RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THAILAND

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled " RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THAILAND", submitted by Nehal A. Farooquee in fulfilment of six credits and of total requirement of twenty four credit for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) of the University, is his original work according to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or of any other University.

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New Delhi,
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C_O_N_T_E_N_T_S

P R_E_F_A_C_E

The interactional pattern of religion and politics
is complex and diverse in a specific historical context. The
literature of the world history suggests that in different
period of time these two institutions have interacted variedly,
at different levels, and in different ways. Some of the
political systems of the past and present societies like that
of theocratic states, secular states, as well as some of the
greatest historical events like that of the crusades in Europe,
the spread of Christianity in England, the beginning of
Reformation in Germany, and the Islamic rule in Pakistan are a
few instances of the consequential aspects of the interactional
pattern of religion and politics.

The study of the interactional pattern of religion
and politics of the contemporary modern societies brings into —
light three major forms of system-theocratic system, quasi-
secular system and secular system.

The Theocratic system is a very old system which
originated in Greece. This was the system in which the system
of authority in government shared power with the wider authority
with the Gods. In other words the head of the state in a
system was the spiritual head also.

The second category, as noted above is the quasi-secular system. In such a system the legal demarcation is laid out between religion and state, and religion does not legally guide the affairs of men. The state and its ideology maintains neutrality towards all existing religious faiths. It allows every individual to preach, profess and practice any religion which suits his conscience.

By a secular system we mean a system which constitutionally separates religion from politics. In such a system polity dominates and law acquires the sacred symbols. There is also separation between religious and political institutions, religious institution in such a system loses its hold and the system of law governs the life of men.

Thailand is example of a system other than the three mentioned above. It is parliamentary Democracy with Buddhism as the State's religion and the interaction between the two institutions, is worth evaluating. The three chapters of this study namely, political process in Thailand, Religion and Politics, and Role of Buddhist Sanghas were selected to study the interactional pattern of religion and politics in post-1932 revolution in Thailand.

After having analysed the interactional pattern of religion and politics in the last four chapters, we would make an endeavour to test the validity of our two hypothetical

statements, (i) Thailand is a country with Buddhism as State's religion; (ii) In Thailand religion, monarchy and Sangha are used for political ends. In turn political resources are used to meet the religious groups interest. We would also make an attempt to answer the following questions in the light of our findings: (a) To what extent parliamentary form of Democracy controls the Sangha; (b) To what extent the political parties, especially the ruling government uses the religion to legitimise its political role; and (c) Is secularism a myth? in an ethnically plural society like Thailand. In order to test the validity of our hypothetical statements, we will piece together the findings and conclusions of our chapters objectively.

New Delhi,   N. A. Farooquee

Dated July 15, 1989.

CHAPTER   I

THAI SOCIETY : AN INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of Thailand which was formerly known as Siam is located in the centre of Southeast Asian mainland. It is the third most populous nation of Southeast Asian region, and at mid 1987 it was estimated to be around 53 million, giving an average density of 104 per sq. km. It is both homogeneous and heterogeneous, but the similarities are more striking because 97 percent of the population speak Thai, 95 percent are Buddhists, 87 percent live in rural areas, and 75 percent belong to the Thai Origin.[1] The majority of Thai origin people are Buddhists, and their cultural and social patterns form the standard for the other Thai groups. The heterogeneous ethnic make up of the population includes Chinese, Malay Muslims and Christians.[2]

The Chinese are the largest ethnic minority, constituting 14 percent of the population as a whole and 33 percent of the population of Bangkok. The Chinese moved into Thailand for hundreds of years in large numbers until immigration quotas

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1   George Thomas Kurian, Encyclopedia of the Third World (London: Marshall Publishing Limited, 1982), p. 245.

2   Ibid.

were enforced in 1948.[3] The second minority are the Malay Muslims, a Malyo-Polynesian group separated from the Thai by both religion, race and to some extent, language. They reside for the most part in the four provinces of the southern region: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun. They have proved highly resistant to assimilation and have been sometimes implicated in secessionist movements. Besides this, there are other small races of Kampucheans scattered in the tribal groups called Meo, Laha, Yao, Lisu, Lawa and Karen mainly residing near the eastern borders.

Even before the present influx of the refugees from the Indochinese peninsula, there were large Laotian, Cambodian and Vietnamese communities in Thailand. "Thailand is one of the countries most affected by the influx of the refugees. Since 1975 more than half a million people from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have fled into the country, including 60,000 Vietnamese, 210,000 Khmer and 250,000 Laos."[4]

In the Agro-based economy of Thailand, Agriculture is the main source of livelihood and it employs 77 percent of the labour force. The agricultural sector contributes 27 percent to the GDP and 52 percent to export earnings.

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3 Ibid., p. 246.

4 Ibid., p. 247.

Rice is the major and staple food crops, rubber and coconut
are the chief cash crops. Most of the farms in Thailand are
owned and cultivated by small scale peasant farmers. But many
of these farms are modest plots and their owners work as
tenants or employees on other farms. Agricultural techniques
are primitive and labour-intensive. The use of modern
techniques and equipments are being used in the agricultural
sector. Thailand is one of the world's largest exporters of
rice.

Industrialization in Thailand is very less, there
is virtually no heavy industry. The most important industries
are textiles and the processing of agricultural products.
Manufacturing employes 8 percent of the work force and
contributes 18 percent of the GDP. The Thai economy is
relatively free of controls on private enterprise, that is
common in other developing countries also. Government's funds
have been directed to private enterprise projects, but despite
the government's commitment to private enterprise, there is
a relatively large public sector known as the "Ratwisahakit".
The concentration of economic and political power within a
small elite group and relative freedom from economic control
are the two factors that have helped to create a favourable
climate for foreign investment in Thailand.

The Thai society is based on three related pillars,
they are the monarchy (phra Mahakasat), the religion (Satsana)

and the nation (Chart). "The three traditional institutions must form part of any organizing ideology if it is to be acceptable to the majority of the Thai population. They have been termed the civic religion of Thailand, which provides the legitimacy and basis for all political activity, including rebellion."[5] Any ideology that endangers these traditional institutions is unacceptable to the ruling elite. However, as the traditional institutions do not provide an adequate basis for the political and economic organization of modern Thailand, they have been supplemented with troppings of democracy and capitalism.[6] Hence the commitment to democracy with the King as the head of the State, and to a loose economic arrangement, with emphasis on private ownership and links to the international market economy is the possible outcome of traditional institutions existing in Thailand. These institutions have long and uninterrupted history and the pervasive influence they continue to exert on Thai politics and society, suggests to analyse them separately.

The Thai Monarchy

The Thai conception of the monarchy is a fusion of the Hindu divine right of deva raja and the Buddhist patriarchal

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5 Frank E. Reynolds, Legitimation and Rebellion : Thailand's Civic Religion and the Student Uprising of October 1973, ed. by Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg: Anima Books, 1978), pp. 135-7.

6 Muthiah Alagappa, The National Security of Developing States, Lessons from Thailand (Massachusetts: Auburu Home Publishing Company, 1987), p. 40.

kinship in which the king rules according to the law of Thammasat.[7] Thus the legitimacy of the monarch is derived not only from divine right but also from the monarch's own conduct and meritorious deeds. In this conception "the king is not only the political leader of the state but also himself both state and society. He is the most important centter of society and is the mechanism of social change and development in Thai society".[8] The central position of the monarchy is best understood by examining its control over land, people and religion. Before the land reform act of 1861, all land belonged to the king,[9] and he allotted land to the people based on Sakdina grades. Ownership, however, still rested with the king. "In addition to this, the king and his nobles also controlled the labor force through a system of registration and protection, with the latter depending on the former."[10] This control over the land and people and thus the forces of production, made royal control absolute.

The monarchy also increased its control over religion, thus further consolidating its position and status. The king

7   Ibid.

8   Ibid., p. 41.

9   Chattip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasortset, The Political Economy of Siam, 1851-1910 (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1981), second printing, p. 23.

10   Ibid., p. 27.

is the patron and the protector of the religion and the latter
is the special treasure of the polity and the marker of
legitimacy. In the eyes of the ordinary Thai, the king is
both a sacred being and a big father or head of family and the
godhead of Thai nationalism. It is the symbol of national
unity and source of legitimacy and status in the political
system.

The political power, role and orientation of the
monarchy has undergone significant changes. The 1932 revolu-
tion, while depriving the monarchy of its centrality in the
political process, did not bring about a revolution in the
modern sense. Constitutionalism was a foreign idea with no
roots in Thai society. Therefore, the new leaders asked for
forgiveness and allowed the monarch to exercise sanctioning
prerogatives of legitimization. Despite the acceptance of the
legitimizing function of the monarchy, tension characterized
the relations between the new leaders and the monarchy until
the Sarit Coup of 1957. Sarit made extensive use of the
monarchy to legitimize his regime both domestically and
internationally.[11] In addition, he also obtained the support
of the king to make his programmes and policies credible
to the public, especially those relating to economic development

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11 Thak Chaloemtiarana, _Thailand : The Politics of Despotic
    Paternalism_ (Bangkok : The Social Science Association of
    Thailand, 1978), pp. 13-14.

and national unity. In return for this support, Sarit made the position of the monarchy more secure in the interim constitution pledged military allegiance to the throne, revived many traditional ceremonies and festivals connected with the monarchy. He also involved the royal family in charity work, all of which considerably enhanced the power and prestige of the institution.

Religion

Buddhism is the state religion in its Therarada or Hinayana form, which is professed by 95 per cent of the Thai population. Thai Buddhism is an amalgam of pre-Buddhist Hindu beliefs and practices animist spirit worship interwoven with Buddhist theology and rituals. Popular religious beliefs and institutions have changed little over the centuries. The cosmological and astrological concepts pervade not only religious but also social and economic life of the Thai people to a great extent. Buddhism in Thailand has an elaborate ecclesiastical structure. Theat structure is headed by the supreme patriarch of the Sangha, whose title is "Sakala Sanghaparinayaka Somdech Phra Sangharaja". The Sangha, or the order of Buddhist monks, with a membership of over 250,000 is the nearest thing to a clergy that Buddhism has in Thailand.[12]

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12 Kurian, n. 1.

The patriarch is appointed by the king, who presides over the supreme council Mahathera Samagom, which has both judicial and legislative functions.

The king is required by the constitution to be a practicing Buddhist. The affairs of the Sangha are regulated by the Department of Religions Affairs in the Ministry of Culture. The state is closely involved in the promotion of Buddhism, and the relations between the two are defined in the Buddhist Order Act of 1962. The government is the legal owner of all wat lands, administers religious education and operates a large Buddhist publishing house. The monarch himself maintains 115 royal wats and two ecclesiastical colleges.

The traditional and most viable collective represen-tation of the Thai are the monarchy and Buddhism. Buddhism can therefore serve as a means of political integration. It is the unifying ideology of all classes within Thai society.[13] Buddhism further serves as the moral tone and social force of society. It is the most important symbol and the primary base for cultural and national identification. Thus the prosperity of the nation is thought to be related to the prosperity of Buddhism and vice versa, and the stability of the nation and religion cannot be separated.[14]

13 J.A. Nields Mulder, quoted in J.L.S. Girling, Thailand, Society and Politics (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 30.

14 Somboon Suksomran, Buddhism and Politics in Thailand (Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 12.

By stressing the legitimizing, integrative, symbolic
and moral force functions of Buddhism in the above quotes, it
can be drawn that Buddhism plays a central role in Thai
politics. Because of this central role of Buddhism, the
successive political authorities and various pressure groups
have manipulated Buddhist values and the Sangha to justify
essentially non-Buddhist activities and policies. Sarit
Thanarat used the Sangha in many projects to promote his policies
and to warn against the perils of Communism. History of
Thai society is replete with examples, where religion has been
used as a weapon to justify activities of the opposing forces,
including revolution. The Holy Men's rebellion in the north-
east in 1902 had a religious base.

In the 1960s and 1970s the sociopolitical changes in
Thailand led to the emergence of political monks, initially
left leaning, and later as a reaction to this rightist monks
also emerged.[15] The leftist monks generally protested against
the existing socio-economic and political order, which they
viewed as authoritarian and accommodating a system of capitalist
economy, and thus fostering social injustice. They also
protested against the Sangha administration, which they
viewed as overcentralized, undemocratic and corrupt. Leftist
monks participated in the peasant agitation of 1974 and in the
1975 electioneering campaign in support of the socialist

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15 Ibid., p. 52.

party, interpolating socialist ideology into the teachings of dhamma.[16]

Because of the symbiotic relationship between the Sangha and the political authority, the Sangha has been essentially a conservative force and willing to cooperate with the incumbent political authority to resist radical changes to the existing political and socio-economic order. Therefore, the Sangha authorities viewed the activities of the leftist monks as creating schisms in the Sangha and as giving support to the enemies of religion.[17] A sharp reaction to the activities of the leftist monks came from a group led by Kitthiwuddho Bhiku, who advocated holy war on the leftists and communists and justified the killing of them.[18] Kitthiwuddho received the backing of the supreme patriarch and the conservative elements in the government and also in the military, which was out of office during this period. The coup of 1976 was victory for the rightist forces.

Emergence of Buddhism as the "national" religion was a response to the politico-economic system and social needs

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16 Somboon Suksamran, Buddhism and Politics in Thailand (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 100.

17 Ibid., p. 90.

18 Keyes F. Charles, "Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism", in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., Religion and Legitimation (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asian Programe, 19).

of the time, and consequently it is both an independent and
dependent variable in relation to the political culture of
Thailand. The manipulation of Buddhism to justify the essentially
non-Buddhist activities of competing and conflicting political
ideologies and the resort by the monks to unconventional
methods of action, including the resort to force, is likely to
undermine faith in religion. But the involvement of Buddhism
in the political process in Thailand to such a great extent,
suggests that it alone influences maximum the socio-economic
political culture of Thailand.

The centrality of Buddhism in Thai politics also
gives rise to another disintegrative tendency. This is in
relation to the Malay Muslim minority in Southern Thailand.
Much more than Buddhism, Islam prescribes detail codes for
Islamic societies. In many issue areas the two value system
are incompatible, a situation which further aggravates the
political and economic dimensions of the separatist problem
in the south. The majority of the Muslims are now advocating
secession from Thailand. They base their claims mainly on
their legitimacy as a separate ethnic community, but on
this issue they themselves are divided.

The Christian missions have had only modest success
in winning converts among the Thai. The missions have
however played an important role as agents for the transmission
of western ideas to the Thai. They have opened hospitals,

schools and have introduced the western medical knowledge. They are very small in number to produce any political demand, and are not united like the Muslims.

Thai Nation

The concept of the Thai nation (Chat Thai) was first articulated and arduously promoted by King Rama VI. He saw a potential utility for state building to unify, protect and modernize his realm.[19] He broadened the focus of loyalty from just the institutions of the monarchy and religion to include the Thai nation, stressing the need for unity and the need to sacrifice individual interests for the sake of the nation. The first nationality act of 1911 stated that everyone born in Siam, regardless of racial background or parentage, was a Thai national. Later on, however, Rama VI defined a true Thai as one who spoke Thai and was loyal to the king, religion (Buddhism) and the country.

This narrow definition of a true Thai was part of Rama VI's effort to preserve the Thai identity, but it gave rise to sharp differentiation between the Thai and the minority Malay Muslims and Chinese. It made the Muslims alert and the issue attracted attention of Rama VI, who was sensitive

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19 Walter F. Vella, Caiyo : King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978), pp. 79-87.

to this problem and accorded the Malay-Muslim community more attention and favour than any other minority group, he undertook the protection of Islam as his duty.

The promoters of the 1932 coup retained the commitment to the Thai nation. During the premiership of Field Marshall Phibul Songkran (1930-1957), Thai nationalism came to the forefront again. This time an attempt was made to use Thai nationalism to develop new political culture.[20] The emphasis on nationalism allowed the state to penetrate and regulate all levels of Thai society and force the acceptance of the regime's policies, as these were equated with or justified as national concerns. The main elements of Phibul's nationalism were militarism, economic nationalism, chauvinism (mainly directed against the Chinese minority), and cultural nationalism. "In content, there was much continuity with the nationalism of Rama VI, but Phibul was more rigorous in the methods employed, which included legislation and the use of force."[21]

Presently, the Thai nation is not defined in the constitution, and there is no authoritative statement as to

20 Thinapan Nakhata, "National Consolidation and Nation Building", in Thak Chaloemtiarana, ed., Thai Politics (Bangkok: The Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978), p. 243.

21 Alagappa, n. 6, p. 48.

what constitutes the Thai nation. It includes, all people living within the borders of Thailand, speaking the Thai language, sharing a similar culture and bound together by history. /

The modern constitutional history of Thailand begins with the Constitution of 1932, which was formed after the Revolution of 1932 led by European educated radicals of lesser noble rank Pridi Phanomyang and Phibun Songkhram and by the highest ranking military officer of commoner background Col. Phahon Phonphayuhusena. The Constitution of 1932 has been amended by 11 other constitutions, and the 1978 amendment is the last amendment so far. The only principle common to all these constitutions is the inviolability of the monarch. Successive changes of government have not diminished the role of the monarchy as the most visible symbol of national unity.

The 1978 Constitution made no drastic changes in the form of government, as under its predecessors the most important government office remained of prime minister, who is usually the leader of the ruling group and the chief executive. He also supervises the office of the royal household and heads the National Economic Development Board. Under military government he is also the Commander of one of the branches of the armed forces. He presides over cabinet meetings and controls their agenda. In a national emergency

he has unlimited powers over national security and the economy.
He makes all appointments and conducts all investigations in
the name of the king.

The term democracy has a positive connotation in
Thai politics, but its import has been more as a means to
legitimacy than providing substantive content to the political
order of the country.[22] Promoters of the 1932 revolution
attempted to use constitutionalism as a source of legitimacy
in addition to the legitimization received from the throne.
This practice has continued, as witnessed by the effort of
almost every new government to produce a new Constitution.

The term democracy itself, however, does not appear
to have lost its positive connotation. The administration of
Kriangsak and Prem Tinsulanonda have frequently reiterated
their commitment to a democratic framework suitable to
Thailand. The Constitution declares Thailand to have democratic
form of government with the king as the head of the State.
Despite this emphasis, there has been no coherent and detailed
articulation of the democratic framework considered suitable
to Thailand.[23]

The 1932 revolution not only brought about the
termination of absolute rule but it also introduced the novel
concept of popular sovereignty. This development created

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22 Ibid., p. 49.

23 Ibid., p. 50.

problems of legitimacy for successive military regimes that
have never really been satisfactorily resolved. There was and
still is no satisfactory mechanism for the transfer of political
power, and the coup d'etat has become the mechanism for the
transfer of political power. The new political powers
legitimize themselves by association with the monarchy and
through other measures, which included the promulgation of a
new constitution, emphasis on Thai nationalism, alliance with
an external patron power (principally United States), emphasis
on socio-economic development and internal repression to
silence political opposition. Many of these coups and measures
were often carried out in the name of national security. For
example, the main reason underlying the 1957 Sarit coup was
the personal rivalry between Sarit and Phao, but the formal
justification was national security. This trend also changed
in course of time, until 1976 the military justified the
usurpation of political power on grounds of protecting national
security against threats issuing from instability created by
participatory politics or from the Communist Party of Thailand,
there was no attempt to legitimize permanently the political
role of military.

In the post 1976 period, there has been a serious
and systematic attempt to legitimize and provide for a
continuing dominant political role for the Thai military. To
a large extent, this has been attempted through a broad

definition of national security, especially of its domestic dimension, to include political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Since political stabilization is one of the major requisites for internal security, it is legitimate from the point of view of the military that they can get involved in politics to restore and maintain political stability.[24]

It is also found that the political dominance of the military is further enhanced by the continuing conflict in Cambodia. Persistence of the conflict may contribute toward remilitarization of the Thai political system through increase in defence expenditure. The centrality of the military in national affairs, repression of opposition may heighten the problem of legitimacy and bring the military into conflict with other domestic forces that also seek to share in the exercise of political power.[25]

The successive military regimes have used the label of national security to justify the usurpation of political powers and their subsequent political actions. Any opposition

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24 Thomas Lobe, United States National Security Policy and Aid to Thailand Police (Colorado: University of Denver, Monograph in World series), vol. 14, 1977, pp. 210-11.

25 Alagappa, n. 6, p. 52.

to these has been viewed as a threat to national security. The recent attempt to institutionalize the dominant role of the military in Thai politics under the mantle of national security has created more scope for the military to stay in power and grab the opportunity from their adversaries.

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CHAPTER   II

THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN THAILAND

Thailand maintained its formal independence throughout history by its internal reforms and concessions to European interest. It smarted under unequal relationships, prospered with the development of internal rice trade, which provided the major source of finance for the modern Thai state. The bureaucracy which was developed to administer the new Siam, consisted of people drawn from old nobility and partly of commoners recruited through a rapidly expanding modern educational system.

Influenced by the western ideas of progress and efficiency, its members soon acquired an ethos which clashed with the principle of royal absolutism and patronage. The tension between royal and bureaucratic authority came to a head over financial stringencies which were imposed by the collapse of international rice market, during the Great Depression. This led to a bloodless coup in 1932 which brought the end of absolute rule of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1925-35), and since then power has lain with bureaucratic elite.[1]

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1 The Far East and Australasia, 1988, Nineteenth edition, Europa Publications Limited, London, 1987, p. 927.

The Revolution of 1932 was led by European educated radicals of lesser noble rank Pridi Phanomyang and major Phibun Songkhram, and by the highest ranking military officer of commoner background colonel Phahon. Pridi who held a series of high governmental posts confirmed the illegality of Communism, parties were banned and press cencorship was instituted.[2]

Phibun when became Prime Minister in 1938, stressed his role as supreme leader and pioneer of a modern society, he changed the country's name from Siam to Thailand in 1939. He encouraged the beginnings of state sponsored industrialism in order to achieve autarchy in basic military supplies. Thailand's great economic development had taken without much change in its social structure at the mass level.

In November 1951 a bloodless coup by Phibun ended what remained of Thai democracy, dissolving the elected national assembly and abrogating the constitution, but with no major development in economy and socio-political systems he found it difficult to defend his position against the ambitions of Gen. Sarit Thanarat.[3]

In October 1958 Sarit Thanarat assumed leadership to himself. Sarit removed the limits on land holding and welcomed

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2 Ibid., p. 929.

3 Ibid.

foreign investment. Soon Thailand became supporter of United
States and provided military bases and supplies. After Sarit
the new Constitution of June 1968 brought limited parliamentary
government and official sponsored political party of Thanom.
The democratic experiment brought more criticism than they had
bargained for. In November 1971 they again seized full power,
but now their authority was severely compromised.

The year 1973 opened a new chapter in the history of
Thailand, as it involved the students substantially in the
politics which led to the October Revolution of 1973. The
upheaval of October was no more a resolution in the sense of
mass armed action, than had the revolution of 1932. But like
its predecessor it marked a watershed in the development of
the Thai political system.[4] It was the culmination of social,
economic and ideological changes which had gradually taken
place, and were at least demanding political expression. The
demonstrations which brought the downfall of military rule were
only the beginning of a turbulent public participation. Students
all over Thailand demonstrated for social reforms, organised
under the National Student Centre of Thailand. The workers and
peasants were in contrast to earlier democratic movements.
They were organised for action to secure redress.

The democratic institutions of the 1973-76 period
allowed free play to such sentiments, but did very little to

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4 Ibid., p. 930.

satisfy demands, as the government of this period had little
authority. The elections in April 1976 brought Seri and the
Democratic Party to power in a coalition, but this too proved
unable to formulate let alone execute a coherent policy.
The governments of the period were markedly more conservative
than non-parliamentary expressions of public opinion. The
parties themselves were poorly organised. Individual military
leaders were prominent in political parties of the
period.[5]

After the death of Gen. Krit there was a return of
military rule. A solution which was increasingly popular as
the urban middle classes came to see authoritarian government
as preferable to paralysis and disorder. A military dominated
national administrative reform council took over, banning
political parties, dissolving the national assembly and made the
government headed by Supreme Court judge Thanin.[6]

In October 1977 Thanin's unstable government was over-
thrown by military coalition headed by Gen. Kriangsak Chomonan.
In March 1980 having failed to find solutions and economic
policies that were both realistic and acceptable to the elite,
Kriangsak was replaced as Prime Minister by the army chief
and defence minister Gen Prem Tinsulanond. Prem's regime like
Kriangsak's was based on a combination of military and civilian

5 Ibid. 930

6 Ibid., p. 931.

leaders. Ultimate power lay with the armed forces, but the political parties played a major role in linking military, civilian, bureaucratic and business interests.

Constitutionalism and Bureaucracy

The present constitution was promulgated on 22 December 1978 and thereafter Thai governmental structure was underwritten by a constitution based on free elections and the principles of separation of powers. Substantial changes had been made in each of these elements as they have been integrated in the Thai culture. According to Clark D. Neher, "Thai constitutions have not been considered the fundamental law of the land, rather they have functioned to facilitate the rule of the regime in power. Thailand's post revolution history suggests the direct relationship between power configuration and the content of the successive constitutions".[7]

The promoters of the 1932 revolution drafted Thailand's first constitution in order to enhance their own power and to curtail severely the power of the king and other royalty. But the promoters also assured their own continued dominance of the government by appointing one half of the legislative body. Military regimes generally promulgated constitutions which rested power in the executive branch and called for half

7   Clark D. Neher, Modern Thai Politics (Massachusetts: Schankman Publishing Company, 1979), p. 318.

appointed half elected parliaments.[8]

The Thai notion of elections contrasts sharply with that of Western societies, where elections are held to provide for changes in government. In Thailand the coup d' etat has been the principal means by which the governments change. The Thai villagers play less role in the political process. They are isolated from political authorities, and there is non-binding social and institutional relations. It is held that these basic orientations are a cause of political apathy in rural Thailand.[9]

The continuing capacity of the Thai political system to cope with changing forces is to a great extent the result of an absence of diverse political structures and the dominance of a centralized bureaucratic structure. Bureaucracy has also reflected the persistent and inevitable growth of governmental activities. Bureaucratic services provide an infrastructure for social and economic activity, and also serves as instruments of social change. The continuance of Thai society would be impossible if the services performed by the civil bureaucracy were withdrawn.[10] Today as in the past, the civil bureaucracy

8   Ibid., p. 319.

9   Ibid., p. 320.

10   Ibid., p. 339.

exists as the intermediate strata of a stratified society. As a sub system of the larger society, it is both part of and apart from its setting.

Political Culture and Environmental Milieu

The learning process of the majority of the Thai people forms the social values and finally the political culture. It is divided into three stages broadly. The first stage is that of the family which includes parents, relatives, Buddhism and the agrarian society. The relationships within the Thai family have a rather loose characteristic, that is, it is not rigid as Chinese and Japanese have.[11] The social values and living patterns coexist harmoniously and are reinforced and supported by the life system of rice agriculture. Rich soils and abundant natural resources enable an individual to live alone without much dependence on relatives and friends. The uncongested living conditions, soil fertility, fair weather and unrigid family system contributes to Thai people's love of independence, aversion to living under rules and regulations of the family and society. These social values are influenced and reinforced by Buddhism, which holds that - (i) Life is transitory; (ii) suffering, happiness, merit and past actions are personal things, and (iii) nobody can share or relieve the

11 Hans-Dieter Evers, ed., Loosely Structured Social System : Thailand in Comparative Perspective (Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1969).

sins of others. This means that an individual has to help himself, to find his own way, and to follow his own will. According to Thai sociologist Prasert Yaenglinfung, "The true Thai will follow his own will". To follow one's own will with little consideration of social rules (even the law) is an obvious and outstanding Thai trait.[12]

The second stage comes when a child steps out into the society, such as having friends, going to school and growing up to become an adult member of the village. At this point the Thai child understands and feels the influence of one of the most important things in Thailand, "bureaucratic power". That is the power of the government which is enforced by government officials. The more he grows up, the more he comes to recognise two omnipresent power as being similar to his own shadow.[13]

Bureaucratic power has important influence on the Thai socialization process because this authority did not just appear as in the case of new states of Asia and Africa. Siam has long had the polity of a "nation" which has a deeper meaning than a "state". Bureaucratic power has existed from the beginning of the national kingdom, especially during the absolute monarchy.[14]

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12 Prasert Yaenglinfung, Thai Traits as Factors of National Power (Bangkok: Faculty of Political Science, Chulalangkorn University, 1971), p. 12.

13 Ibid., p. 156.

14 Ibid.

Thai political culture is based on the two conflicting values "independence and individualism" vs. "dependence and authoritarianism", so the political development is faced with enormous complexities. First whenever the power of authority disappears or grows weak, the independence and individualism trait exerts its strong influence. The political parties, associations and organisations tend to be temporary and inefficient because of the Thai inability to organise into a group, organisation and institution. This is partly the result of a political culture characterized by extreme conflicting values. The value placed in independence and individualism is the reason, people do not permanently and voluntarily join groups while the necessity to establish groups and organisation always exists.[15] Therefore there is no strong party with committed people at all levels of organisation. So in a party the strong leader becomes authoritarian and continues till he commands the support. After that organisation dissolves naturally because there is no binding relationship among its members to replace the leader.

Political Change in Thailand

Constitutional change is not new to Thailand, but the prevailing civilian awareness and attitude towards socialism,

15 Ibid., p. 163.

as well as the increasing demands by well-organised groups of students, teachers, workers and farmers, do represent a significant departure from all previous attempts to achieve democracy in Thailand. Successful strikes by workers in Bangkok and grass-roots movements in the provinces have characterized the new emerging forces in Thai politics since the October student revolt of 1973.[16] These political events occurred at a rate never before experienced by the Thais. Moreover, unlike previous protests, these movements gained broad-based support from diverse sectors of Thai society.

Transition, in the context of political developments since 1973 is related to three main areas of concern, and they are bureaucratic reform, emerging social forces and changes in domestic and foreign policy.

The traditional Thai bureaucracy has persisted in a conventional mold with few exceptions since Prince Damrong instituted the reforms of king Chulalongkorn the Great. This bucraucracy has been described by many scholars of Thai politics (among them F.W. Riggs, W.F. Vella and W. Siffen) as being one of the most adaptable and at the same time, the most durable systems of civil service in Southeast Asia as described by Ross Prizzia.[17] He further describes that Thai

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16 Ross Prizzia, <u>Thailand in Transition</u> (Centre for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, 1985), p. 1.

17 Ibid., p. 2.

civil services based on Conzucian principles and hierarchy of authority that owed its origins and legitimacy to the monarchy, has continued almost unchanged since the 1932 coup which legally shifted the bureaucracy from the monarchy to civilian and military control. In the aftermath of the bloodless coup of 1932, power shifted to a slightly broader based decision-making apparatus, but rule by various dominant cliques at the highest level of this new power base still persisted.[18]

Another significant aspect of the transition was the emergence of new social forces, the techniques of the new social forces in pressing demands on the various agencies of the government became as diversified as the demands themselves. The largest and the most visible oppositional force immediately after the 1973 October revolution was the students of the National Student Center of Thailand.[19]   Similarly, other concerned citizens groups also organised strikes and used various technique to press their demands on the government. At the same time, workers and other became more effective in exerting pressure on the government.

Another characteristic of the transition involved changes in Thailand's foreign policy. According to Ross Prizzia "This aspect of the transition has most to do with

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18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Thailand's ultimate survival in the strategy for peace in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, Thai foreign policy began to shift toward neutralism and nonalignment in its mildest form and toward anti-neoclolonialism in its harshest form. The change in Thai foreign policy was also characterized by a general trend toward normalization of relations with People's Republic of China and accommodation with the new Communist governments of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea.[20] Another significant aspect of the foreign policy change was the withdrawal of US troops from Thailand and the general proposals of Thailand's first coalition of government. The overall proposal of Kukrit Pramoj government in 1973 was designed so that no country in the future would use Thailand as a base for aggression on other countries in Asia. These new policy proposals pertained particularly to the US air force bases which had carried out bombing missions over Laos, Kampuchea and North Vietnam.

The political environment, particularly after 1973, created a unity of purpose among many oppositional groups. Students and leftist groups jointly supported the protests against police incursions involving mistreatment of members of separatist movements in Thailand.[21] This led to the enfranchisement of new groups, expansion of popular participation in a

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20 Ibid., p. 4.

21 Ibid., p. 5.

largely autocratic decision-making structure. Hence students could overthrow an unpopular regime and a government of the masses displaying portraits of the monarchy's incumbents, the king and queen was established.

The Changing Social Scene in Thailand

Traditionally, Thai society was the same as many Southeast Asian societies, with major influences from the Confucian way of life and the teachings of Buddhism and its Indian influences. Traditional Thai social values stressed the family system, respect for hierarchy in the family structure, concept and fear of Gods and the devils, and the difference between the ruler and the ruled. Buddhism also influenced the Thai people, stressing passiveness rather than activeness in the roles they played in society.[22]

The traditional political system in Thailand helped in laying the infrastructure of Thai society. The above mentioned philosophical and religious foundation plus the nineteenth century British and French colonial and civil service systems, provided the elite structure of Thai society headed by many thousands of Thai civil servants. These social elites set the

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22 N. Ketudat, "Changing Social Scene in Thailand", in S. Sangchai and L.J. Jock, ed., Trends in Thailand (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore University Press, 1976), p. 39.

traditional Thai social standards which were envied by the rest of the Thai society.[23]

The turning point of Thai social changes occurred just before and after the October 1973 student revolt which overthrew the Thanom-Prapass regime, followed by the general election and the parliamentary government. Even before the revolt of 1973, traces of social change had begun, university students had started questioning the traditional social values. The contemporary Western and particularly American social values came pouring in through films, television programmes and pop music. The first wave of cultural shock to reach and flourish on the Thai shores was the Hippie Generation which denied just about all existing Thai social values. Disobedience against the elder generation became clear in course of time, and the traditional social context were being looked down upon.

Student Revolt did not succeed because of the students alone. The students had exposed many malpractices of the military and government leaders and hence they got public support while proving the double standards of the government leaders and traditional value system. The student revolt of 1973 brought a qualitative change in the life style of Thais, in the thinking and the social values.

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23 Ibid., p. 40.

The concept of Buddhism and the Buddhist way of life underwent such a change that Buddhism has become less of a religion and more of a way of life, and a philosophy. Fewer people go to the temple to pray, instead more of them, particularly the young go there to practice meditation and to discuss Buddhist philosophy and its interpretation of life. The anti-war and anti-military ideas are identified with Buddhist passiveness and its search for peace. Anti-materialism is associated with the Buddhist doctrine of self-satisfaction.[24]

The above mentioned social changes had less effect in the rural areas initially but the modern mass media, through radio, television and the press made it easy for the infiltration of progressive ideas and values to the rural religious villages.[25] Moreover in every region, there are regional colleges and universities which breed students who preach the new social values, and who are active in both social and political activities in their respective regions.

If one studies the population structure of Thailand, one cannot fail to conclude that more social changes are on the way. An enormous number of Thai youth are pouring into society, searching and experimenting with the changing values.

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24 Ibid., p. 42.

25 Ibid., pp. 42-43.

National Political Process

National level politics in Thailand has always involved only a very few people. Kings, royalty and nobility reigned supreme during the Sukhothai, Ayuthaya and Bangkok eras. The 1932 coup de' tat which overthrew the absolute monarchy did not bring any fundamental change in the pattern of rule, a bureaucratic elite replaced the monarchical elite.

The major decision makers in contemporary Thai national politics have been the top-level bureaucrats, high-ranking military officers members of royalty, directors of large business and corporations, intellectuals and politicians.

Monarchy which is above all, is theoretically and legally above politics. Thai king is even today revered by his subjects, is the national symbol of the kingdom, the supreme patron reigning over all, and the leader of Buddhist religion.

The executive branch of government dominates the political scene, since 1932 the Prime Minister has wielded great authority as the leader of the cabinet and military. The executive here has always been controlled by the military. The executive branch has consisted of the prime minister and other cabinet level ministers representing various ministries.

Under various cabinet ministers are civil servants who comprise the official bureaucracy.

The legislature has never been a politically powerful branch of the government. On the contrary, the legislative branch has most often been used to enhance the power of the executive. Executive control of the legislature has come about partially through the government's power to appoint half of the legislative body. Legislature has been peripheral to the military dominated political system in Thailand.[26]

Thai political parties have had the most rudimentary organization, with almost no regard for programme or issues. Party lines are not based on ideologies but rather on the personalities and aspirations of political leaders. Parties in Thailand tend to flourish or decay depending on the ability of the party leaders to command resources and to distribute these resources effectively to his clientele. The personal orientation of the parties results also in legislators of one party easily shifting to other parties when their interests are better served. To be in the opposition is to be deprived by access to funds for road building and other development projects for one's constituency.

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26 David Morrell, "Legislative Intervention in Thailand's Development Process : A Case Study", Asian Survey, vol. 12, no. 8, August 1972, p. 627.

In the Thai political system the arena of politics is inside the government, with little or no competition for power emanating from outside the bureaucratic institutions. The effect of this form of oligarchy is to reduce the number of persons engaged in politics and to narrow the range of scope of political activity. Yet top-level politics in Thailand, as in more diffused systems, is characterized by competition and conflict, cleavage and manipulation.[27] To maximize the chances of achieving these ends, patron-client groupings amalgamate into cliques and entourages, and the working off these factional groups are probably best understood in the context of patron-client relationships.

The cabinet represents the highest level of political activity because its ministers have greatest access to the government's resources and are closely affiliated with prime minister. Generally, therefore, cabinet members include members of dominant clique. Those closest to the prime minister usually head the ministries of Interior and Defense.

In the struggle for power, wealth and status the military has been particularly successful since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. The military has dominated the office of prime minister. The military has held the key political positions and thus has been bureaucratized by political system.

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27 Neher, n. 7, p. 277.

The military leaders like the would be kings in Thai history, have seized power in the absence of institutionalized norms of succession. And even during the constitutional period, military leaders have used the coup d' etat to seize power from both civilian and military regimes.[28] The coup, which is the ideal mechanism for politically ambitious military groups, has become the standard means by which Thai government change.

Thailand is a good example of a nation with the proper preconditions for a coup d' etat. Since high political posts are held by only a very few people and since the governmental participation is concentrated in the bureaucracy, it is possible to dominate the entire political system merely by controlling the bureaucratic structure.[29] And extra bureaucratic institutions have been in consequential, they are easily bypassed. In addition, the fact that Bangkok is the nation's only major city considerably eases the logistical problems in carrying out a coup.

The military is the best organized group in the kingdom and in terms of discipline and hierarchy has no rival. Thus the national emphasis on hierarchy, deference and status is congruent with the military's organization, which is based on superior-subordinate relationships. In addition, the army

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28 Ibid., p. 278.

29 Ibid., pp. 278-9.

can count on the loyalty and obedience of its followers to a
much greater extent than can ad hoc groups of politicians.

Military, by decrying civilian ineptness, corruption
and inefficiency and by proclaiming the threat of Communist led
insurgency and the inability of civilian regimes to cope with
the threat, the military leaders have been able to persuade the
bucreucratic polity that can do a better job of governing the
nation. When unable to persuade the civilian leadership, the
military has forceably grasped power.

The political process in Thailand has a unique feature,
where there has been a continuous struggle for power between
the military and top civilian bureaucrats. The role of political
institutions has been very less in this struggle, but the
increasing awareness and consciousness of the people might
make political institutions much stronger to govern the political
process in Thailand.

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CHAPTER   III

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion and politics have been inextricably inter-
related since the dawn of human culture and civilization.
According to Myron J. Aronoff "Introduction of the focus on
culture provides an important new paradigm, a more synthetic
approach to understanding the relationship between religion and
politics.[1] Liebman and Don-Yehiya argue that democratic
"visionary" regimes like Israel rely on traditional religious
symbols that evoke a "sense of the sacred" in order to mobilize
and integrate the society and to provide legitimacy for the
regime and the political system.[2] Islamic revitalization
movements with radical political agendas are posing challenges
to regimes throughout the contemporary Middle East.

The revolution in Iran was a spectacular example of
this phenomenon. The leading role played by the Shia clergy
in the counter mobilization that successfully overthrew the
regime of the Shah.[3] These examples explore the role of
traditional religious values, symbols, affiliations and leaders

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1 Myron J. Aronoff, Religion and Politics (New Burnswick :
   Transaction Books, 1984), p. 1.

2 Ibid. p. 1

3 Ibid., p. 2.

in dealing with contemporary socio-political realities. Each attempts to analyse the way in which religious traditions help shape the understanding and meaning of contemporary political realities, and how they are reinterpreted and used to accomplish political, as well as religious goals.[4]

The kingdom of Thailand is an anomaly among the states and societies of the Third World. Like all Third World countries in general, the actual operation of the democratic process in Thailand has brought into sharp focus the complexity of the relationship between politics and society. "The framework of politics in any democratic society is characterized by the general and specific features of the interaction between politics and the social structure. The general feature of politics in all democratic societies is that it intervenes to influence society and that it also reflects the social reality. This interventionist and reflective character of politics cannot, however, be taken for granted. It has been empirically observed that instead of playing an activist role in society, politics becomes passive and reflective of social forces."[5]

Thailand is attempting a reconciliation between a modern democratic political system with a social system which

4 Ibid, p. 2

5 C.P. Bhambhri, Politics in India (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1988), p. 176.

has its firm foundations in ancient culture and religion. Many ancient social structures and religious values are persisting with full faith and involvement of the people. In one sense, the modern democratic political system has been superimposed on people who are greatly attached to their religion, and the dynamics of contemporary. Thai society derives from a struggle or conflict between an emerging democratic politics on the one hand and the loyalties of people rooted in the religion on the other hand. Yet it is quite obvious that religion occupies a central place in the cultural tradition and social values in the country.

The case of Thailand provides illustrations of a wide spectrum of religio-political phenomena like the role of religion in Thai nationalism, the interaction of Buddhism and modern political ideologies, the use of religion in democratic politics, the political role of Thai Buddhist monks, the unique leadership of a politician in promoting religious revival, Communist danger and Holy War on the Communists, and the contrasting role of a military regime.

Buddhism and Thai Nationalism

In Thailand, nationalism had to be forced because Thais never had their nationhood threatened since the middle of the eighteenth century, and having then survived the threat and grown in strength, they had by the beginning of the

twentieth century ceased to be self-conscious about nationhood. Moreover, no alien ideology had been able to secure a position of advantage and Buddhism had continued to provide a basis of cultural unity and to exert an influence at all levels of society. However, the time came when a conscious attempt to develop a more lively and militant Thai nationalism was made.[6]

The concept of Thai nationalism began during the reign of Ramo VI, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. It was made partly in the name of Buddhism because of people's confidence and faith in Buddhism.[7] Nation, religion and king (chat, satsana, phramahakasat) the patriotic slogan was coined by king Vajirayudh, or Rama VI shortly after his accession to inculcate devotion to Fatherland, Nation and Holy Religion as a focus for Thai unity and integrity.

King Rama VI believed that religion had an important part to play in fostering the spirit of nationalism. In the furtherance of this idea, he had the practice of introducing Buddhist prayers in various public institutions, such as government schools, the police force and the army. He firmly rejected the idea that such practices were inappropriate to Buddhism, and denied that Buddhism was primarily concerned with

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6 Trevor Ling, Buddhism, Imperialism and War (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 91.

7 Ibid., p. 92.

meditation. He said in his sermons to the people that Bhddhism's positive qualities could best be seen on the battle field; fighting men with a belief in Buddha's teachings would not flee, because their belief in dhamma strengthened their courage and convinced them that the sacrifice of their life was an advantage, the Thai people had a Buddhist cause to fight for.[8]

The policy of glorifying military virtues and enhancing the place of the army in Thai national life carried out by Rama VI had long-term consequences which still exists. The Thai army, built up by the king in the early years of the twentieth century with the declared intention of defending Buddhist civilization, was by mid-century to become the dominant power in Thailand, and by the last quarter of the century it has become evident that the Buddhist Sangha in Thailand is being required to assist in implementing the policies of Thai military elite, policies which to some Buddhists are odious.[9]

Religion, Politics and Social Change

The relationship between Buddhism, the Sangha, political authority and the state is quite complex and inter-mingled. Dhamma (teachings of the Buddha) and the Sangha (a body of ascetic monks) reflect a pious laity and leading an austere life geared to learning, disseminating the teachings

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8 Ibid., p. 92.
9 Ibid., p. 93.

of the Buddha, and meditation. But with regard to political
authority and the state, the religion and its sangha serve as
the moral tone of the nation, provide the people with spiritual
guidance, while the political authority and the state give them
patronage, protection and support.[10]

A closer look shatters the appearance of simplicity
of Buddhism. Buddhism has long served as one of the most
important sources of political legitimation for political
rulers, it is one of the main socializing, acculturating and
unifying forces in Thai society. It has profoundly influenced
the cultural, economic and political development of the
nation and also reputedly continues to mould the social and
political values of the great majority of the Thai
population.[11] The sangha not only confines itself to studying
preaching, and meditating, but also plays an important role in
the social, political and economic life of almost every Thai.
With its high prestige derived from its own moral and
spiritual authority, the sangha helps in providing the
integrative force in the social and cultural life of the Thai
Buddhists, and help induce solidarity by providing a set of
basic Buddhist values for the regulation of the life of the
society. Economically it is dependent on the people, and
politically it is dependent on the political ruler.[12]

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10 Somboon Suksamran, Buddhism and Politics in Thailand
    (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982),
    p. 5.

11 Ibid., p. 6.

12 Ibid.

Buddhism, as it emerged as a national religion over centuries, was as much a response to social needs as to politico-economic system of the society. Conceived in this way, one can envisage that changes in the Sangha's orientation, attitude, values and organisation had a similar pace to change in the socio-political structure of which it is a part. Nevertheless, changes in the structure of the Sangha have followed changes in other aspects of the socio-political structure, and not preceded them.[13] The rapid socio-political change in contemporary Thailand has been ideological conflict and tension within society, notably among political groups. With differences in ideological stands, there have appeared different kinds of reaction to socio-political change in Sangha.[14] The socio-political change means the process by which sets of social relationships, particularly those based on power and wealth, and sets of ideas about the nature of society and its power relationship, alter over time.

Most Thai Sangha in general may be classified as conservative or traditionalist. Their main concern is with the study, preservation and dissemination of the Buddha's teaching, while maintaining minimal involvement in secular political and economic affairs. However, socio-political changes over time

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13 Ibid., p. 7.

14 Ibid.

have effected change in the internal structure of the Sangha
in such a way that it has been subjugated under fairly tight
control of the political authority.[15] With the increasing
rapidity of socio-political change in recent times, there
emerged modernizing monks within the Sangha who felt that the
Sangha should adapt its roles to keep pace with and to accommodate
changing socio-political conditions in order to retain its
status in society.[16]

The activities of the modernizing monks have mani-
fested themselves in the institutionalized involvement of the
Sangha in government policies of national development and
integration. This has especially involved the increasing
employment of the monks in government-sponsored modernizing
schemes since the 1960s. The leading modernizing monks and the
political leaders alike justified the Sangha's involvement on the
basis that this has been done for the sake of national stability
and the progress of the people as well as for the security of
the religion.[17]

Tracing the origin of political monks, one reaches
the assumption that modernization has significantly contributed
to the development of their political and social awareness. The

15 Visakha Puja, Problems, Status and Duties of the Sangha
    in Modern Society (Bangkok: B.E. 2511, 1968), p. 58.

16 Ibid., pp. 59-72.

17 Suksamran, n. 10, pp. 52-53.

improvement of communications such as mass media and transporta-
tion has enabled the monks to broaden their horizons and to
familiariz- themselves with social and political milieu outside
the monastery. According to Somboon Suksamran in his book
Buddhism and Politics in Thailand, "The modernization and
expansion of education have widened the monk' secular learning.
Since the 1960s, for example, the Buddhist universities have
modernized their courses, such secular courses as social
studies, political thought, economics, sociology, anthropology,
psychology Asian studies and Public Administration have been
included in the Buddhist university. These factors are, to a
certain extent, responsible for the new dimensions of the
monks."[18]

On the one hand, we may attribute the monks' involve-
ment in government policies and programmes to their growing
social and political consciousness. On the other hand, we
can also note that they became involved because they were
manipulated or directed by the government. The politicization
of monks became clear and popular in the year 1970. The
absence of political monks earlier during 1960s may be attributed
to the fear of political repression which had dominated the
country's political life. But the repression itself has in
fact become socio-political ferment for the rise of political
monks later.

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18 Ibid., p. 54.

The demise, though temporary, of military-authoritarian rule in 1973 permitted political freedom of a kind not previously known in Thailand. This included freedom of expression, freedom of redress grievances and to organise public rallies, demonstrations and strikes. The mushroom growth of pressure groups representing politically repressed and underprivileged sections of society and of a free press in this period contributed to the development of the most genuinely free political atmosphere Thailand has ever experienced.[19]

With the free political atmosphere in 1973-76 came a dynamic political mobilization of the Thai people by competing political groups which devoted their campaigning efforts to persuade the people to their ideas. As a result, the forces of change and conflict had great impact on every section of Thai society.[20] Ideological polarization had also emerged and gradually pervaded the informed and politically conscious public. As part of the social structure, the Sangha could not escape these forces of change and conflict. In time some monks implicitly and explicitly advocated particular ideologies and identified themselves with the secular political activities. There also appeared ideological division among the political monks.

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

As several kinds of political monks emerged after 1973,
in an attempt to identify them and appreciate their ideologies,
Samboon Suksamran "divides political monks into broadly defined
categories: the left-wing monks on one side and the right-wing
monks on the other. Since few became political monks, such a
division does not mean that all political monks fall into
either of the two groups. Rather, the lebels are used to
designate broad differences in ideologies, identification and
activities of political monks corresponding to the distinction
between left- and right-wing activists in secular politics".[21]
The political monks who espoused changes in secular socio-
economic structures and who identified and shared ideology with
the secular left-wing movements were classified as the left-
wing political monks. Those monks who attempted to introduce
changes in the organization and administration of the Sangha
are included in this category. In contrast those monks who
opposed changes in socio-political and economic structures, and
who reacted against the displacement of vested interests in
the society were termed as right-wing political monks. These
monks shared a common ideology with the conservative and
right-wing movements in secular politics. In their efforts
to promote their ideologies, both right- and lift-wing monks
sought legitimacy for their effort by claiming that they were

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21 Ibid., p. 55.

the vanguard of the nation, religion and the monarchy, that their involvement in political economic issues were compatible with the Buddha's teachings, and that their actions and ideologies were for material and spiritual benefit of Thai society as a whole.

The 1973 Political Upheaval and Its Aftermath

The period 1971-1973 saw a rapid political and economic deterioration. The new military regime centralized power in its own hands, excluding civilian technocrats and politicians from high level decision making. Political repression and restrictions on the freedom of expression were restored. "The military leaders were so preoccupied with the task of ensuring the support of their clients that attempts to solve the immediate economic difficulties produced by inflation were neglected."[22] The growing awareness of the monks about the social and political system of the country made them realize their duty on religious leaders of the suppressed masses. Monks began to express their great concern about the deterioration of the country's economy, the central concern was the economic plight of the peasants. Thus before October 1973, the political and economic deterioration had already

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22 Clark D. Neher, "Stability and Instability in Contemporary Thailand", _Asian Survey_, vol. 15, no. 12, December 1975, p. 1099.

created preconditions for rapid, possibly violent change. A
by-product of this situation was the emergence of political
monks.

In the early part of the year, a variety of incidents
accelerated the 1973 upheaval. One of the most significant of
these began in June when nine students of Ramkamhaeng University
were expelled for writing a satire on the government. This
made the students to organise in large numbers under the
National Students Centre of Thailand (NSCT). The students
were supported by the urban masses and ultimately the
demonstration became a forum for spelling out grievances
against the military government.[23] Apart from the formation
of so many interest groups like Farmers and Labour Unions, there
was an organisation of the monks called "Federation of Buddhists
of Thailand (FBT)". On the most significant developments of
the 1973 political upheaval was the ideological polarization
and confrontation between the left- and right-wing political
groups. The monks could not keep themselves away from the
ideological polarization and confrontation. "Some monks had
engated themselves in political activities before 1973, their
actions had either been pro-government and therefore commended
by government and Sangha authorities, or anti-government and
therefore minor and restrained."[24]

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23 Ross Prizzia and Narang Sinsawasdi, Thailand : Student
Activism and Political Change (Bangkok: Allied Printers
1974), p. 40.

24 Suksanran, n. 10, p. 83.

Monks implicitly and explicitly advocated particular ideologies publicly and identified themselves with the secular political activists. In order to articulate their views and to influence the direction of change, whether it was on secular issues or on Sangha affairs, some groups of politically and socially conscious monks formed special organizations outside the institutionalized Sangha organization, thus operating as a sort of pressure group. Because of their political activities these monks came to be regarded as "political monks".

The participation of monks in the political activities during 1973 was maximum. They participated like any other party workers, they joined demonstrations, shouted slogans, conducted public meetings and distributed leaflets against the military regime.

The leftist political monks varied in their degree of radicalism and their approaches to particular issues, they were united in their dissatisfaction with the existing socio-economic and political structure as well as with Sangha administration. They viewed the system of government as authoritarian, accommodating a system of capitalist economy and thus fostering social injustice. With regard to the structure of the Sangha administration, they accused it of being undemocratic, over-centralized and corrupted. The administrative monks at the highest level were regarded as dictators. They were also accused of having obstructed

positive changes, and of being responsible for the lack of progress in Buddhism.[25]

The danger of left-wing political monks gave rise to the right-wing political monks. The Sangha was essentially conservative and the top of the Sangha hierarchy was in many ways closely linked to the monarchy and government in power.[26] There were fears at the top that the left-wing monks were undermining the faith, creating schism in the Sangha, and giving support to the enemies of religion. This was further seen as weakening the moral basis of Thai society in such a way as to ultimately lead to the destruction of Buddhism, the nation, the monarchy and the government.[27]

A sharp reaction to the activities of the leftist monks came from a number of groups, notably one led by a Kitthiwuddho Bhiku, who advocated a holy war on the leftists and communists and justified the killing of them on the ground that the demerit incurred by the killing of these incomplete persons was far outweighed by the merit derived from the acts undertaken to preserve the nation.[28] Kitthiwuddo identified a

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25 Ibid., p. 90.

26 Ibid., p. 91.

27 Ibid., pp. 91-92.

28 Keyes, "Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism" in Bradwell L. Smigh, ed., Religion and Legitimation, p. 155.

broad group encompassing those represented by the National
Students Center of Thailand, the Communists, left-wing political
parties and newspapers and magazines supporting them as the
enemies of the state. His ideology was similar to that of
Nawaphol, an extrabureaucratic force created to preserve "Thai
Nationalism" and financed by the military faction.[29]

Although Nawapol did not claim to be a political
party seeking parliamentary representation, but it was obvious
to the public that it was a political movement. Kitthiwuddo's
involvement in Nawalpol was unquestionably seen as an involve-
ment of religion and of monkhood in politics.[30] Kitthiwuddo
maintained that Nawapol was not a political institution since
it was not a political party and it did not bid for political
power. To him, its members were tied together by a principle
of nationalism whereby the movement took the middle way of
Buddhism to solve problems of government economics and
society.

The initial reason for Kitthiwuddho's involvement in
Nawapol was to preserve and protect the nation, religion and
monarchy which, for him and Nawapol, were in grave danger of
being destroyed by the Communists and enemies who operated
under different names but were in fact part of the Communist

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29 Suksamran, n. 10, p. 133.

30 Ibid., p. 134.

movement.[31] Kitthiwuddo made a major effort, in concert with
Nawapol and with others on the far right, to mobilize all
classes of the people and monks to wage war on Communists
and leftist movements.

Kitthiwuddho declared a crusade on the Communists,
he was articulate about the strategies and means to be employed
in the fight against the enemies he had identified. The
counteraction was to be mounted simultaneously by monks and
laymen, each using different strategies and weapons but acting
in concert. Kitthiwuddo mobilised the masses against
Communists, he used the government full support, the monarchy
and the religion. "For Kitthiwuddho, the Communists were
mara (the evil one) and Communism was thus an ideology of evil.
It was the ideology that negoted virtue (kwamdi) and aimed at
the destruction of society, the happiness of mankind and
religion. It was therefore the most dangerous and direct
enemy of Buddhism. It was also in turn the enemy of the
monarchy. "[32]

Kitthiwuddho's mass mobilization of people govern-
ment and monarchy, along with material resources was only
in the name of religion. He used religion in drawing the

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31 Ibid., p. 138.

32 Ibid., p. 139.

sentiments of the people against Communism. The suppression of the Communists was justified by Dhamma and Vinaya of Buddhism, Kitthiwuddho interpreted religion and Buddhism in the mobilization of men and material on the one hand, and subjugation and suppression of Communism on the other.

According to Muthiah Alagappa "Three interrelated conclusions may be drawn from the mobilization of men and material and suppression of communism by religion. First, the assertion that Buddhism is the integrative force of Thai society. Secondly, the manipulation of Buddhism to justify the essentially non-Buddhist activities. Thirdly, the alignment of Sangha with the conservative forces against the forces of change".[33] The centrality of Buddhism in Thai politics also gives rise to another disintegrative tendency. This is in relation to the Malay Muslim minority in southern Thailand. Much more than Buddhism, Islam prescribes detail codes for Islamic societies.[34]

The bulk of the Muslims are concentrated in the four provinces of southern Thailand, directly adjacent to the northern part of peninsular Malaysia. Their history, language, culture and religion are different from those of the Thai

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33 M. Alagappa, The National Security of Developing States, Lessons from Thailand (Massachusetts, 1987), p. 45.

34 Ibid.

Buddhists, but match closely to those of the Malays situated across the border in the Peninsular Malaysia. The pattern of society in the four southern provinces is such that the Muslims feel alienated from the Thai mainstream. Muslims are also separately situated, away from the Buddhist inhabitation. [35]

The Muslims are very much interested in retaining the essence of their traditional culture and fear that the Thai government is trying to assimilate them by changing their local systems, institutions, language and the religion. The Muslims have emphasized the importance of the knowledge of Islamic religion, the history of Muslims Sultanates, and the Malay language. [36] The Muslims have also used Islam, their religion, for making a common cause to struggle with the Thai administration for attaining outonomy or complete independence. The majority of the Muslims are now advocating secession from Thailand. By and large, the Muslim secessionists base their claims mainly on their legitimacy as a separate ethnic community and religion. [37]

Thus we find that the minorities also exert their distinct identity and politics in the name of religion. The

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35 Ganganath Jha, "Muslims Minorities in the Philippines and Thailand", India Quarterly (New Delhi), July-September 1978, p. 339.

36 Ibid., p. 340.

37 Ibid.

people of four provinces of southern Thailand have used Islam,
their religion, for making a common cause to struggle with
the Thai government for attaining autonomy. So religion is
found to play a major role in the political system, further
religion is found to be the integrative force in the Thai
society in general.

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CHAPTER IV

THE BUDDHIST SANGHA : ITS ROLE AND POLITICAL PATRONAGE

In Thai thinking the prosperity of the nation is
thought to be related to the prosperity of Buddhism and vice
versa, and that the stability of the nation and religion cannot
be separated. The Thai rulers have been deeply concerned with
the prosperity and uprightness of Buddhism. The survival and
meaningfulness of Buddhism in turn largely depends on a sound
and uncorrupted Sangha which preserves, continues, studies
and disseminates the teaching of Buddha. It is thus a vital
traditional function of the political ruler to promote support,
and protect Buddhism and the Sangha.

This exalted concept of the Sangha leads to two
important relationships in a Buddhist society: (i) Popular
reverence for the monks makes their influence considerable
in whatever area they choose to exert it, including politics.
(ii) Internal corruption in the monastic order eats at the
very vitals of Buddhist religion and is likely to elicit
measures for reform from other sources of authority, especially
government.[1]

For the Thais who are Buddhists (approximately 95
per cent of Thailand's population), the Sangha is one of the

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1 Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma (New
   Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 187.

greatest, most traditional, and most important institutions in the society. The members of the Sangha (the monks) have played a prominent role in and are closely involved with the life of almost every Thai, in both religious and secular matters. The monks are held in high esteem, respected, revered and are considered indispensable. They are considered as the integrative force in the social and cultural life of the Thai Buddhists. They are considered to induce solidarity by providing a set of basic Buddhist values for the regulation of the life of the society.

According to Suksamran "Sangha can exercise their powers to mould the social and political behaviour of Buddhists. But it would be a serious error to assume that the Sangha can exercise a form of socio-political control at its discretion. In fact, the Sangha is hampered in achieving an independent socio-political role because it received recognition and patronage from the political authority. The Thai Sangha has been loyal and subservient to the political authority in return for protection and patronage. The hierarchical Sangha organisation is a government creation modelled on, and part of the civil services, and functions on the same line."[2] Thus it is seen that government domination is so much on the Sangha that it has started functioning like any other government organisation.

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2 Somboon Suksamran, Buddhism and Politics in Thailand (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), p. 13.

The Political Authority's Patronage of the Sangha

One conspicuous element in the relationship between the
Sangha and the government has been the institution of patronage.
This has taken many forms over the centuries, like the building
of wat (monastry), land donation, slave endowment and awards
of Ecclesiastical Honorific Titles.

It has been a long-established tradition that when
a new king ascends to the throne, he builds a new monastry
and a new royal palace. The magnificence of the buildings
signified the extent of the king's pious concern for the well-
being and prosperity of the religion and the Sangha. The
simultaneous construction of the wat and the palace indicated
an earthly structural relationship between the Sangha and the
political authority. The wat built by the king or under his
patronage is called wat luang (Royal Monastery) and the one
built by a commoner is wat rath (Commer Wat).

Another feature of material political patronage of
the wat and its monks, still practised today, is the donation
of land and the donation of benefits from the land to the
wat.[3] Land that is donated to the wat is called Thithoranisong
or the monastry land. The donated land is managed and looked
after by the wat committee called as Kammakakan wat. The major

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3 Donald E. Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma (New
    Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 185.

donor of land has been the political authority, whether it be the king or the government. The amounts of land given to the wat by the kings are far from certain. Western visitors in the nineteenth century were impressed that many wat in the country possessed a considerable acreage of the best land.[4] A.G. Graham, for example, reported that the Thai Sangha enjoyed a considerable income from the donated lands.[5] The business of the wat properties is managed and administered by the wat lay committee, and their activities are supervised and closely controlled by the Department of Religious Affairs.

Another kind of patronage by the political authority of the Sangha is the award of ecclesiastical honorific titles, the Samanasak. The word Samana here basically refers to the monks or the one who leads the ascetic life. Sak or Sakdi means power in the sense of resources or energy. Just as the Sakdina served as a refined index of rank in lay society, Samanasak signifies the rank and status of an individual monk in the Sangha hierarchy. While the title of Somdet Chaophraya denoted the highest rank and status of an official in the

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4 Jacob T. Child, The Pearl of Asia (Chicago, 1892),
   p. 20.

5 A.W. Graham, Siam : A Handbook of Practical, Commercial
   and Political Information (London, 1902), p. 507.

Sakdina system, then of Somdet Phrasangharacha indicates the rank of a monk in the system of Samanasak.

The criteria adopted for selecting recipients for honorific titles varied over time. The evidence suggests that in the Sukhothai, Ayudhya and early Bangkok periods, competence in ecclesiastical education, knowledge of Dhamma and Buddhist scriptures and good behaviour were the main qualifications for securing honorific titles.[6]

According to J.P. Ferguson and S. Ramitanondha "Today success or achievements in the following areas would contribute significantly towards royal recognition and the award of an honorific title: the education of self through success in taking Pali or Thai exams in religious subjects; contributions towards the education of others; a record of social service projects; a reputation for administering one's monastery as an abbot and for carrying out responsibility well and eagerly; public respect for living a correct and proper life as a Buddhist monk."[7]

When a title becomes vacant, the council of elders (the Mahatherasamakam) the sole administrative body of the Sangha, considers candidates from the rank or grade below that title, with the advice of the Department of Religious Affairs.

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6   Simon de Loubere, A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam (London: T. Horne, 1693), p. 194.

7   J.P. Ferguson and S. Ramithanondh, "Monks and Hierarchy in N. Thailand", Journal of the Siam Society, no. 64, 1976, p. 118.

When a decision is reached, it is passed through the Minister of Education to the Cabinet and the Prime Minister and thus to the king for ratification.[8]

On the King's birthday each year, the successful candidates are called to the palace to receive certificates and ceremonial fans from the king or his representatives. The certificate indicates the rank and status of a particular monk and involves a change of name for him to suit the qualities for which the title is given.

An honorific title also helps its holder to climb the ladder in the administrative hierarchy of the Sangh. It creates disparity amongst the monks because the higher ranks enjoys greater privilege, which is further marked by differential monetary rewards and positions in the Sangha hierarchy. Second the practice of giving stipends to individual monks encourages the personal accumulation of wealth. This is not compatible with Buddhist orthodoxy, in that monks should not have personal possessions. Wealth, if acquired, is considered to belong to the whole monastic community.

The practice of linking directly or indirectly the Samanasak to the administration of the Sangha results in a hierarchical ordering of the monkhood. The emergence and

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8 Suksamran, n. 2, p. 20.

development of a hierarchical ordering of the Sangha can be seen
as part of the creation of secular political authority, possibly
to keep control of the monks. By giving rewards in the form of
honorific titles and stipends, the political authority secures
the administrative Sangha's loyalty and cooperation.

The State Authority over the Sangha

The loyalty and cooperation from the Sangha in return
for patronage by political authority is not enough to secure
religious support. Therefore, in conjunction with patronage it
is necessary for the political authority to exercise a measure
of control over the Sangha. The political control of the Sangha
is for socio-political and various strategic reasons of the
political authority.

The government views a strong and uncorrupted Sangha
as a means for social integration and as an effective safeguard
against hostile ideology, i.e., Communism. In this respect,
the political control primarily aims at the protection of the
monks from corruption, and Sangha from degeneration.

Control over the Sangha enables the government to keep
the Sangha in line with government policy and all Thai
governments have attempted to achieve this. According to J.A.
Niels Mulder, "Every major governmental policy change, be it
the Cakkri Reformation of 1782, the early modernization efforts
of king Mongkut and king Chulalongkorn, the Revolution of

1952, or Marshal Sarit Thanarat's policy of national development through strong leadership has been accompanied by efforts to reform and reorganize the monkhood."[9]

The political authority has had several means of control. These have been revised, modified and redefined over time to ensure that the Sangha adopts to the policy of the government. The sanctions applied to the Sangha appear to be not qualitatively different from those evoked to justify intervention into, or supervision of the activity of any other social organization.[10]

The 1932 Revolution brought about an end to absolute monarchy and replaced it with the conventional Western institution of Constitutional government. The idea of parliamentary form of government, a responsible cabinet headed by a prime minister, an independent judicial system, political parties and an electoral system were also introduced. These Western notions of democracy penetrated into the Sangha. Monks were fascinated and excited by these new political ideas, expressed the view that the Sangha authority structure should be more democratized and the Sangha administration should follow democratic principles.

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9   J.A. Nields Mulder, Monks, Merit and Motivation : Buddhism and National Development in Thailand (Illinois: CSAS, Northern Illinois University, 1973), p. 19.

10   Suksamran, n. 2, p. 26.

According to Kenneth P. Landon, about the 1932 Revolution and its effects on the monks, "Novices and young monks were sometimes requested not to leave the temple grounds during the period of revolutionary activity. The roads of Bangkok were dotted with yellow robes during the exciting days. Some temples forbade discussion of political subjects. There were people who suggested that a democratic form of government was needed in the temple as well as elsewhere. To this some priests agreed but many more objected."[11]

There were also protests against some administrative monks and the general character of the Sangha authority structure. This was well reported by Virginia Thompson in his book <u>Thailand : The New Siam</u>. "By September 1932 many monks had formed themselves into parties in order to do away with the control of the lord abbots. This threw the abbots, whose attitude toward the revolution had not crystallized until then, onto the side of the government, which in turn strengthened their position by protective legislation. That this did not entirely liquidate the movement among the monks was apparent when the patriarch ordered thirty three monks to retire in January 1933 because they had tried to force their abbot to hand over power to them. In February 1933 a delegation representing some two thousand monks arrived in Bangkok to

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11 Kenneth P. Landon, <u>Siam in Transition</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 216.

petition the premier to bring government control of the Buddhist church into line with the democratic regime".[12] These incidents along with the widespread Western idea of democracy which was spurred on by the anti-authoritarian stance of the new commoner-recruited political leaders, and the commitment of these leaders to live up to their ideology, i.e., to do away with anything deemed authoritarian, forced the government to agree to liberalize the structure of the Sangha authority, and the Sangha Act of 1941 being passed.

According to Yoneo Ishii "The legislation of the Sangha Act 1941 was an experiment to introduce the Buddhist order to the principles of democracy, i.e., the idea of the separation of administration, legislature and judicature."[13] Accordingly the administrative structure of the Sangha became once again a replica of the political and administrative system of the civil government.

The democratic reform of the Sangha administration seemed to work smoothly at first, but the principle of separation of power which was the prime spirit of the Sangha Act 1941 permitted the re-emergence of long dormant disputes between the two sects (nikai) - the Mahanikai order and the Thammayat

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12 Virginia Thompson, Thailand : The New Siam (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 642.

13 Yoneo Ishii, "Church and the State in Thailand", Asian Survey, vol. 8, no. 10, 1968, p.867.

order. This perennial confrontation was worsened by a number of factors which justified the intervention of the government, and the Sangha Act 1941 was abolished in 1962 and replaced by the Sangha Act of 1962.[14] When Sarit Thanarat came to the power through coup d'etat in 1957 he abolished the constitution, dissolved parliament and banned all political parties, and replaced them with a system of military dictatorship in October 1958. Sarit Thanarat was doubtful about Western democratic government as an effective means to modernize the country. Sarit considered that if the Sangha was to be an effective tool for national achievement, it must be strong, disciplined and well organized.

Sarit Thanarat supported by the top administrative Sangha, were in agreement that the Sangha Act 1941 had only caused schism within the Sangha. This was because Sangha Sapha had become a forum for conflicting views. For the authoritarian government, the Sangha Act 1941 with its democratic spirit was no longer suitable for the Sangha administration. Sarit himself had told the top Sangha administrators that "It is the intention of the government to give support in every possible way to Buddhism which has been the Thai's religion from time immemorial and whose culture

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14 Thompson, n. 12, p. 642.

is deeply ingrained in the national stability and character."[15]

Thus it is seen that changes in the authority and administrative structure of the Sangha in relation to the political authority has largely stemmed from the socio-political changes of the time. Symbolically, the political authority justifies its intervention into Sangha affairs and its exertion of control over the Sangha by asserting that this must be done for the sake of the purity of the faith and the Sangha. Politically, the reorganisation of the Sangha authority structure by political leaders has frequently been intended to make the religious structure an instrument for the promotion of national government policies.[16]

The Sangha and State

Throughout Thai history, the distinction between the Sangha and State as separate entities is not easily made. This is primarily because of the nature of the political nexus between them. The Sangha sought to secure the adherence of the political rulers (i.e., the king, dictator or government) to Buddhist values, for this would guarantee their virtual monopoly as spiritual leaders and religious professionals of the

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15 Suksamran, n. 2, pp. 46-47.

16 Landon, n. 11, p. 219.

state. The political leaders needed the cooperation of the
Sangha because the Sangha provided the state with moral
legitimation and could considerably assist in matters of
social control. According to J.A. Nields Mulder, "It is very
likely that the interests of the political rulers and the
Sangha coincided - that an ideology which needed supportive
political power met a political ruler looking for a legitimating
ideology. What developed was a peculiar type of state based
on the reciprocal relationships between the political rulers
and the Sangha.[17] The political rulers as patron supported
and protected the Sangha because the Sangha continued Buddhism,
kept Dhamma (the teaching of the Buddha) alive by studying
and disseminating it, and gave daily evidence that Dhamma
could be studied to great effect. Dhamma ensured the high
morality of the people and social prosperity. By supporting and
protecting the Sangha, the rulers preserved Dhamma, and in
preserving Dhamma they performed their duty as good Buddhist
rulers.

The use of religion for political ends has been
an old tradition in the human history. In Thailand this kind
of adaptation of Buddhism and Dhamma for political ends has
continued to the present day. Simultaneously, the survival

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17 Mulder, n. 9, p. 27.

of Buddhism and Dhamma depended on a sound and uncorrupted Sangha, and the rulers through their state control acted in effect as law enforcement officers for the monastic code of discipline, the Vinaya. In Canonical Buddhism, the Sangha was supported to be governed by the Vinaya and free from any control. The Sangha and the state's secular domain were separate. But this has never been the case in Thailand, since the state has never allowed the monks to govern themselves and their institutions like the Sanghas and wats, and has incorporated into the structure of the civil government of the state like any other government institutions and organizations.

Development in the modern Thai political system (since 1932) has demonstrated its authoritarian character most of the time. Authoritarian modes of government has infringed not only on the socio-economic and political life of the people but also on that of the religious domain. In this circumstances the structure of the Sangha has always been modelled after and paralleled the socio-political structure of the civil government.

A small and powerful ruling elite commands the socio-political order of the secular society, a powerful interest groups of monks closely associated and identified with the

secular vested interest commands the whole Sangha. The struc-
ture of the Sangha is in fact the creation of the political
power and further subjugated to it.

In terms of value orientation, the state and the
Sangha hold quite different and contrasting value orientations.
The state (i.e., civil government) is concerned primarily with
the organization of the state and regulation of social order,
and the administration of the material needs of the people,
while the Sangha traditionally emphasizes the spiritual well
being and moral order of the society. However, there is a
convergence in common interest of the two - the prosperity of
the nation is thought to be related to the prosperity of
Buddhism, and vice versa. Therefore, the security of the
nation and the stability of the religion cannot be separated,
as described by Somboon Suksamran in describing the orientation
of the two entities.[18]

Further the continuity of this relationship between
the Sangha, the state and the people that has played an important
part in shaping the roles of the Sangha in modern Thailand.
On the one hand, the Sangha, especially at the higher levels,
which has been co-opted and integrated as part of the ruling
elite, has closely identified and closely cooperated with the
state in the construction and implementation of certain government

18 Suksamran, n. 2, p. 159.

policies. The civil government as the protector of Buddhism
and the Sangha expected the cooperation of the Sangha in
ensuring national security, by adapting their roles so that
they could promote the morality of the people and the welfare
of the state.[19]   In this situation, the civil government has
deliberately manipulated the Sangha as an integrative force,
and the Sangha has used the prestige, it derives from its moral
authority to make the government's actions and policies
intelligible to the people. On the other hand, Sangh, in
the eyes of some monks with different value orientations,
see it not identical with political authority even though it may
be closely associated with it. They see the prestige and
influence of the monks resting on their religious roles _per se_,
and not on their relations with political authority.

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19 Ibid., p. 160.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A study of the international pattern of religion and politics in Thailand since 1932 onward, has reiterated the role of religion in the functioning of the government and politics. As a matter of fact, these two institutions have interacted variedly, at different levels and in different ways in almost all countries of the world and Thailand is no exception to the rule.

The use of religion directly and indirectly by the political authorities have emerged as a result of the strong faith of the people in the religion, and the profound societal adherence to the tradition. Moreover, the traditional dimensions of Thai society has reiterated the structural characteristics of the state in terms of the social and political perspective. The Thai ruling elite has not been oblivious to this feature of the politics, but they have participated fully to perpetuate the system, and have further gone out of their way to use it for their political ends. This perception of the ruling elite has been the guiding theme of our entire discussion, because Thailand has been dominated by a series

of military dictators, as regards the reign of power is con-
cerned. All military rulers had their own ideological
proclivities, ethos and perspectives, for their smooth and
long existence they legitimized their administration by the
institution of religion. Their shifting perceptions, alignments
and perspectives have been quite noticeable.

The guiding theme as well as the hypotheis of our
discussion has been the fact, that, it is the perception of
the government that has interlinked the religion with the
political mechanism. Time and again in the course of our
evaluation this fact has been validated. This interaction
has been used by the governing elite to facilitate the
ideological hegemony over their communist and other opponents
as well as maximize their support base.

Against this background let us now look into the
findings and conclusions of the last two chapters. After
having focussed upon at length, the reconciliation between a
modern democratic political system with a social system with
its firm foundation in ancient culture and religiou. The use
of religion in democratic politics, the political role of Thai
Buddhist monks, the Communist danger, Buddhism and Thai
Nationalism, religion and social change in the light of
politics, minorities and their identity problem, Buddhism
as state's religion etc., we have gathered the following

conclusions. First, Buddhism, the state religion has been and continues to be used by the political authority for their political ends. Secondly, the development of secular political institution in Thailand has been hampered by the institution of religion, so much so that political institutions cannot be separated from religion as such. Thirdly, religion gives legitimacy to various acts of the government which are against the tenets of the Buddhism. Fourthly, minorities do feel alienated because of the Buddhism being the state's religion, and the domination of the national culture by Buddhism. Fifthly, monks apart from their practicing and preaching Theravada Buddhism, also perform political roles in the political process. Sixthly, in running the administration of the Sangha, the attachment of the government is so much that it functions on the pattern of civil administrative office. The Sangha is not in a position to go against the wishes of the head of the state and in return of that it gets donations and honorific titles from the state.

Now let us answer the questions we have raised. The overall analysis of interaction between religion and politics in Thailand makes it imperative to put forth a view that the concept of Buddhism being state religion puts check on the smooth functioning of the political institution independently. The absence of scientific outlook and enquiry

has resulted in a situation in which religious ideologies of
the dominant section have been imposed over the polity so
much that it constitutes the national culture. It is thus
safe to say that secularism is a myth in a state where religion
dominates so much that it is also called "Land of Yellow
robes". So long as religion and politics are joined together
and are not divorced from each other, secularism will remain
a myth. Political authority will use religion to legitimize
certain things which are non-Buddhists. Thai polity is so
much interlinked with religion that it serves the interest of
the ruling elites.

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APPENDIX

BUDDHISM : THE THERAVADA

As the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, so does this Dhamma and Discipline have but one taste,, the taste of freedom.' (Vinaya- Pitaka)

Buddhism is a name given comparatively recently by Westerners to the vast synthesis of teachings, now 2,500 years old, attributed to Gotama (Sanskrit Gautama) the Buddha, the Sage of the Sakyan clan, and to much that later grew out of them as they spread from India to other lands. In his own days his teaching were known as Dhamma (Sanskrit, Dharma,) what is right and is as it ought to be, also as Buddha-vacana, the word of speech of the Buddha, or again as Buddhasasana, the message, teaching instruction or dispensation of the Buddha. From its origin down to the present day this Teaching of peace, inner and outer, has made a triumphant appeal and now probably numbers more followers, especially in South-East Asia, than does any other faith.

'Religion' is perhaps not a very good term to use in connection with Buddhism since it recognises no God or godhead, no isvara or Brahman in the Upanishadic sense. Life here is not regarded as a preparation for eternity, but

as a discipline for governing man's attitude to the
here and now, the present conditions, and, if properly and
deligently carried out, will lead on gradually but surely
to what is best, the highest good. 'Beyond', where it is
his aim to arrive and abide, is virtually the super-consci-
ousness that was already knwon to the yogis. When a
mediator or contemplative achieves this condition of the
mind and is deeply and utterly absorbed, material things
are so completely transcended that they cease to attract
or repel or even impinge on the senses. There is no
reaction to them. This is freedom, and it is peace. 'Immaterial
things are more peaceful than material, cessation is more
peaceful than immaterial things'.

Between the time the Founder entered on parinirvana,
the final termination of the countless births in which he
had circled and run leaving no substratum for further birth
remaining, and the writing down of these Sayings. Utterances
and Discourses, four centuries were to elapse. This is
partly because India at that time had no known materials
suitable for writing, indeed for engraving anything more
than the briefest proclamations; and partly because it was
already an ancient custom to rely on human memory for the

preservation and passing on of the spoken 'religious'
word. So, for the first 400 years or so the Savings of
the Bud ha were carried in the memories of his disciplies
and their disciplies in a long succession, or various
successions of teachers and pupils. Even while the Buddha
was alive, not only had attempts been made - for example
by his gifted but treacherous cousin Devadatta - to wrest
the leadership from him; but there had also been splits
and disruptions in the Order of monks in spite of machinery
devised to keep it unified and harmonious. With the lapse
of time and the Buddha no longer there to act as guide, law-
giver and interpreter of his own sayings, divergences of
opinion on this matter and that crystallised sufficiently
for eighteen 'schools' or sects and subjects to appear
on the scene in the second and third centuries after his
death. Because a number of these schools regarded certain
aspects of the Teaching and discipline in one way and some
in another, and because they stressed and developed different
points, they came on the whole, though still all acknowledging
allegiance to the Buddha and his teaching, to reside in
different monastic centres and localities.

Alive to such possible dangers to the true Dharma,

five hundred Arhants (those who had fully trained themselves
in the development of their mental powers) gathered together
at Rajagaha to hold the First Council a few weeks after the
Teacher's passing from this world, with the object of reciting
out loud his Dharma and Vinaya (monastic discipline)so as
to come to agreement on the accuracy of their memory of
them and so to establish them as the genuine ones to be
preserved, learnt, mastered and followed. Their guiding
belief and mainstay was that 'Dharma is well taught by
the Bhagavan (Exalted One, Blessed One); it is tobe self-
realised, its fruits are immediate, it is a come-and-see
thing, leading onwards the doer of it to the complete
destruction of anguish. 'Not only may a man or woman
win complete confidence in it; he or she may also practise
it and live it.

In the midst of the assembled Arhants who attended
the First Council the monk Upali answered all the questions
put to him by the Elder Kassapa concerning the discipline
for monks and nuns. This now forms the Vinaya-Pitaka,
the 'basket' (pitaka)containing the rules and regulations
for the conduct of monastic life (vinaya). And after the
Vinaya-Pitaka had been recited the Elder Kassapa questioned

the venerable Ananda about Dharma. Dharma is now contained
in the Sutta-Pitaka, the Basket of Discourses, which consists
of five collections of the Teaching believed to have been
uttered by the Buddha and to a lesser extent by some of his
monastic disciples of both sexes. To these there came to
be added a third 'basket', the Abhidhamma - (Sanskrit,
Abhidharma-)Pitaka, ih which the more psychological and
philosophical terms belonging to Dharma are analysed,
classified and expounded. Together these three Baskets
constitute the Tipitaka (Sanskrit, Tripitaka), or the
three baskets of canonical texts. The version of this
voluminous collection that is known sometimes as the Pali
Canon, because it came to be written down in this language
is the authoritative source of the teachings for those who
follow the earliest and most orthodox form of· Buddhism.
This goes by the name of Theravada (Sanskrit, Sthaviravada),
the doctrine, speech or profession of the Elders - those
Elder monks who had been the Buddha's companions and fellow
workers and some of whom convened the First Council to
purify Dharma of what was not Dharma.

Acc accounts agree that about a century after the
Buddha's passing a group of monks sought for greater laxity

in ten points of discipline. The Second Council was
held at Vesali to deal with the situation, but the rebellious
minority refused to abide by the decision of the orthodox
majority and, splitting off from the main body, came to be
known as Mahasanghikas. These earliest seceders, the
chief surviving work of one of whose sub-sects is the
Mahavastu, put a number of different interpretations on
Sutta and Vinaya and rejected certain portions of the Pali
Canon that had been confirmed at the First Council. With
their conception of the Buddha as completely supermundane
and appearing on the earth only in a phantom-body, they
were the forerunners of the Trikaya (three Bodies)doctrine
of the Mahayana. Of all the eighteen schools the one that
remained closest to Theravada was the Sarvastivadin holding
that everything, past, future and present, exists, though
denying any permanent substance in an individual being,
but also denying the exclusively transcendental nature
of the Buddha.

Other Theravada Councils have been held at infrequent
intervals, always with the object of 'purifying' the
records, at first spoken, later written down. The Sixth
was held in Rangoon to commemorate the Twenty-fifth Century

of the Buddhist Era in 1956.

Though the members of the First Council had given
much care and anxiety to preserving the Discourses as they
remembered them, yet the Buddha had never regarded his
words as sacrosanct or held that his Teachings (as distinct
from his Discipline) must be be believed as a whole,
taken on trust or repeated faultlessly by his disciples
on pain of their incurring blam or ineffectualness, as
was the contemporary Brahman, view if their priests made
a verbal error in reciting the sacrificial formula. He
advocated each person investigating and testing the Teachings
for himself. But the whole point of this, too often
overlooked by those who like to call Buddhism non-authoritarian
is that there is but the one sole Way for the purification
of beings and for overcoming that covetousness and dejection,
the source of which is traceable to the world of the senses,
or for crushing that craving and that ignorance which bind
sentient beings to the wheel of mutability and morality from
which Buddhism teaches them how to break free. Narrow
and straight is the Way that must be followed for the escape
into the undying and unchanging. Though Buddhas point out

the Way, each discovering it anew for himself, yet 'It
is yours to swelter at the task'(Dhammapada) of arriving
at its ending there to discard the Way like a raft once
the other shore has been gained. If the aspirant goes
according to his own fancy, deviates from the Way or does
not put his whole energy into the struggle, he will fall
short of his aim: 'Sadly lives the man of sloth involved
in evil unskilled states of mind, and great is the goal
he fails to win. But he who stirs up energy lives happily,
aloof from unskilled states of mind and great is the goal
he makes perfect. Not through what is low comes the
attainment of the highest, but through what is high comes
the attainment of the highest. Wherefore stir up energy
for the attainment, mastery and realisation of what is not
yet attained, mastered or realised (Samyutta-Nikaya),,,,.
and train yourself by thinking: "We will not shrink back
but will struggle on...... so that there may come to be a
vortex of energy for the winning by human strength, human
energy and human striving of that which is not yet won"
(Anguttara - Nikaya). But since no one can purify another,
it is for each aspirant himself and by his own energy, effort,
striving and diligence, for which Pali has many words
constantly to the forefront in the Teaching, to follow and
walk on the Way leading to the bliss of emancipation from
the ubiquity of impermanence.

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