle of the CPT, because the act of killing contradicts Buddhist precepts. She wrote, "If I do not abandon religion, I cannot become a new person for communism. Thus, I chose to be a person who does not have religion ... I offered myself as a soldier"<sup>101</sup>.

In the powerful trend of Marxism or the Communist movement after the 14 October uprising, less mature, younger students were willing to accept the formulae of Mao Tse-tung<sup>102</sup>. In the radicalising ideological conflicts between liberalism and communism, as well as even within the communist camp where they accused each other of being "revisionist", the easiest and most effective strategy in political debate was to adopt the CPT's ideological line as their own opinion. The ready-made set of ideas that

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<sup>99</sup> The CPT did not demand that its followers abandon religion as a prerequisite of its membership. In fact, the CPT was tolerant of its members' faith in Buddhism to a certain extent (Phirun Chatrawanitchakun, interview, Bangkok, 1 September 1999; Chonthira Satyawatthana, interview, Bangkok, 25 August 1999; Prawut Simanta, interview, 16 August 1999, etc). Although the intellectual members were criticised for participating in superstitious rituals to protect themselves from the fear of *phi* or evil spirits, members were not criticised for having an interest in Buddhist philosophy and for respecting "good monks" such as Phra Phimolatham and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. (Phirun, interview.) There were even some CPT leaders who admitted the significance of religion such as Pluang Wannasi (1922 – 1996) and Prasit Thiansiri. Pluang was a former MP from Surin Province and a central committee member of the CPT, and was also known for his poems. He respected Buddhadasa and Phra Thammapidok (Prayut Payutto) until he died in China (Khana kammakan chat ngan ramluk pluang wannasi (The committee for the memory of Pluang Wannasi) (ed.), *Prawat phon gnan lae kham ramluk pluang wannasi: kwi, nak khit, nak khian, nak su* (The history of works and memories of Pluang Wannasi: poet, thinker, writer, and fighter) (Bangkok: Khana kammakan chat ngan ramluk pluang wannasi, 1997), p. 20). Prasit was the leader of the CPT in the southern provinces, which had been the most powerful and self-supportive army of the CPT that did not require assistance from China and foreign countries. When he was confronted by and disappointed with the dominant Chinese Party's policy, and sent on to the northern bases, he was reading the *Tripitaka* in the jungle (Seksan Prasoeakun, interview, Bangkok, 31 August 1999). Seksan was together with Prasit in the jungle in the north for six months. Prasit had been in jail for the Peace Committee case during 1952 – 1957, and practised *vipassanā* meditation and studied the Abhidhamma with Phra Phimolatham (Suphat Sukhonthaphirom, "Raluk thung kulap saipradit" (The memory of Kulap Saipradit), Suphot Dantrakun (ed.), *Ramluk thung kulap saipradit*, p. 10). In the CPT, it was just that no one called him/herself a *phutthasasanikachon* or a Buddhist (Phirun, interview).

<sup>100</sup> Pracha, interview; Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae than*, p. 147.

<sup>101</sup> Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae than*, p. 170.



the CPT certified spread without being critically examined. In this context, students paid little attention to religion, which Karl Marx named “the opium of the people”. They considered religion as “opium” or ineffectual idealism, in this they included the most rational school of Buddhism. These students did not even notice that Buddhadasa placed emphasis on Dhammic Socialism during the time of their student movement in the 1970s<sup>103</sup>. The tendency to conform to the CPT’s Maoist ideology and ignore religious value had overwhelmed the Thai students by the time of the 6 October coup in 1976.

The armed conflicts escalated particularly after the Communist victory in Indochinese countries in April 1975 and the abolition of the Lao monarchy in December 1975. These events increased the level of fear among conservatives including the royal family, army, civilian bureaucracy, and local businessmen. Especially after 1975, the rightist mass organisations also grew rapidly for the purpose of countering communism and adherence to the nationalist symbols: nation, religion, and king<sup>104</sup>. After all the assassinations of and assaults on the leading activists, the radicalised rightist mass organisations, such as Red Gaur, Village Scouts, and Naowaphon, massacred students at Thammasat University on 6 October 1976, and the military overthrew civilian government and parliamentary politics. In order to take refuge from the reactionary violence, students had to break away from the urban mainstream and join the CPT’s armed struggle in the jungle.

### Buddhism’s role for social change as an alternative to communist struggle

Although during the 1970s Buddhism was considered useless by radical student activists, and was utilised by the rightist mass organisations as a symbolic fortress against the communist invasion, Buddhism did not just serve as anti-communist propaganda. As Buddhadasa and Sulak had attempted in the 1960s, Buddhism had the possibility to be developed as a critical discourse against existing social injustice. Even though most students rushed to the CPT’s Marxist tenets, there was a small group of

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<sup>102</sup> Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae than*, pp. 143 – 144, 148.

<sup>103</sup> Weng, interview, 23 December 1998; Anut Aphaphirom, interview, Bangkok, 17 August 1999.

<sup>104</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of national loyalty*, pp. 19 – 33.

students who preferred Buddhism as a basis for their social actions rather than the armed struggles led by the CPT.

This group is called *klum ahimsa* (*ahimsa* group, or non-violent group) or *klum santi withi* (group of the peaceful method). These students found that the Buddhist concept of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, was more significant than any goal to be achieved by violence, killing, and revolution. They were a group of Buddhist students in the Yaowachon Sayam who organised themselves as the Ahimsa Group in 1974 in opposition to the current of students devoting themselves to the CPT's revolutionary movement. The students in the Ahimsa Group included Wisit Wongwinyu<sup>105</sup>, Santisuk Sophonsiri<sup>106</sup>, Phaisan Wongwarawisit<sup>107</sup> (who later ordained and took the name, Phra Phaisan Wisalo), and Pracha Hutauwat (also known by his ordained name Phra Pracha Pasannathammo while he was a monk during 1975 – 1986) after his withdrawal from the CPT's youth organisation. They have remained under Sulak Sivaraksa's advisement, and developed their *ahimsa* movement further into the 'socially engaged Buddhist' movement.

The Ahimsa Group centred their activities on publishing the journal, *Pacharayasan*, which means "The teacher of the teacher". *Pacharayasan* first came to exist in 1971 under the editorship of Phiphop Thongchai while he was a student in the Prasanmit School of Sinakharinwirot University. At that time, Thanom's military dictatorship banned the publishing of new journals so that people used the name of an existing journal that had already been registered. When Phiphop started *Pacharayasan*, it was officially a special edition of a journal of the Prasanmit School alumni association, *Kansuksa* (Education), and the full name of the journal was *Kansuksa chabap pacharayasan* (Education: *Pacharayasan* edition). Under Phiphop's editorial board, *Pacharayasan* was a journal specialising in alternative education, and introduced Summer Hill's style of education. When Phiphop graduated from university in 1974, Sulak gave the Ahimsa Group an opportunity to work for the editorial board of

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<sup>105</sup> Wisit was the practical editor of *Pacharayasan* in the second half of 1974. The nominal editor (*bannathikan*) of the journal was Sulak Sivaraksa for official purposes. Wisit was officially in the position of sub-editor (*phu chuai saraniyakon*) to the main editor, Phiphop Thongchai, but it was Wisit who was in charge of presenting the volumes in line with the principle of *ahimsa*.

<sup>106</sup> Santisuk was the editor (*saraniyakon*) in 1975.

<sup>107</sup> Phaisan was the editor (*saraniyakon*) in 1975 – 1977.

*Pacharayasan*. It was after the 14 October, and the political oppression of the military dictatorship had been abolished so that the succeeding editorial board of *Pacharayasan* was officially registered as a new journal, and it changed its editorial line to *ahimsa*<sup>108</sup>.

As the editorial board of *Pacharayasan*, the Ahimsa Group propagated the philosophy of non-violence. Because all these students were competent in English, they were able to seek alternative views of Marxism in foreign countries through English materials. In the journal they promoted and translated the works of leaders of non-violence movements such as Gandhi<sup>109</sup>, and Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam<sup>110</sup>.

While Gandhi's works had already become well-known in Thailand since 1938, the Ahimsa Group contributed and attracted their contemporary and younger student activists through introducing and translating the works of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk who fought against the Vietnam War using non-violent resistance. One of the most famous works of Thich Nhat Hanh, *Miracle of being awake*, which was first translated into Thai by Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, the then ordained Pracha Hutauwat, has gained lasting popularity since it was first published as a pocketbook in 1976, and by 1995 had been reprinted ten times<sup>111</sup>. The way of political activism exemplified by Thich Nhat Hanh was strength of mind cultivated by Buddhist meditation practice instead of physical violence. This was unique in late 1970s Thailand both in circles of radicalised student activism, and of Buddhism, which most often taught people to seclude themselves to achieve their individual salvation, and was criticised from a Marxist perspective as useless idealism. In this light, Buddhism was no longer necessarily a conservative national ideology against materialist communism, but was instead given the role of criticism against any violence for any political purpose of

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<sup>108</sup> Phiphop Thongchai, interview, Bangkok, 24 August 1999.

<sup>109</sup> Gandhi's life and work was known in Thailand at least since 1938 from Sawami Sathayanantha Buri's (Swami Satyananda Puri's), *Mahatama khandhi: phu patthiwat india* (Mahatma Gandhi: an India's revolutionary) (Bangkok: Dharmashrama, 1938). Gandhi became more popular among recent generations through the translations of Karuna and Ruan'urai Kusalasai, the Thai scholars on Indian literature in Hindi and Sanskrit. *Pacharayasan* also propagated the ideas and activities of Gandhi and his followers from the second half of the 1970s onwards.

<sup>110</sup> Pracha Hutauwat, interview. Thich Nhat Hanh's thought and approach became very influential among Thai student activists through the works of the Ahimsa Group in *Pacharayasan*. About Thich Nhat Hanh, see Sallie B. King, "Thich Nhat Hanh and the United Buddhist Church: nondualism in action", Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (eds.), *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist liberation movements in Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 321 – 363.

<sup>111</sup> Thit Nat Han (Thich Nhat Hanh), *Patihan haeng kan tun yu samoe* (Miracle of being awake) (translated by Phra Pracha Pasannathammo) (Bangkok: Mulanithi Komon Khimthong, 1995).

either the right or the left.

The role of the Buddhist activists became significant especially in the absence of the radicalised students who *khao pa* or joined in the jungle struggles of the Communist Party after the 6 October Coup in 1976. The Ahimsa Group actualised their philosophy of non-violence in the face of the reactionary coup on 6 October. The expanded network of the Ahimsa Group, which was named the Co-ordinating Group of Religion for Society, or CGRS, undertook the human rights campaign to release the political prisoners of the coup turmoil. The members of the Ahimsa Group wrote open letters, visited those political prisoners, and made reports for international organisations such as Amnesty International in order to pressure the Thai government to ensure fair trials and prompt release. One of the leaders of the CGRS, Phaisan Wongwarawisit, currently ordained as Phra Phaisan Wisalo, estimated that the activities of the CGRS were meaningful both as symbolic action and as direct action to demand the government and the public to release 600 political prisoners<sup>112</sup>. This action of the Ahimsa Group, based on Buddhist philosophy instead of Marxism, was an alternative way of struggling with political and social injustice.

Although Sulak has been a respected advisor and a mentor of the Ahimsa Group, initiatives in these philosophical pursuits and political actions were taken by the young activists rather than by Sulak. The activists in the Ahimsa Group used Sulak's connections with international organisations during Sulak's absence, he had been invited to the United States at the time of the 6 October coup and did not return to Thailand until the situation eased under the Kriangsak regime in the late 1970s. The Ahimsa Group appreciated Sulak for identifying the potential of young students and finding opportunities for them<sup>113</sup>, but at the same time, the inspiration from the Ahimsa Group seemed to be essential to the further development of Sulak's ideological and organising activism as an engaged Buddhist.

#### Activists' return to Buddhism

On the other hand, activists who were involved with the Communist Party of

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<sup>112</sup> The announcement of the CGRS establishment is in "Thalaengkan" (Announcement), *Pacharayasan*, Vol. 5 No. 17 (March – April 1976); Pracha, interview; Phra Phaisan Wisalo, interview, Bangkok, 25 August 1999.

Thailand, when their commitment to the Party became deeper, faced problems with its inflexible adherence to ideology. When the reality of the Communist Party disappointed them, some activists, including those who once abandoned Buddhism for dogmatic loyalty to communism, revisited Buddhism to seek more relevant ideas and another approach to society.

Pracha Hutaniwat (1952 – ), who had been one of the founders of the Yaowachon Sayam, in 1973 abandoned Buddhism and became a member of a youth organisation of the CPT. He then returned to Buddhism and was involved with the Ahimsa Group shortly before the 6 October 1976 military coup. Pracha's withdrawal from the CPT was much earlier than most students who only left the jungle struggle from 1980 onwards. Pracha was disappointed with the CPT's project of revolution because of its corrupt administration, its rigid, intolerant ideological adherence to the line of the Chinese Communist Party, and the lack of spiritual value in the movement<sup>114</sup>.

By experiencing Marxism's criticism of religion, where it was regarded as an individual comfort and impractical idealism, Pracha discovered another dimension of Buddhist insight and meditation that actually contributed significantly to social activism. He criticised the "good" Buddhist practices as egotistical. For example, a hospital, whose Buddhist club of doctors and nurses were known for their eager participation in meditation practices and devotion to their monk teachers, actually gave unequal medical treatment to the rich and the poor. Pracha insisted that their religious practices should not be satisfied in seclusion for their individual achievement, but rather should generate right view that could distinguish good from evil in society to make the world better by their conduct<sup>115</sup>. Pracha argued that the latter type of meditation practice would help activists to challenge the social evils even being at odds with the mainstream view. The *paññā* or insight, which can arise from meditation practice, would distinguish what was just without conforming to the world of "materialism" that suppresses humanity<sup>116</sup>.

When Pracha withdrew from the Communist Youth League, he ordained as a

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<sup>113</sup> Pracha Hutaniwat, interview.

<sup>114</sup> Pracha, interview.

<sup>115</sup> Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, *Phawana kap kan-rap-chai sangkhom* (Meditation practice and serving society) (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1981), pp. 5 – 9.

<sup>116</sup> Phra Pracha, *Phawana kap kan-rap-chai sangkhom*, pp. 42 – 45.

Buddhist monk<sup>117</sup>. Among the members of the Ahimsa Group, Pracha became the closest disciple of Buddhadasa, with whom he stayed at Suan Mokkh for six years, 1980 – 1986. As a capable disciple of Buddhadasa's later years, Pracha did a thorough interview with Buddhadasa about his life and thought. His interview was published as a series of books entitled *Lao wai mua wai sonthaya: atchiwaprawat khong than phutthathat* (Talking in the twilight years: an autobiography of Ven. Buddhadasa). It is not only useful for Buddhadasa's personal history and thought, but also for the contemporary history of Thai Buddhism which he learnt from and participated in as a significant contributor.

After his experience with Marxism, Pracha summarised his view on Buddhadasa's contribution to Thai people and society. He said that Buddhadasa pointed out the deepest roots of the Thai people and of human beings, or the *pumipanya* of their own civilisation<sup>118</sup>. Pracha emphasised that what prevents individuals from realising *sammādiṭṭhi* or "right view" to distinguish the real cause of remediable social problems is *watthuniyom* or the "materialism" of both capitalist consumerism and Marxist tenets, both give more weight to the material to the rather than the spiritual<sup>119</sup>. For Pracha, the synthesis of the conflict between the right and left was Buddhism: the essence of Buddhist *dhamma* that Buddhadasa presented, but it is distinguished from superficial ritual or superstitious beliefs. Pracha published his views, learnt from Buddhadasa, in *Pacharayasan*. His articles became popular among younger student activists, who came along after the Communist Party was in decline, they supported the non-violent approach that respects humanity the most.

On the other hand, Kanya, as a woman, had a different experience when she withdrew from the Communist Party of Thailand. Kanya, who worked for the Party's radio broadcasting in Yunnan as a full member, had to face the reality of the CPT in many ways. She witnessed among the CPT's executives, financial corruption, the Chinese faction's dominance, and the rigid ideological adherence to the Chinese

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<sup>117</sup> Pracha's ordained name was Phra Pracha Pasannathammo. Pracha remained a monk for eleven years, and disrobed in 1986 (Pracha, interview).

<sup>118</sup> Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, "Than phutthathat kap kan-patiwat watthanatham" (Ven. Buddhadasa and revolution in culture) in *Phutthathat kap khon run mai*, p. 154.

<sup>119</sup> Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, "Than phutthathat kap kan-patiwat watthanatham", pp. 148, 154, 160 – 170.

Communist Party, which deserted the CPT for its own national interest in a new period of international relations.

China, which had both ideologically and materially supported the CPT's activities from its beginning, adopted a pragmatic policy in the new international situation, which in effect left its subsidiary stranded. After Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, in February 1979 China invaded Vietnam in retaliation. Due to this dispute, the CPT, which was allied with China rather than Vietnam, lost their vital supply routes and campsites in Laos, which was allied with Vietnam. This political change made it very difficult for the CPT guerrillas to survive and struggle in the north and northeastern jungles of Thailand. Furthermore, China sought co-operation with the Thai government to assist the Khmer Rouge on the Thai border to help block the Vietnamese advance in its southern region. China, which was co-operating with the Thai military, abruptly closed the CPT's radio station in Yunnan in July 1979. The students became critical of the CPT's old guard who were still loyal to China, which had abandoned the Thai communist movement for its own national interests<sup>120</sup>.

In May 1981 Kanya finally broke away from the Party, to which she had devoted herself for the higher purpose of creating a better society at the cost of her own relationships. She had to question whether or not the deaths of Thai people, including her close friends and students whom she had introduced to the party, were in fact only a political contribution for China. She had to re-examine the value of *ahimsa* in Buddhism, which she had abandoned when she entered the jungle for revolutionary struggle.

However, contrary to the male Buddhist activists in the Ahimsa Group, some of whom had a path to become ordained as a monk, ordination was not a choice for a woman to return from radicalism. Compared with monks, people do not gain as much merit from giving to women ascetics, who are usually called *mae chi* in Thailand, therefore it is more difficult for *mae chi* to support full-time religious practice. Kanya gave up the idea of renouncing the world to be an ascetic, and even rejected being involved in any group or organisation. She got married to become a housewife

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<sup>120</sup> Gawin Chutima, *The rise and fall of the Communist Party of Thailand (1973 – 1987)*, University of Kent at Canterbury, Centre of South-East Asian Studies, Occasional Paper No. 12 (1990), pp. 37 – 41; Pasuk and Baker, *Thailand...*, pp. 311 – 312.

anarchist<sup>121</sup>.

Kanya felt that her faith in Marxism, which used to dominate her, was inappropriate and invalid so that she needed to sort out what she was able to believe. She read any books that might have an answer. Those books included the forty-five volumes of the *Tipitaka* and books on almost every school of Buddhism from magic to sermons of famous monks and women teachers. Kanya learnt *idappaccayatā* or conditional arising as a Buddhist way of looking at things. Everything, whether it is in the mind or in the material world, takes place because of a sequence of causes. She thought that it was more important to look at this inter-related causation of events rather than insisting on either mind or matter as dependent on the other. If the mind is defiled by egoism, reality cannot be seen. When she had presented herself as a Marxist or Maoist, neither of these belief system was in fact her own view, but she put forward those ideas in order to win ideological debates. As a result, she could not take responsibility for what she had said and what she had done. Those younger students she introduced to the Party's youth organisation had to lose their lives in the revolutionary war. Through the lessons of the CPT, she decided to have three principles for herself: not to tell a lie; not to do violence to other beings; and to do whatever was useful for herself and others<sup>122</sup>. When she found herself following the Buddhist principles as her own opinion, she thought she was no longer a person without religion. She had returned to being a Buddhist<sup>123</sup>.

In the process of returning to Buddhism, Kanya realised that Buddhadasa was again significant for her. Although for a long time she avoided reading Buddhadasa's works in order not to believe in his thought, it was Buddhadasa who explained the meaning of the scriptural text the best. Among the many schools of Buddhism in Thailand that she explored by her broad reading, Buddhadasa's insightful words reached her the most profoundly<sup>124</sup>.

Just like Kanya, a number of intellectuals and students who returned from the communist insurgency in the jungle turned to Buddhism and Buddhadasa's teachings in

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<sup>121</sup> Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae tan*, p. 282.

<sup>122</sup> Kanya, interview.

<sup>123</sup> Rudi Roengchai, *Yot nung nai krasae tan*, pp. 288 – 289.

<sup>124</sup> Kanya, interview.



order to seek the meaning of their experience and their life<sup>125</sup>. Anut Aphaphirom, a CPT intellectual writer whose articles had a great impact on students' decision to be involved in the communist struggle in the 1970s, changed his attitude toward Buddhism after he left the Party in 1981. Although Anut did not find significance in religion when he wrote his articles for the revolutionary movement, he started studying Buddhism after his return from China. Anut had to find an answer to his question, "Why was Marxism unsuccessful?" (*Thammai latthi mak lomleo?*) Anut did not believe that it was because capitalism was superior to socialism. Buddhism or religion should have significant points which were lacking in Marxism. When he sought an answer to this question, two monk teachers were helpful to him. Buddhadasa pointed out the essence of Buddhism, while P. A. Payutto Bhikkhu defined Buddhist concepts in a manual<sup>126</sup>. Anut realised that the prophecy of Marxism, whose plan was to radically achieve an ideal society, could not be actualised, but a real change can be brought by individuals who attained right view and used it to benefit society, as Buddhadasa had been teaching. Even if socialist states won the revolutionary struggle, they had a lot of corruption because of dictatorial structures and the *kilesa* of each individual that could not be abolished by the revolution. Anut agrees with the problem as proposed by Buddhism.

Weng, who was once a Buddhist advocate in the Parithat Sewana but took part in the communist struggle by concealing his Buddhist element as merely individual sentiment, also became critical of the Communist Party after his serious involvement with it. He severely criticised the leaders of socialist countries who were dominated by *kilesa* (defilements) and *avijjā* (ignorance) even though those leaders succeeded in building up the socialist system<sup>127</sup>. Only after his return from the jungle in 1982 did Weng learn that Buddhadasa had been insisting on socialism with the *dhamma*. Weng

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<sup>125</sup> Apart from Buddhadasa, several other schools of Buddhism fulfilled the internal demands of former communists. According to some of the former CPT members, such as Charan Ditthanphichai and Phirun Chatrawanitchakun, there were many former party comrades and villagers in the Buddhist communities of Santi Asoke, which resemble the ideal of communism (Charan Ditthanphichai, interview, 21 August 1999; Phirun Chatrawanitchakun, interview, 1 September 1999). Suthep Lakkhanawichian, one of the most influential underground mobilisers of university and high school students throughout the 1970s, became ordained in 1988 as a monk, Phra Suthep Chinawaro. Suthep followed a meditation teacher, Luang Pho Thian (Phra Suthep Chinawalo, interview, 26 August 1999).

<sup>126</sup> Anut Aphaphirom, interview, 17 August 1999.

<sup>127</sup> For example, Weng cited that Stalin killed his political enemies through his *dosa* (anger) and *moha* (ignorance), and Mao Tse-tung killed people for the sake of his Cultural Revolution, and

agrees that socialism has to be Dhammic Socialism, which has the *dhamma*. However, Dhammic Socialism seems to be underdeveloped in Weng's later intellectual and political activities. Although Weng still respects Buddhadasa as his highest teacher, he does not think that Buddhism was the ideological principle behind his own leadership of the Black May demonstration<sup>128</sup>.

Those who took over the idea of Dhammic Socialism were those who were involved in the Ahimsa Group, or who were claiming themselves to be 'socially engaged Buddhists'. They developed their Buddhist perspectives on society in NGO activities after the 1980s.

### Applying Dhammic Socialism to NGO-led community development

Even in the 1980s when those student activists left the Communist Party with disappointment, the social problems that they attempted to solve using Marxism remained and had even worsened. Because of the economic boom through the shift of economic orientation from agricultural products to manufacturing and service industries, the rural population moved to become urban labour, and the gap between the urban commercially wealthy and the rural poor widened. It was also a spreading of "materialism" or consumerism all over the country.

With the expulsion and declining role of the Marxist critique in the public sphere after 6 October 1976, Buddhism and Buddhist intellectuals developed social analysis and involvement. In the sphere of university activities, the Buddhist club was one of the three student club activities allowed by the authorities, along with the Young Rotary Club and the Thai music club. Among these choices, not only religiously devoted students but also those students who were interested in social engagement chose to join the Buddhist club<sup>129</sup>. In the social section of the Buddhist club<sup>130</sup>, the

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acquired many pretty women as his 'wives' (Weng, interview, 23 December 1998).

<sup>128</sup> Weng, interview, 31 August 1999.

<sup>129</sup> Phra Dutsadi Methangkuro, interview, 6 March 1999. Dutsadi entered Thammasat University in 1977, and became the president of the Buddhist club in his third year. Throughout and after his activities in the Buddhist club, Dutsadi closely worked with Sulak Sivaraksa and the Buddhist activists who sought Sulak's advice. After graduating from university and working for NGOs for four years, Dutsadi was ordained as a monk in 1985, and stayed at Suan Mokkh for eight years, 1987 – 1995.

<sup>130</sup> In Thammasat University the Buddhist club differentiated into three sub groups: the group undertaking the traditional Buddhist ceremonies; the meditation group; and the social work group. The members of the social works group organised a camp to help develop rural communities and

influence of Sulak Sivaraksa and the Ahimsa Group was expanding. They advocated community development based on religious values, and it became appealing to student activists. Sulak developed this idea through contact with progressive Christian groups which signified inter-religious dialogue and community development. Sulak sought a way to apply it to Thai Buddhism, especially in his networking of so-called *phra nak phatthana* or development monks, who had already been voluntarily assisting villagers' economic life with their religious guidance. Having some relationship with Sulak, Dr. Prawase Wasi<sup>131</sup> (1931 – ), another well-known lay follower of Buddhadasa, developed his role as a Buddhist social critic and an organiser of rural community development, especially in the area of medical care. In this situation of the expanding roles of Buddhist intellectuals in social work from the 1980s onward, Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism was reconsidered and a way of practical use was sought through dialogue with Marxism.

During the 1980s and 1990s the leadership of social activism in Thailand shifted from the Communist Party and Marxism to the Buddhist group of Sulak. The Communist Party of Thailand was in decline after the early 1980s, and the student activists who went into the CPT's armed struggles in the jungle returned to the city. The fall of Marxism's prestige was accelerated by the dissolution of the communist regimes in Europe in the late 1980s. People realised that the radical change of society through armed struggle for total revolution was not as romantic as in the Marxist theories.

Sulak and the Ahimsa Group, which expanded its scope of activities to rural development, recently have begun to call themselves "engaged Buddhists" in order to cover the wider range of social activism that they are involved in from a Buddhist perspective. Aside from promoting the idea and performing actions of non-violence,

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urban slum areas. They had contact with Sulak and some NGO activities as well (Phra Dutsadi Methangkuro, interview).

<sup>131</sup> Compared with Sulak, who basically does not have any position in academia, Prawase belongs to more elite circles. Prawase studied in the United States and in England on the Royal Scholarship, and became an expert on haematology. He has had important positions in Sirirat Hospital, Mahidol University, and the Doctors Council. When Prawase started reading Sulak's journal, *Sangkhomsat parithat*, and was involved in an extensive research on thalassemia (a blood disease) in rural areas in the 1960s, he began to pay attention to the villagers' diseases and poverty. Around the same time, Prawase became interested in Buddhism through the influence of Dr. Uai Ketsing at Sirirat Hospital. However, Prawase preferred Buddhadasa's sermons to the forest monks whom Uai respected. For Prawase's biography, see Prawet Wasi, *Bon sen thang chiwit* (On the road of life) (Bangkok: Mo chaoban), Vol. 1 – 7.

they have started organising a network of local monk-led rural development movements, which spontaneously arose around the same time of the mid-1980s. Among many others that belong to Sulak's group, two networks are important. One is the Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development (or in Thai, *Khana kammakan sasana phua kanphatthana*) established in 1980, which is a network of lay Buddhist and intellectuals from other religions who support development. The other is the Sekhiyatham, which was founded in 1991 to make contact between monks and *mae chi* who work for development. As activities of these networks, the lay engaged Buddhists hold seminars, organise study trips, publish and distribute the seminars' proceedings in order to share successful experience with monks and villagers in other villages<sup>132</sup>.

Those local monks who are now organised into the Sekhiyatham are called *phra nak phatthana* (development monks) and have provided leadership for the better livelihood of villagers in their own local community<sup>133</sup>. These monks have witnessed the changes of the rural economy in their villages in the last forty years. According to a *phra nak phatthana* from Yasothon Province, Phra Khru Suphacharawat, his village started to change in 1961 when the government introduced jute and other commercial crop cultivation for export. In the early 1970s, the government promoted high productivity rice as well as chemical fertiliser and agricultural chemicals, which severely damaged the soil and water. By practising agriculture for sale, all they got was debt from the bank, and their sales account was not even enough for them to buy food. Phra Khru Suphacharawat has challenged this current of capitalism and consumerism in the village since 1981 by promoting the villagers' self-reliance. For the purpose of self-reliance, he introduced a village co-operative in which villagers make a small deposit and borrow money from the community funding pool<sup>134</sup>. This community banking system has been promoted both by the government programme and by NGOs. In such a small scale banking system with little power of enforcement, each member's

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<sup>132</sup> Waraphong Wetchamalinon, a secretary at the Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, interview, Bangkok, 23 August 1999.

<sup>133</sup> About development monks, see Seri Phongphit, *Religion in a changing society: Buddhism, reform and the role of monks in community development in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Arena Press, 1988).

<sup>134</sup> Phra Khru Suphacharawat, interview, Yasothon, 25 December 1999; Prida Ruangwichithon, *Phlik fun khun chiwit: chiwit lae ngan khong phra khru suphacharawat* (Restoring life: life and work of Phra Khru Suphacharawat) (Bangkok: Khana kammakan sasana phua kanphatthana, 1992).

morality and respect for the rules was essential for its sustainability. In it, the spirit of religion contributes significantly.

In the case of Phra Khru Suphacharawat, his unique idea for the villagers' self-reliance that revived traditional herbal medicines was shared with other village monks and leaders through the network of NGOs and Sekhiyatham seminars. Through those seminars, he also learnt from the experiments of other villages the methods of integrated agriculture (*kasetthakam phasom phasan*) that primarily produces everything the villagers eat, such as their own rice, vegetables, fruits, fish, chickens, and ducks, instead of produce for sale. Aside from such technical aspects, the engaged Buddhists or urban educated NGO workers positively contributed to the self-respect and confidence of villagers.

Phra Khru Suphacharawat proposed an ideal of a harmonious village community as *thammika chumchon*, or "dhammic community", an idea he gained from Buddhadasa's "Dhammic Socialism". In the work for a dhammic community, villagers no longer feel ashamed of their living conditions compared with those of the urban elite. The concept of dhammic community stands for both an empowerment and validation of the villagers' own way of living and wisdom, by which social reform would be achieved concretely on a small scale.

Aside from practical coordination of community development, engaged Buddhists are attempting to develop Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism as an ideological basis of their social movement. On the one hand, Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism is critically examined. For instance, Prawase acquired some points from Marxist critiques, and examined the social problems as those of the social structure rather than those of individuals. Prawase does not believe that people became poor because they are lazy, or because they have indulged in vice as Buddhadasa stated<sup>135</sup>. Prawase looks at the structural causes of social crisis, such as the problems of the centralised system, the unfair economic system, the structure of hidden violence, and the lack of balance in society<sup>136</sup>. Also, Prawase even modified the concepts of Dhammic Socialism, and calls it "Dhammic Society" (*Thammika sangkhom*), because he

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<sup>135</sup> Prawase Wasi, interview, Bangkok, 29 April 1999.

<sup>136</sup> Prawet Wasi (Prawase Wasi), *Thammika sangkhom* (Bangkok: Mulanithi komon khimthong, 1995), p. 34 – 59.

considered “socialism” as outdated, and the term socialism has a narrower connotation than society<sup>137</sup>. He said that “Dhammic Society” could avoid being misread and better promotes the relevance of Dhammic Socialism in today’s society<sup>138</sup>.

Many engaged Buddhists agree with the value of Dhammic Socialism, which provides an important spiritual value complementing contemporary society and economics, which is missing in the Marxist project of a new society. What they consider significant is, first of all, the presence of the *dhamma* in society. They agreed that the four meanings of the *dhamma*: nature itself, the laws of the nature, duty in accordance with the laws of nature, and the fruit from duty in accordance with the laws of nature, are valid in the case of society as well as for the human mind and human life. An anonymous writer considers that Dhammic Socialism provides a view on the relationship between human beings and nature, which coincides with the Green Movement in Europe, which has come to replace the Marxist critique<sup>139</sup>. Second, engaged Buddhists agree with Buddhadasa’s critique of *watthuniyom*, or materialism in terms of consumerism, which should be replaced by morality. Phra Phaisan Wisalo states that Dhammic Socialism can provide Western socialism, which aims at social justice and equality by emphasising material prosperity, with a higher spiritual attitude that is never attached to the world<sup>140</sup>. The morality of Dhammic Socialism can free people from the problems of contemporary society, such as materialistic worldview, money worship, and purposeless, disciplineless freedom<sup>141</sup>.

Some engaged Buddhists are attempting to connect their understanding of Dhammic Socialism to practical reforms. Santikaro Bhikkhu, an American monk who is one of the most vocal and active disciples of Buddhadasa in contemporary Thailand, through his fluent Thai sermons advocates the “noble twelve-fold social path” in order to realise Buddhadasa’s concepts: right religion, right education, right leadership, right organisation and government, right communication, right culture, right sexuality and

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<sup>137</sup> Prawet Wasi (Prawase Wasi), *Thammika sangkhom*, pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>138</sup> Prawase Wasi, interview.

<sup>139</sup> “Bot nam: thammika sangkhomniyom si khiao” (Introduction: green Dhammic Socialism), *Pacharayasan*, vol. 20 no. 4 (October – December 1993), pp. 7 – 15.

<sup>140</sup> Phra Phaisan Wisalo, “Yutthasat thammika sangkhomniyom lae thang ok haeng phuttha-tham” (The strategy of Dhammic Socialism and an exit [i.e., solution of a problem] at the Buddha Dhamma), *Pacharayasan*, Vol. 25 No. 3 (March – June 1999), p. 33.

<sup>141</sup> Phra Phaisan Wisalo, “Yutthasat thammika sangkhomniyom...”, p. 35.

family, right ecology, right play, right monitoring, and right *sangha* and solidarity<sup>142</sup>. An anonymous writer proposed a reform of land ownership and a progressive taxation system in order to have a fair distribution of wealth based on the principle of Dhammic Socialism that encourages individuals not to accumulate more property than necessary, and not to exploit other human beings or nature<sup>143</sup>. Phra Phaisan proposes the two ways of social practice as strategies of Dhammic Socialism: support for nurturing civil society and reform in Buddhism by reviving the original Buddha Dhamma and by Sangha reform so that the Sangha administration is not an obstacle to social reform<sup>144</sup>. Dhammic Socialism has sought relevance to contemporary society.

In this chapter, I have examined the development of Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism and the development of Buddhist social engagement based on this concept from the 1960s to the 1990s. The discussions with Marxism brought into the Thai Buddhist public sphere nurtured a social perspective in Buddhism. In the face of Marxism, Buddhism was not simply divided into leftists and rightists, or labelled as an ideological weapon for the anti-communist campaign. Buddhism acquired its own critical stance toward contemporary society, a stance that sides with neither the communists nor the counter-insurgency security forces. Some of those Buddhist perspectives, such as the method of non-violence and resolution of individual defilements, were missing in the Marxist project of social transformation. These perspectives became especially important after the social criticism of Marxism decreased in strength following the collapse of the socialist regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In the 1980s, concerns for social reform were directed at the betterment of life in small rural communities through the activities of NGOs. When highly educated activists of urban origins went into villages in the countryside, they found the rural Thai communities are already "anarchistic", which means antithetical to both capitalism and communism<sup>145</sup>. What kind of "anarchistic" characteristics do rural Thai communities

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<sup>142</sup> Santikaro Bhikkhu, "The four noble truth of Dhammic Socialism", Watts, Senauke, and Santikaro (eds.), *Entering the realm of reality*, pp. 89 – 161.

<sup>143</sup> "Bot nam: thammika sangkhomniyom si khiao", pp. 12 – 13.

<sup>144</sup> Phra Phaisan, "Yutthasat thammika sangkhomniyom", p.36.

<sup>145</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, "The community culture school of thought", Manas Chitakasem and

have? They are perceived as independent from government control, and distinct from the principles of capitalist economy<sup>146</sup>. For example, the villagers' traditional herbal medicines and treatment do not require modern medical service from the government, and their subsistence farming to survive does not seek to multiply profits as in the capitalist economy. These ideas of Thai villagers are called *phumpanya chao ban*, or the local wisdom of villagers. The new role for Buddhist activists is to reinforce the local wisdom in rural communities, which have actually become involved in the system of the capitalist economy.

An especially important aspect of Buddhadasa's philosophy that contributes to economic oriented development works is his criticism of *watthuniyom*, which means material determinism and consumerism. Buddhism, from a perspective that stresses spiritual values, challenges the capitalist economic system that grows through endless desire for consumption. In this light, Buddhism can become a counter-ideology to capitalism. This is also an answer to a question, how can Buddhism become an alternative system of social thought after the Communist Party and Marxism have declined<sup>147</sup>.

Based on these discoveries of social aspects in relation to Marxism, Buddhism became an important ideological foundation for NGO-led social engagement. Instead of the radical revolutionary transformation, "engaged Buddhists" applied the morality and insight of Buddhism to members of small-scale rural communities in order to improve their economic life. These works are a practical approach to construct a harmonious balance of sufficiency in nature, as depicted in Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism. This was a significant gain for Buddhism in the Thai Buddhist public sphere through its contact with Marxism. Buddhism, which was discussed in the Buddhist public sphere, was no longer a religion solely for pious people aiming at otherworldly salvation. Rather, it indicated people a righteous way of living in the real world here and now.

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Andrew Turton (eds.), *Thai constructions of knowledge* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991), pp. 118-141.

<sup>146</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, "The community culture school of thought", p. 133.

<sup>147</sup> cf. Phra Pracha Pasannathammo, "Than Phutthathat kap kan-patiwat watthanatham" (Ven. Buddhadasa and revolution of culture), *Phutthathat kap khon run mai: mua khon num sao tham thung rak khong khwam-pen-thai* (Buddhadasa and the new generation: when young men and women asked of the root of Thainess) (Bangkok: Mulatnithi komon khimthong, 1983), pp. 128-193.



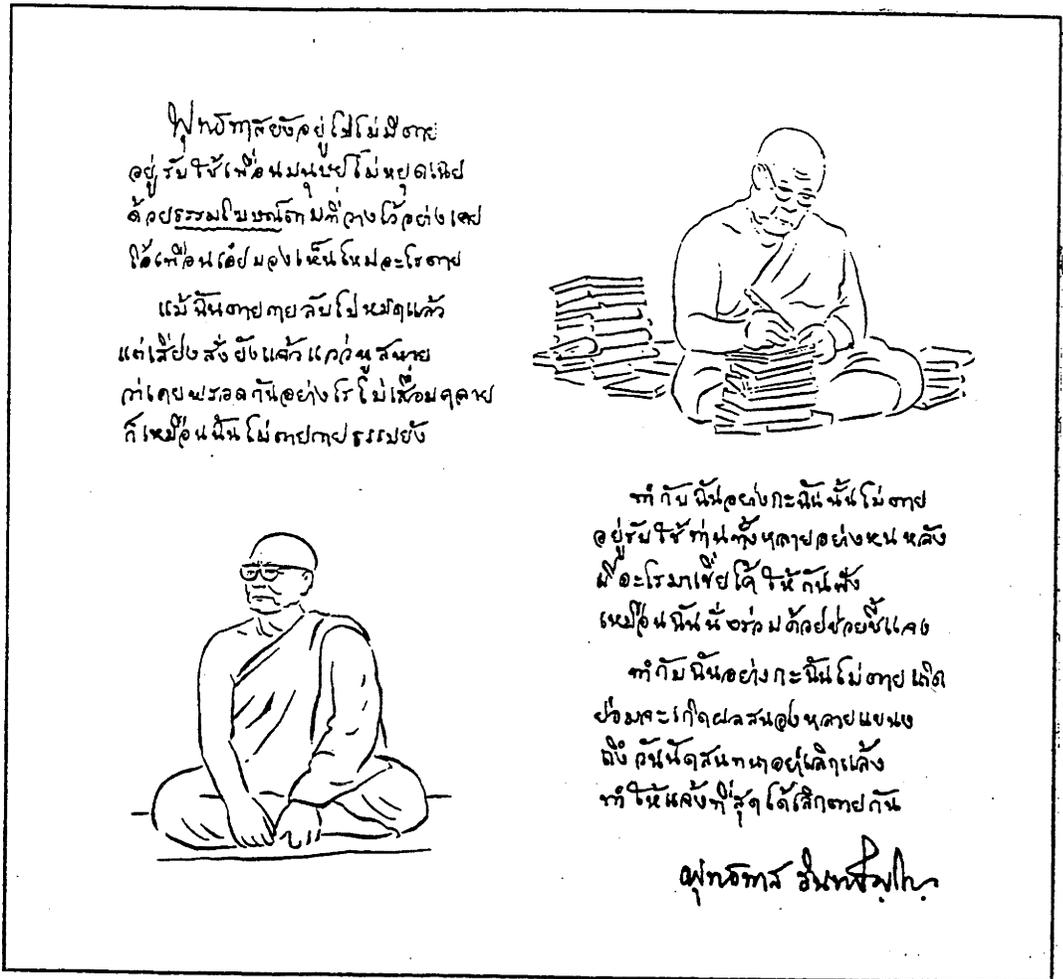


Figure 5. A poem by Buddhadasa  
 ("100 pi phutthathat (2449 - 2549)" (A hundred years of Buddhadasa [1906 - 2006]),  
*Phutthasasana*, Vol. 67 No. 2 (May - July 1999), p. 147; A translation by Ito).

Buddhadasa keeps living, is not going to die  
 He lives in order to serve human beings without ceasing to care for them  
 With the *Propagation of the Dhamma* left, just as it was  
 Friends, do you see what the death is?  
     Even though I die, the body fades entirely away  
     The voice remains in the ears of friends  
     It used to preach to people, it does not become feeble  
     As if I do not die, the body of the *dhamma* remains  
 What we have been doing together does not die  
 I remain in order to serve you, the same as before  
 If something turns up for you to listen to  
 Think of it as if I stayed here to show you the right way  
     What we have been doing together does not live or die  
     Fruit will arise from a fruit in various branches  
     Until the day we promised to talk to each other, don't stop  
     Keep the *dhamma* in mind to put an end to death

## Conclusion: Buddhadasa, the Buddhist public sphere and twentieth-century Thailand

Human life and the world are both impermanent. In 1993 Buddhadasa passed away with criticism of modern medical treatment for prolonging life. Towards the end of his life, Buddhadasa did not have enough strength to go outside Suan Mokkh to preach, but he recorded his messages on tape to send his thoughts to his friends and to his audience. He said, “Buddhadasa keeps living, is not going to die / He lives in order to serve human beings without ceasing to care for them / With the Thammakhot<sup>1</sup> left just as it was / Friends, do you see what the death is?”<sup>2</sup>. After his death, his ashes were scattered in accordance with his will. Thais believe that the bones of some famous forest monks have special characteristics which indicate the attainment of *arahantship*. They say the bones are crystal clear, like jewels. Some rich lay followers of forest monks have built museums or commemoration halls at temples in order to exhibit such bones as evidence of the monk’s becoming an *arahant*. However, Buddhadasa’s disciples did not do this because he was against this practice. The remains of Buddhadasa are the numerous books and tapes in which he has spoken of the *dhamma*.

In the century in which he lived, from its beginning to its end, the socio-economic development during the 1960s under military dictatorship created perhaps the most remarkable changes in Thai society. The apparent achievement of material prosperity convinced many to accede to the military’s deep involvement in government. At the same time, the military governments suppressed political activities and freedom of speech about socio-political issues that might involve criticism about and threats to the existing order. However, unlike discussions in the political sphere, which were necessarily confined to non-controversial topics, the Buddhist public sphere entertained lively discussions that extended beyond ecclesiastical education matters. At the same time, these Buddhist discussions were sometimes linked to society and politics. These discussions facilitated roles for Buddhism in secular society as both a support for government anti-communist propaganda, and as an ideology critical of the current social and political conditions. Buddhism was no longer a religion confined to monasteries for the enlightenment of the ordained, but instead served to explain realities

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<sup>1</sup> Underlined by Buddhadasa; this is the name of the series which collects together Buddhadasa’s preaching, it literally means “Dhamma propagation”.

<sup>2</sup> See Figure 5 for the whole poem and the citation details.

in the real world. In the 1970s with the radicalising Marxist doctrinal critique of religion as abstract idealism, Thai Buddhists sought for the relevance of Buddhism to the contemporary social situation. After the late 1980s, Buddhism developed as a critical ideology presenting an alternative in the face of the declining credibility of Marxism, while Thai society continued to expand in a capitalist and consumerist direction. Throughout the twentieth century, discussions in the Buddhist public sphere have dialectically responded to the impermanency of social changes.

The discussions Buddhadasa was involved in and his activities traced in this thesis reveal some features of the Buddhist public sphere in recent Thai history.

In Chapter I, I examined the development of Buddhadasa's thought as it was influenced by certain ideas and communications in the Buddhist public sphere. The reform and spread of ecclesiastical education provided an essential foundation for expanding participation in it. Enthusiasm for unfamiliar Buddhist doctrines, which had not been present in conventional Thai Buddhism, was also transmitted through the Thai Buddhist public sphere by critical lay Buddhist intellectuals in Thailand. International Buddhist movements that had attracted rational Western minds to convert to Buddhism also influenced the Thai Buddhist public sphere. Greater availability of doctrinal knowledge facilitated the discussions of Thai Buddhists. In addition, ethnic Chinese who had migrated to Thailand acquired cultural identity as Thais through Buddhism, as in the case of Buddhadasa's family members, by becoming a part of the Buddhist public sphere, where they shared in the discussions.

The experiences of Buddhadasa and Thammathat indicated that there were a number of small informal circles which discussed Buddhism. These developed as groups of friends who shared an interest in Buddhist doctrines as presented in the textbooks for ecclesiastic examinations and in foreign Buddhist journals. Their discussions took place in shop fronts and in monasteries. These small groups were the smallest fora of discussion in the Buddhist public sphere. Also, the mutual support of Buddhadasa, the monk in charge of Suan Mokkh, and Thammathat, lay head of the Khana Thammathan, represented the equal significance of monks and laity in the Buddhist public sphere. The activities of these two brothers expanded communication outside their local circle by publishing the journal, *Phutthasasana*. Through responses from intellectuals to the journal, Buddhadasa was inspired to further develop his thought, which was to become controversial within Thailand.

In Chapter II, I explored the propagation activities of Buddhadasa and his

followers. Propagation was one of the important activities undertaken in the public sphere by groups of different opinions in order to share their ideas with others. Most of the people could learn of new ideas through such propagation activities, and they began to consider their attitude or position in order to discuss this with other people. In this chapter, I have traced different types of propagation work undertaken by Buddhadasa and his followers.

First, I examined the two journals: Buddhadasa's journal, *Phutthasasana*, in comparison with the academic Buddhist journal of Mahamakut Buddhist University, *Thammachaksu*. Both were loci of the Buddhist public sphere in the print media. Articles in them represented the intellectual concerns of Thai Buddhists in each period. In the beginning the concerns in these journals coincided with each other: they contained Thai translations of Pali scriptures, only that *Phutthasasana* was more open for highly educated lay intellectuals to participate. By the early 1960s, *Thammachaksu* had become more conservative, losing novelty, while Buddhadasa, who by then had had more opportunities to demonstrate his thought outside his journal, was going his own way by incorporating ideas from other Buddhist orders and teachings from other religions that he considered useful for overcoming suffering. This meant a differentiation of their positions in the Buddhist public sphere.

Second, I examined an elite circle of the Buddhist public sphere that conducted *dhamma* propagation, the Buddhist Association of Thailand. In this association of notables, Buddhadasa was acceptable as a respected teacher of Buddhism even for the lay elite intellectuals, who often had higher education than monks, and he also made radical lectures inviting ideological conflicts. These were perceived as those of a communist who was destroying Buddhism.

Third, I investigated the expansion of the Buddhist public sphere into Northern Thailand, which had a distinctive local tradition. People in the North, who insisted on their identity and opposed integration with Bangkok, gradually accepted the Sangha administration, especially through their respect for charismatic North-eastern forest monks who belonged to the Thammayut Order. In the late 1940s when Chao Chun Sirorot determined to propagate the *dhamma* by inviting Panyanantha Bhikkhu as a representative of Buddhadasa's group, people in the North were fully a part of the Buddhist public sphere of Thailand.

Fourth, through the propagation activities of keen lay followers of Buddhadasa, I explored the place of ordinary, non-elite individuals and the means of discussion and

communication in the Buddhist public sphere. The discussions were facilitated especially by the distribution of low-price books on the *dhamma*, through Suwichan Bookshop, the Organisation for the Restoration of Buddhism, and the Sublime Life Mission. The heads of these groups also played a role as leaders of *dhamma* discussions in shop fronts or in public fora, and as selectors of and commentators on worthwhile topics. The oratorical expression of the *dhamma* by capable preachers, both lay and monk, were also effective in inviting people with less education to participate in the Buddhist public sphere as the audience. Through the efforts of his followers, Buddhadasa's teachings were delivered not only to urban residents but also to rural dwellers and they even crossed the border to Lao people under their socialist government. The discussions in each locality examining Buddhadasa's teachings were also parts of the Buddhist public sphere.

In Chapter III, I examined the discussions about Buddhadasa's concept of empty mind as an issue that had been heavily discussed in the Thai Buddhist public sphere in the late 1960s. Traditionally the concept of emptiness is not explicit in Theravada scriptures, nor has it been discussed as much as in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It was quite recently promoted by Buddhadasa among Thai Buddhists as *lokuttara dhamma*, or teachings to overcome suffering and achieve *nibbāna*, possible even for lay people in the midst of engaging in a secular occupation. Because of its unfamiliarity for the Thais, some people were doubtful whether empty mind was authentically part of their religious beliefs.

The discussion about empty mind became heated only after the respected intellectual, Kukrit Pramoj, disagreed with Buddhadasa about this concept in the publicised panel discussions at the Khurusapha in 1963 and 1964. By opposing Buddhadasa, Kukrit insisted that it would be impossible to practise empty mind for lay people living in the secular world. After the second panel discussion between the two, the issue was discussed by more people, particularly by Buddhadasa's opponents and his followers, who were a part of the Buddhist public sphere.

Their discussions suggested well the ways of the Thai Buddhist public sphere. There were a number of distortions, and strained interpretations that linked his teaching with communism, as well as jokes and sarcastic remarks on personal backgrounds in order to disqualify other discussants and be more influential than the opponents, i.e. arguments *ad hominem*. These arguments functioned as means to appeal to people's impressions and perceptions in the Buddhist public sphere.

In Chapter IV, I explored the context and significance of Buddhadasa's conflict with the Abhidhamma groups in the Buddhist public sphere of the late 1960s. In the tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* embodies the school's orthodox interpretation, but Abhidhamma studies in contemporary Thailand indicated that it had been kept in a marginal position in the Thai Sangha's ecclesiastical curricula. In the current education curriculum the Abhidhamma is only studied by those who take the highest levels of ecclesiastic examination. Otherwise, the Abhidhamma could be studied at several private classes of either lay or ordained teachers who had little to do with the Sangha's authority but were influenced by some Burmese teachers who preached in Thailand only after the 1930s. Although Abhidhamma studies have not been dominant in the Thai Sangha's official understanding of Buddhist doctrines, Abhidhamma groups became quite influential in the 1960s' Thai Buddhist public sphere with their highly articulated doctrine.

In 1965 Buddhadasa, by then already a respected preacher, polemicised the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* as not being the speech of the Buddha himself. On the one hand, this statement indicated Buddhadasa's free doctrinal interpretations, which were not necessarily restricted by the classical commentaries. However, not all the Abhidhamma groups in contemporary Thailand came into conflict with Buddhadasa nor did they adhere to the interpretation of the complicated human psychological states by the traditional exegetes. Some Abhidhamma groups, which had troubles with Buddhadasa, taught not only the Abhidhamma theory but in addition developed supernatural beliefs in order to attract people to the Abhidhamma. Their arguments to defend the Abhidhamma's authenticity as the Buddha's own speech even involved manipulations of the audience's perception rather than appealing to any faith in the orthodoxy or refuting with rational arguments. The disputes between Buddhadasa and some Abhidhamma groups meant a struggle over generally perceived credibility in the public sphere as well as doctrinal conflict.

In Chapter V, I examined discussions in the Thai Buddhist public sphere involving dialogue with other systems of thought, particularly the relationships and ideological exchanges between Buddhadasa and Marxist intellectuals from 1946 to 1958. Marxism spread in Thailand in the relatively liberal political situation during the post-World War II period. During this time a number of leading Thai Marxists had contacts with Buddhadasa. It could be said that by the time of their meeting a common ground for their discussion had been prepared by Buddhadasa, who had promoted

rational Buddhist ideas which were not related to either rituals or supernatural beliefs. Through their meetings both Buddhists and Marxists elaborated their thoughts. Buddhadasa might have been stimulated by Marxists to find a social perspective in Buddhist teachings, such as non-egoism and self-sacrifice for society, while Thai Marxist intellectuals developed Buddhist interpretations of Marxism, such as non-violence and their own “materialisms”, which were not restricted by the Communist Party’s “orthodoxy”. Such a discussion was never brought up by the traditional Sangha authority nor by most pious lay Buddhists who instead avoided doing evil and devoted themselves making merit. The Buddhist public sphere incorporated the issues into discussions outside monasteries.

Chapter VI dealt with a Buddhadasa’s concept of Dhammic Socialism and its reception in the Thai Buddhist public sphere from the 1960s to the 1990s, when the contemporary relevance of Buddhism was seriously challenged by Marxism. Although Dhammic Socialism sounds like it is inclined towards a socialist ideology intermingled with religion, it was not directly related to Marxism, but rather reflected a popular Thai understanding in the 1970s of “socialism” as an ideal social order in a welfare society. By Dhammic Socialism Buddhadasa meant a harmonious social order in accordance with the *dhamma*, or the law of nature. For him, harmony in society was accomplished by each member of a society who does not take advantage of other people, but instead feels satisfied with the meeting of basic needs. Dhammic Socialism was particularly critical of the accumulation of an excessive surplus through greed and held that needs were to be controlled by wisdom, as formulated in the ten kingly virtues. Such a viewpoint of Dhammic Socialism entailed a criticism of capitalism. At the same time, it does not agree with the Marxist concept of materialism, in which the mind of human beings depends only on material changes. Therefore, Dhammic Socialism was a Buddhist concept of an ideal society rather than an imitation of Marxism.

During the early 1970s Dhammic Socialism was first received by an elite circle rather than by activist students, because the latter were attracted by more “orthodox” Marxist theory and the Communist Party, which was suddenly available to them after the downfall of the military dictatorship on 14 October 1973. However, activists began to revisit Buddhism and Dhammic Socialism when they were devastated by the Party’s actions. They did not see the defect of Marxism as any ideological inferiority to capitalism. But rather they looked at its indifference to the defiled human mind, which should be overcome by right thinking. In the 1990s, Dhammic Socialism became a

social critique of consumerist, capitalist society, an alternative to Marxism, and since then engaged Buddhists have been attempting to apply it to the real reform of society.

What I have examined in this thesis is a Thai Buddhist world in which Buddhadasa, his supporters, his opponents and his followers who followed him from a distance developed his ideas into activities. Their discussions and activities indicated at least two remarkable occurrences in twentieth-century Thai Buddhism. First, lay people became much more concerned with what had formerly been seen as highly rarefied religious topics, previously dominated by monastery dwellers. For example, Buddhadasa promoted *lokuttara dhamma* (transcendent *dhamma*) such as empty mind, and its practice in daily life, even for the farmers working in a rice field. His proposal was criticised, but his opponents, including Kukrit Pramoj and Bunmi Methangkun, were also lay people who studied Buddhism in depth, for instance, the Abhidhamma and *vipassanā* meditation. Regardless of whether they were Buddhadasa's disciples or not, lay Buddhists in twentieth-century Thailand did not just follow moral principles to accumulate merit or to be good people, but instead through Buddhist practice in actions, in speech and in mind sought more to see some fruit of their practice in their present life. Especially overcoming of suffering that Buddhadasa placed emphasise on did actually meet the demand of people living in the secular world. Buddhist sayings, poems, some passages of sermons, including those of Buddhadasa, were posted around offices or houses in order to remind people to live in accordance with those teachings. Pious acts of lay Buddhists were to be given significance by doctrinal interpretations.

Second, Thai Buddhists found it possible for Buddhism to have divergent political interpretations, especially after the polarised conflict between nationalists who supported the Thai status quo, and Marxist revolutionaries. From around the middle of the twentieth century, both the political right and left attempted to interpret Buddhism, sometimes for ideological support. In such a situation, the Sangha was unable to dominate political interpretation of the Buddhist *dhamma*, on which it was based and which provided legitimation of the traditional Buddhist monarchy. Although the *dhamma* had been transmitted in the Sangha, the Sangha could not exclude the lay masses from being involved in interpretations of the *dhamma*, because the Sangha also has the duty to teach Buddhist doctrines to the people. Under the "democratic" system, or a system of people's rule, which in 1932 abolished the absolute monarchy, both politics and the *dhamma* have become more and more a matter of public discussion that the Sangha, the national administrative body of the ordained Buddhists, cannot control



totally. The more interpreters there are, the more understandings of Buddhist legitimation became diversified.

When a religious viewpoint is brought to politics, it tends to be concerned with what is just. In the Buddhist public sphere the *dhamma* has been discussed by people who had various political opinions, many of which were not necessarily dominant in the government. Consequently the Buddhist public sphere, which can be understood as overlapping a part of the public sphere in general, could function as a watchdog of government. In Habermas's model, opinions in the public sphere are supposed to be reflected in a democratic parliament through representation by elections. Contrary to this model, the Thai Buddhist public sphere is neither connected to a political channel nor always represented by a Buddhist political party, because it is primarily made up of fora which deal with religious discussions, not necessarily related to politics. Instead, I think the public sphere is more to do with civil society, which recently came to the Thai people's attention. Recently some Thai intellectuals have become dissatisfied with the reality of democracy as it works in Thailand, because they realised that what the democratic procedure reflects the most are the interests of big business rather than the interest of unwealthy masses. Instead, these intellectuals promote a strengthening of civil society, in which people help each other and themselves but do not necessarily rely on the state. They apply pressure collectively on the state. In the context of civil society, opinions expressed in the Buddhist public sphere, especially those with social perspectives, rather work as public opinion that puts pressure on the government through an informal process.

I do not want to argue here that the traditional functions of Buddhist society have vanished in contemporary Thailand. Rather, I think that the Sangha is still transmitting the *dhamma* to the next generation, and lay people never cease to seek merit and support the Sangha. However, the concept of the Buddhist public sphere can shed light on the diversity of opinions and the dynamism of intellectual activities that have become more and more apparent in Thai society. The contributions that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and his associates made to the Buddhist public sphere from the 1930s until his death in 1993 had significance for Thai intellectual life far beyond the religious realm in which they have heretofore been studied.

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