CHAPTER – III

Buddhist Monastery and the Sangha in Thai Politics

"The Order of the Sangha is considered the oldest democratic institution in the world and it was set up as a model for lay organizations, including political institutions. The ideal state envisaged in Buddhism is a democracy, working for the material and spiritual welfare of the people, guaranteeing political, religious and personal freedom as well as economic security with full employment."

Cited in G.P. Malalasekera
Gems of Buddhist Wisdom, (1983:76)

The main objective of this chapter is to understand and interpret the growing politics around the Buddhist monastery and the Sangha with specific reference to the case of Phra Phimoladham and the abbot of Mahadhathu temple. Because, in recent times, there has been an increased politicization around the Sanghas and also of the monks. Moreover, Thailand has been witnessing changes in the relationship between the Sanghas and the state as Thailand undergoes through social and political changes. The chapter, therefore, also discusses about the role of Sangha in political modernization of Thailand and the state's control over Sangha in twentieth century with reference to Sangha's administration.

As Thailand march towards the path of a modern nation state, the role and position of stabilizing institutions like Buddhism underwent changes. The modern state demanded control over all institutions of potential power, not only because of the fear of their dissent, but also because of their capacities to aid and sanctify a lot of state actions and policies. Three Sangha Acts enacted by the Thai government in 1920, 1941 and 1962 brought the Sangha formally under the government’s control.

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1 The meaning and significance of Sangha. The Sangha forms the third component of the Triple Gem. Sangha members represent the embodiment of the Dhamma and they have been, by and large, responsible for the preservation and promotion of the religion, both during and after the time of the Buddha. Literally, Sangha means community. In its broadest sense, the term covers both the lay and the monastic communities. From the doctrinal perspective, it refers to those who have achieved any of the four stages of transcendent spiritual attainment. Such Sangha members are known as ‘noble disciples’ (ariyasangha). Technically, these are called Sotapanna (Stream Enterer), Sakadagami (Once Returner), Anagami (Non-Returner), and Arahanta (Worthy One). These noble disciples constitute the Sangha of the Triple Gem; they are Sangha by virtue of their special attainments. Thus anyone who has attained to that higher level is qualified to be included in this category of Sangha. However, because the role of the monks is so distinct and prominent, the term Sangha is often used exclusively in reference to the community of monks and does not cover the laity as in its broader sense. In the Theravada tradition, especially, this term is never used in connection with the lay community.
Each of these Acts created a state-imposed organizational structure for the Sangha that paralleled the current forms of government: in 1902, Siam (Thailand) was still a monarchy, and the hierarchical, centralized Sangha as headed by a Supreme Patriarch (Phra Maha David Yasasi 2006). In 1941, a decentralized structure was established that paralleled the democratic, Constitutional Monarchy in place and in 1962, a top-down structure was reintroduced to match the autocratic government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (Sudhamani 980:74). The transformation of the supremacy of the state from monarchy to written Constitution requires the definition of the status and duties of the king and also the rights and duties of the Thai people (Wilson 1968:266).

It is therefore worthwhile to mention what the new Constitution requires of the King after the shift from monarch to a written Constitution. Chapter 9 of the Constitution of Thai Kingdom, 2007, says “The King is a Buddhist and upholder of religions.” In chapter 4 and section 79, it says:

“The State shall patronize and protect Buddhism as the religion observed by most Thais for a long period of time and other religions, promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions as well as encourage the application of religious principles to create virtue and develop the quality of life,” (Government of Thailand, 2007:30).

None of Thailand’s written Constitutions defines a national religion. Superficially, this is as if Thailand is a completely “secular state,” especially in comparison with Indonesia, Pakistan, or Burma. But in reality, Thailand has not passed through a process of decisively separating state and religion as in Europe (Aoesrivong 1991:9).

In addition to the above statement, Jackson (1997:85) puts the question, ‘Is a wholly secular Thai state likely to emerge? Is it conceivable that with further market-oriented development and progressive undermining of the religion’s authority, the politico-bureaucratic structure will divorce itself totally from the ritual, symbolism and discourse of Buddhism? As Loy, David & Jonathan suggest Bangkok has changed culturally and socially, and this has dragged the rest of the country with it by the chains of the economy and the mass media. Accompanying this change was the growing culture of consumerism and further development of a market-driven economy. It is context that the above questions seem pertinent in Thailand vis-à-vis the significance of religious authority (Loy, David & Jonathan 1998: 3-4).
In fact, Buddhism has been one of the strengths of Thai culture and Thai people through centuries of change. However, there are indications of growing indifference of the people towards religion. Monk scholar like Phra Phaisal admits that "In the past, Theravada Buddhism prospered thanks to the close relationships between monks and villagers, but when the two parties grow apart from each other, they will both weaken as a result this." Closely parallel to the dilution of Buddhist teaching is the growing distance between the temple and the lay public. Now monks are expected to conduct only the traditional routines within the ecclesiastical walls, aloof and indifferent to the affairs of the world (Phra Phaisal Visalo 2002:1-2).

The (lay) community has become weaker because the temple lacks the ability to advise how they could interact with the outside world, with the flows of modernization, in a constructive, enlightened manner. Meanwhile, the Sangha has also weakened since there is no support, no infusion of 'new blood' from the lay people, most of whom have long forsaken the temple (as well as their own communities).” (Phra Phaisal Visalo Bangkok post, 24 Nov 2003). Thus, while the kingdom's political, economic and social institutions are undergoing drastic change, her major religious institution is confronted by a rapidly changing faith and social circumstances. John emphasizes that, the current social and economic climate presents a potential crisis for Buddhism and without appropriate responses to the demands of contemporary Thailand, the religion may well be abandoned by the people whom it is meant to serve, and upon whom it depends ( Knox, Bangkok Post, February 22, 1998).

Here, Phra Paisal cautions against the danger of religion being reduced to catering only to the benefits of individuals or their immediate acquaintances. Therefore, he suggests that all Buddhists need to do is to follow the five precepts which signify a pragmatic form of Buddhism (Phra Phaisal Visalo 2003: 11-12). Santikaro Bhikkhu also believes that if we focus on the proper role of religion within society, it does not necessarily contradict with the new changes. The proper role of religion has been:

1) to provide a higher purpose and meaning to human life, one that transcends limited self-interest;
2) to counter-balance the disruptive tendencies of politics and economics with shared values able to hold society together;
3) to provide a moral structure in which human beings act (social ethics);
4) to stand up for and protect the "little ones," those who are marginalized and oppressed within the usual power schemes. (Santikaro Bhikkhu 2006).

Whenever Buddhism has played its proper role, Society has been able to maintain a relatively peaceful balance and harmony among the generally disruptive and self interested tendencies of politics and economics (Ibid.).

Thus, the original role of Buddhism prefigures the idea that Civil Society is needed to balance and correct the competing interests of State and Capital in Thai modern societies. Further, it points to certain functions that Civil Society must embody if it is to succeed. At a minimum, the four roles listed above are crucial for a healthy Thai Civil Society. Suksamran believes that Buddhism continues to fulfill a residual legitimizing role for the state, and he sees politicians’ attempt to associate themselves with Buddhist monks and religious movements in order to secure and maximize their legitimacy. ‘This can enable them to build a government with sufficient popular support to carry through their political plans which, they envisage, will, given time, legitimate their rule through instrumental values.’ Suksamran further comments that the notion of political legitimacy is, in general, based on the belief that the government has the right to govern and the people recognize that right (Suksamran 1993:7). It involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that its political institutions, structures, processes, policies, decisions, and actions are the ones most appropriate for the society in question (Ibid.,). The legitimate government or political system is one which has proved possession of those qualities of righteousness, propriety, or moral goodness which are accepted by the governed. Thus, whether a government is legitimate or illegitimate depends on government’s success in convincing the people that its values are their primary values.

Singsuriya remarks, in case of the Thai Theravada, it is much more than mere patron-client relationship. The Thai nationalism that is constituted by the symbiosis, "Nation-Religion-King," permeates through the Thai Sangha’s life world so that Buddhism is understood to be part of the nation itself. The religion’s stability is identified with that of the state and vice versa. Therefore, it is not unusual to generally witness monks’ patriotic tone of voice (Ibid.). It is very important to consider that, Buddhism in Thailand has been a factor in Thai politics from the Sukhothai period till date (Singsuriya 2004:262-269).
Evolution of the Monastic Sangha

The Sangha in Thailand comprises two sects or schools, the Mahanikaya and the Dhammayuttika. The first has far more members than the second, but the Dhammayuttika exercises a more rigorous discipline, having a reputation for scholarship in the doctrine, and having a close connection to royalty continues to wield influence beyond its numbers among intellectuals and in Sangha administration. Both schools are included in the same ecclesiastical hierarchy, which is very closely tied to the government. (Phra Dhammapitaka et al: 1986:12) The strengthening of those ties between the two sects began in the nineteenth century, ostensibly to deal with problems of internal disorganization in the Sangha but also the Sangha could be used to help integrate a government that was just beginning to extend and strengthen its administrative control over the North and Northeast (Jumsai 2000:23).

According to Phasudharachati before King Rama V reformed the Sangha Act, the Sanghas from the North and Northeastern were not included in the realm of Buddhist Sangha in Central Region). When king Chulalongkorn reformed the first Sangha Act Roh Soh 121, he stated that only the king can grant the rank to the Sangha (Phasudharachati 2002:300 in Thai). Phra Dhammapitaka points out that, each of these regions in effect had its own Sangha, and the unification of the Sangha was seen as an important step toward the unification of Thailand. The pattern of legislative and other steps culminating in the Sangha Act of 1963 tended to tighten government control of the Sangha; there was no significant resistance to this control from the monks Conflicts existed between the two schools, however, over issues such as position in the hierarchy (Phra Dhammapitaka 1997:32-33).

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1 In the 1960s and 1970s many of the Mahanikaya monks - often originating from poor peasant families in the impoverished Northeast - became politically active in left-leaning organizations, joining the students in demonstrations. The image of a united a political sangha was shattered, and their lines were deeply divided. Some right-wing monks called upon the Thai to kill the communists, while some left-wing monks escaped to the jungle to join the Communist Party of Thailand after the student massacre at Thammasat University in October 1976.
King Rama IV or Mongkut and His Religious Reforms

According to Hazra, (2000:62) the Dhammayuttika Nikaya was founded in 1833 A.D. by King Mongkut, the fourth ruler of the present Chakri Dynasty who ruled Thailand from 1851 to 1868 A.D. Having himself spent 27 years as a Bhikkhu; the King was well versed in the Dhamma, besides many other branches of knowledge, including Pali, the canonical language of Theravada Buddhism. The express desire of the King in founding the Dhammayuttika sect was to enable monks to lead a more disciplined and scholarly life in accordance with the pristine teachings of the Buddha (U.Thittila 1986:68-71, Stroup 1968:147-154). The differences between the two Nikayas are, however, not great; at most they concern only matters of discipline, and never of the Doctrine. Monks of both sects follow the same 227 Vinaya rules as laid down in the Patimokkha of the Vinaya Pitaka (the Basket of the Discipline), and both receive the same honor from the public. In their general appearance and daily routine life too, except for the slight difference in the manners of putting on the yellow robes, monks of the two Nikayas differ very little from one another (Plamintr 1993:49). The doctrinal reform of Buddhism initiated by King Mongkut was carried on by monks of both orders and was notably accomplished by the work of the reformist monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993:4).

There are two things, doctrine and institution reform. King Mongkut reformed namely institutional reform of Thai Buddhism, within a Thai socio-cultural context. King Mongkut used his own political structure as a model (Puntarigvivat 2004:2-3). The reason for King Mongkut Reform was mainly because he saw that the Sangha of that time not strictly following the monastic discipline in the Vinaya Pitaka, but rather followed traditional practices. Most monks were in many ways lax, easygoing, unwilling to reform, and some important Vinaya rules of conduct were

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being ignored. He was also anguished to find that Thai ordinations probably were invalid (Hazra 2000:397). King Mongkut understood that the authentic line of descent from the Buddha for the Thai Sangha had been broken after the fall of Ayutthaya. King Mongkut called his group of monks Dhammayuttika (Dhammayutinikaya in Pali), meaning "those adhering strictly to the Dhamma-vinaya" as contrasted with the Mahanikai (Maha nikaya) majority whom he deemed "those adhering to long standing habit" (Ibid.p. 389).

The impact of King Mongkut's reforms which generated the new sect within the Sangha not only created dissension but also brought a historical twist to the model of the relationship between the monarch and the Sangha. All later kings after Mongkut favored the Thammayutta sect, and the members of the royal family were ordained into it. The reform of monastic standards began to be translated into institutional forms to benefit the entire Sangha. In other words, the political support given to the Thammayutnikaya greatly contributed to the expansion of its initial influence (Reynolds 1976:212-213).

**Buddhism and Political Background of Thailand**

The relationship between the Thai Buddhist Sangha and the state is a complex one. Thailand provides the last remaining example of what might be called 'state Buddhism in its classical form. However, the term state Buddhism is in one respect misleading, for it might seem to imply that Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand in the sense, for example, that in the seventeenth century Anglicanism was by law the religion of every Englishman. This is not the case in Thailand; the only person who is required by the Constitution to be a Buddhist is the king. But the close involvement of the Sangha with the hierarchy of government is salient feature of the modern Thai state, and for this reason the term 'political Buddhism' is appropriate (Suksamran 1977:12-13, Ortner 1992:53-55). Numerous political measures over the past two centuries testify to the degree of control imposed upon the Thai Sangha by secular authorities most conspicuously the attempts of King Mongkut to reform the Sangha by establishing a new order, which drew on Mon Buddhist traditions to create a purer, more disciplined monastic model. McCargo argues that the Sangha reforms of Mongkut set the pattern for subsequent administrative and legislative changes: since secular authorities needed the Sangha for their own legitimacy, they were frequently ready to intervene in Sangha affairs, chiding the unruly, restoring
good order, and imposing regulatory mechanisms which reflected the prevailing mode of civil government (McCargo 1997:68-69).

Jirakrasiri, in an article on political beliefs of the Thai Sangha noted that “the social institution responsible for responding to these needs as symbolic outputs is religion. Since the religious institution is part of the political system, political activities will not be complete if the influence and output from religious teachings are not taken into consideration when responding to the demands of mental development and cultural preservation to bring order to the political system in the form of systematization, stability and ability to adjust to environmental changes (Jirakrasiri 2004:219-226)

Modern development in Thailand has caused changes in the traditional society, both in the cities and in the countryside. It has led to social and economic changes in which success and wealth are the objectives. These changes have created confusion in ethics and the meaning of good and evil (Ibid.,p.,228). As the emphasis in society inclines more towards money and power, Sangha members who lack understanding of these complex social issues have allowed the liberal-capitalist system to dominate their views so that they see good people as people with money and power. Monks who feel this way draw themselves and their monasteries closer to those who have money and power. In so doing they become economic and political tools of society’s elite. Some of them get caught up in material gains, rank, praise and other worldly conditions (Ibid.,). Such attachment to worldly gains presents no problem from the point of view of a lay person, but for one gone to homelessness it can be a point of censure. Even so, from the perspective of the Buddhist principles on the social level, it should represent no adverse effect on the Sangha, because attachment to these things has very little effect on the Sangha’s beliefs both regarding Buddhism and political doctrines (Ibid.).
Dhammayutta Nikaya and Mahaninikaya Nikaya

In Thai politics, Buddhism is an important institution for creating social order and a medium through which that order can be controlled. In the Thai political system, for instance, Buddhism is expected to constrain the members of society within standards and procedures for peace, happiness and security and therefore, it has an important role in training and inducing its followers to conformity by providing moral awareness. Hence, the attempt will be made to discuss the political relationship between the two sects (Plamintr 1993:21) Thus, the Thammayutta sect has always maintained a much tighter network than the Mahanikaya sect with its decentralized structure of numerous and autonomous temple. It has also maintained stricter disciplinary standards and a greater unity as a pressure group than the much larger, looser, and discordant Mahanikaya sect. Apart from above, Tambiah (1984:45) described the sectarian rivalries that surfaced after the promulgation of the 1941 Sangha Act and have continued to the present day show the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. This act was intended to liberalize the ecclesiastical organization and bring it in line with the country’s political system, which had been democratized after the so-called revolution of 1932. Thus under the provisions of the 1941 act, the Sangha, in imitation of the Assembly of people’s Representatives and the cabinet system, would also be administered by an elected Ecclesiastical Assembly and an Ecclesiastical Cabinet under the headship of the supreme patriarch appointed by the king. However, this Constitution proved to be a recipe for competition between the Mahanikaya and Thammayutta sects for the cabinet ministerial and deputy-ministerial posts. According to Tambiah the division of spoils was resolved as an equal representation of members of the two sects on the cabinet, a formula that confirmed the political strength of the Thammayutta sect, which was very less in number (Ibid.p.,71). It is in this context of rivalries and tensions that a struggle crystallized between the two most senior monks, Phra Phimoladham, abbot of Wat Mahathatu (Mahanikaya sect) and ecclesiastical minister of the interior, and Somdej Phra Mahawirawong, abbot of the Wat Makut (Thammayutta) and ecclesiastical prime minister, in which the later emerged as the winner and subsequently became the supreme patriarch. The discord in the Sangha

* Dhammayutta monks were to abstain from doing hard labor; they and their temples should instead receive gifts and donations of money and services. The current Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara Suvaddhana, is a member of the Thammayut Nikaya.
gave the opportunity for Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat to intervene, with fateful consequences.

Field Marshal Sarit: The Consolidation of Thai-Style Authoritarianism

Sarit came to power at the period of great American alarm about "Red China" expansionism in Southeast Asia. Thailand was conceived as a bastion of the "free world" and its strength and stability was regarded vital to the United States in the period of "cold war" in Southeast Asia. During Sarit’s regime (1958-63) and that of his successors Thanom Kittikhachorn and Praphat Charusathian (1963-1973), Thai security in the widest sense required an intensification of political and administrative control which combined an emphasis on national development, national integration with traditional symbols of king and Buddhism (Tambiah 1986:166, Darling 1977:116-132). Sarit abrogated the Constitution, dissolved parliament, and banned all political parties. The country began to experience the period of absolutism and strong anti-communism: popular participation in politics was totally prohibited; the press was severely restricted; hundreds of critics, politicians, writers, monks were arrested and accused of being communists, and most of them were imprisoned without trial, (Ibid. p, 187). Critics protested that Sarit had demeaned religion by using it for political ends and had compromised the monarchy by using it to legitimize a military dictatorship. They asserted that the regime’s policies, rather than restoring these institutions, had contributed to the growth of materialism and secularism and to the erosion of religious belief in the country. In Sarit’s picturesque terms:

"During the Constitutional period, Constitutionals have frequently been drafted, changed and then discarded... It has been argued that the lack of stability stems from the low level of education in Thailand. Some people say it is because we change our regimes too hastily. We don’t know or understand enough about freedom. Therefore, we tend to use freedom beyond its limits. Some people say the citizens choose the wrong leaders... However, it is necessary to accept the fact that we formed a Constitutional regime without having had the time to lay the basic foundation. We have not been able to do this as other countries have done. The foundations have not yet been made firm. This is why the Constitutional period has not been stable." (Neher 1974:37a.)

Sarit was not a reactionary. It was he who oversaw the opening of the country to foreign investment, as well as to the increasing American security presence. He coupled his despotism with these developments through the claim that political
stability, which could best come about through preserving the uniqueness of Thai institutions and values, was the key to national security and economic development, (Ibid., p.36).

Neher observes Sarit was better able to gauge the public mood than his rivals. He knew what he wanted and he obtained it by manipulating the public's anti-regime sentiments. He attempted to legitimize his usurpation of office by claiming that he acted on the behest of the media and in the people's interests. He also claimed to be defending the Constitution and democracy from the corrupt politicians, (Neher 1979:14).

Finally, he (Sarit) presented himself as the man best able to stop communism, which he warned endangered the monarchy, Buddhism, and Thai values the usual “Nation, Religion, King” formula. As Kevin points out Sarit was adept at exploiting, but also enhancing, the crown. Soon after coming to power, Sarit obtained a royal appointment as “Defender of the Capital” (Kevin 1997:13). In contrast to the 1932 generation, Sarit had genuine respect for the monarchy. He also correctly assessed that it was, as a fount of legitimacy, an asset rather than a threat. Sarit created an aura of glamour and romance by associating his rule with the pomp and ceremony of the monarchy, (Ibid.).

With the establishment of a Constitutional monarchy Kingship became a mere symbol of national unity. The powers of the King were curtailed drastically. The different subsequent Constitutions of Thailand however upheld the monarchy in the system of government.

**Sarit Thanarat and the Sangha Administration**

The Thai government has made anti-communism the keystone of its policy both domestically and abroad. The government’s fear of communism and the disputes within the Sangha were probably the basic motives that provoked the Sarit government to intervene in the Sangha. Murashima commented it should be remembered that the deterioration of the Sangha took place at almost the same time as Sarit’s successful coup d'etat of 16 September 1958. Sarit was almost single-mindedly concerned with national development as means of modernizing the

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5 Sarit always argued that his coup in 1958 was historically unique in that a revolutionary government was installed to carry out pattiwat (Revolution) and phethana (development) Yet Sarit’s pattiwat (and phathana) had their own peculiar meanings for him, very different from Western concepts of revolution and development which involve major social, political, and economic changes.
country (Murashma 1988: 96). According to Ishii, the existence of a strong national church as an excellent tool for effecting his purposes and Sarit thought that national integration must be strengthened to realize national development. To attain this goal, he planned to start with fostering the people's sentiment for national integration through the reinforcement of traditional values as represented by monarchy and Buddhism (Ishii 1968:869). Therefore, it was necessary for Sarit's government to reform the Sangha organization and create a highly centralized Sangha with strong leadership and power concentrated in the hands of the Supreme Patriarch (Keyes 1970:559). Although the new Sangha administrative structure worked well for two decades, it appears to have floundered due to a dispute between Dhammayutta Nikaya and Mahanikaya monks in which Phra phimoladham, a Mahanikaya monk and abbot of Wat Mahathatu, was the central figure. Some believe that the case of Phra Phimoladham was a subterfuge exploited by the Sarit Thanarat government to exert even more control over the Sangha. Other look to intra-Sangha politics, not only sectarian rivalry between the Dhammautta and Maha Nikaya but internecine conflict within the Mahanikaya order itself (Sweare 1999:210). At Sarit's request, in 1960 the Sangha administration dismissed the Sangha cabinet and appointed a new one without Phra Phimoldhma (Mayer 1996:41).

Power and Justice in the Sangha Institution: Phra Phimoldham

Phra Phimoldham challenges to power and justice in the Council of elders (Mahathera-samakhom) is clearly mentioned from his own bibliography 1955 (2505), "Against the Evils: Experience in Prison for 5 years." There were three causes taking him into the fire. Firstly, he sent Buddhist monks who went to study abroad like India and Sri Lanka to continue higher studies. Secondly, he invited Burmese Monk to teach Abhidhamma Pitaka (one of Pali Canon section). Thirdly, he started teaching meditation at Wat Mahathatu, and it was spread to other

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6 Sarit era the First Plan was implemented in the period of 1961 to 1966. It was recognized broadly that development was based on economic growth only. Top-down approach was practiced in formulating the Plan. Moreover, it was focused on investment in infrastructure and social development projects utilizing "Project Analysis" technique. And this plan emphasized to accumulate physical capital assets.
provinces. These three things mentioned had never been done by anyone before. It made him very popular both within and outside the country. He claimed to be the first monk in Thailand to establish and systematize the proper meditation pattern after the Burmese style (Ibid., p. 2).

Phra Phimoldham was born in the north-east of Thailand and began his teaching duties in the 1920's, teaching the method of watching the rising and falling breath at the navel, which later became popular in Burma in 1949. (Phra Phimoldham was invited to Burma over a dozen times by the Burmese Sangha, and he was also invited to teach in the U.S., Europe, Israel, India, Kampuchea, and Malaysia). He was the only strict Vipassana Bhikkhu to become a leading figure in The Sangha Administration. This fact, and his esteem within the Sangha, was never popular with the scholars in the administration. In the early 60's, the Sangha Administration perjured against him, and he was stripped of his robes and imprisoned without trial (Phra Phimonhama (1956) Work of Phrapimoldham, (2003:4-6).

According to Phongpaichit (1997:274) the first case emerged in 1956 in the months of September and October. The three monks went to Peking to attend a seminar organized by the Buddhist Association of the Chinese People's Republic. They were arrested and unfrocked and accused of being communists in 1960. One of them was Phra Rach Ratanamolee. He is still living at Mahathatu Section 3 in Bangkok. He was imprisoned for 4 years and 6 months. Then, Phra Phimoldham's fate at the hands of the authoritarian Prime Minister Sarit and his military colleagues had a great deal to do with his sponsorship of a programme to disseminate and popularize meditation throughout the country among both monks and laity. Phra Phimoldham's propagation of vipassana meditation involved not so much the setting up of forest hermitages populated by monks who had retreated into reclusive contemplation as the enlisting of numerous urban and village to teach meditation not only to monks and nuns but also, and perhaps more importantly, to pious laymen of all ages and occupation (Phra Rajratanamolee 2006:179). In addition to why this popular programme and the influence wielded by the monk sponsoring, it might have been construed as a political threat by Sarit and his military colleagues. Tambiah (1985:167) describes that the programme served as a basis for marshaling the support and loyalty of several monks and laymen. Most importantly, that political power was grounded theoretically in a monk's spiritual excellence and
religious achievement. This source and basis of power were inaccessible to lay politicians and soldiers whose power rested on the control of physical force. In so far as there exists mechanisms within the Sangha for generating a collective support in society that can be claimed to be independent of and immune to naked political power, the political authority will seek to curb them (Ibid., p, 168). This is indeed why Sarit would and did try to taint Phra Phimoldham’s activities as “politically subversive” and this is indeed why a seemingly religious project for the revitalization of religion could be branded as a ‘political’ attempt to amass power dangerous to the regime. As Tambiah further comments, the Sangha lends its religious weight to the championing of a political program that legitimates the political authority and seeks to strengthen it further, then, of course, the political authority is likely to appreciate and reward the Sangha’s spiritual excellence (Ibid.,).

Phra Phimoldham had become the administrative office of the Sangha administration and was appointed the Sanghamontri (ecclesiastical minister) and retained that office until 1960; after this he was ousted from his office. Undoubtedly, the government had been keeping an eye on him. According to the charges made by the military prosecutor, his misdeeds extended the period from 1957 to 1962 (Suksomran 1977:38). As for the accusation of being a communist and provoking the public to revolt against the government, it was alleged that during the period 1957-60, he had assembled men who from time to time were trained for guerilla war and for revolution, and sometime in the year of 1962 he had accused Sarit of corruption, and of being a dictator. The first case was brought to a court martial in 1961 and completed in 1964 (Carr, Stephen 1993:1-2) The three accused were declared not guilty and were released. Then, another case was brought to the same court in 1963 and the court’s verdict was that Phraphimoldham was not guilty; he was released in 1966. Phra Phimoldham, himself have stayed in the police station’s jail for 1603 days (Phra Pimoladham’s Experience in prison for 5 years: 1987:9).

As far as Sarit was concerned, it was said that Sarit did not like Phra Phimoldham because the latter was so popular that Sarit’s own popularity might be diminished. This was illustrated when Sarit visited khonkean, not long after he came to power. He was surprised by the small number of people who came to greet him. He learnt later that the majority of the people had gone to welcome Phra Phimoladham, who

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5 Phra Phimoldham was a native of Kkon Kean who rose to become abbot of Maha Thadhtu Temple, the administrative centre of the Mahanikaya sect.
had been at a nearby town at almost the same time (Phongpaichit and Chris baker 1999: 274). Phra Phimoladham was victimized by the political authorities, numerous temple throughout the country had become satellite propagation centers under the direction of Wat Mahathat. The Sangha heads of all provinces in the north-east unanimously supported a campaign to reinstate him in the Sangha hierarchy (Tambiah1984:168).

The Administration of the Sangha in Thailand

To make it clearer, an attempt will be made to discuss how the Sangha Act was enacted in 1902 by King Chulalongkorn to promote unity and joint action between the Sangha and the state, and to provide a channel through which the Sangha can communicate with government authorities. According to Wyatt, King Chulalongkorn had a strong moral conviction as to what power was for. He strongly felt that it was right, in both Thai Buddhist and Western terms, that the king exercised his power as a sacred trust- that he ruled, not for himself and his family, but for his subjects, and that they (Thai people) and he were locked together by strong mutual bonds of obligation (Wyatt 1999:276-277). He was firmly convinced that fundamental change was both right and necessary: right in terms of common Buddhist and Western standards of justice, honesty, and human dignity; and necessary because the kingdom’s failure to exemplify these standards would imperil the kingdom’s survival. Certainly, the young king did move to strengthen his own power, but he did so in the service of ends which far transcended his personal interest (Ibid., p., 277).

For instance, Thompson emphasizes that, from the viewpoint of formal education, the monastic period was the only one that could be seriously counted, although attendance was irregular, accommodation sketchy, and the curriculum primitive (Thompson 1967:770). Under King Rama V’s education reform, it was

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6 With refers to the political dominance of the nobility and their resistance to fundamental institutional change were serious handicaps to the survival of the kingdom and the king. Both (Buddhist realm and State realm) were very weak. The kingdom was only loosely centralized; amateur military forces, finances, provincial administration, and even the legal system were under the control of semi-independent individuals and families. The king's decree was law only when it did not infringe upon the customary prerogatives of entrenched interests. King Chulalongkorn could not prevent outlying provinces from undertaking actions which might, and often did, run the risk of involving them in conflict with foreign powers. Neither could the king undertake the basic reforms involved in centralization that alone could strengthen the kingdom's defenses and minimize the dangers of conflict with the west. That was why king Rama V decided to reform the sangha Constitution under his power.
organized in monasteries in almost every village and town throughout the country. The education offered by the monks in all levels was free of charge. Classes were held when it suited the teacher-monk and pupil. The study centered on literacy, Buddhism and religious values. Henceforth, elementary schools were built in every province to act as the models for other schools; all monasteries were made places of study and abbots in every monastery were enlisted as teachers (Wyatt 1999:245). Monks taught monastic schools following the modern form and curriculum with government textbooks which provided not only a basic literacy and religious ideas but also modern mathematics, science, history and geography (Fry 2002:3-4). Education was an important area where both the state and the sangha work in tandem with each other.

In fact, there has always been a harmonious cooperation between the Sangha and the state. Because, the prosperity or stagnation of the Sangha depends mainly on its administration which was carried out by the state. In former days, the King of Thailand, as the upholder of religion, regulated and supervised the Sangha himself (Tar ling 1999:290). As the Sangha became bigger and better established with a large body of learned Bhikkhus, it became more autonomous because the king let it run its own affairs through an administrative body called the “Mahathera Samakhom or Council of Elders” (or the Sangha Supreme Council). However, to achieve perfect harmony between the Sangha and the state, the “administration” of the Sangha, which consists of a series of laws, was enacted by the state. Furthermore, the state sees that the Constitution will go well with these laws, and has updated them from time to time (Phra Mahaphaisit Dhamaraso 1992).
The Administrative Acts relating to the Sangha that have been passed are:

(I) The Sangha Administration Act of 1902
(II) The Sangha Act of 1941; and
(III) The Sangha Act of 1962

According to Srisumdeang the 1902 Sangha Act reflected the traditional notion that the progress and prosperity of the nation and Buddhism were interrelated. Indeed, the Sangha Act of 1902 brought the Sangha and monasteries under a standardized state control for the first time. This led to a reform of the administrative structure of the Sangha that parallel that reform of the secular bureaucracy which King Chulalongkorn established in 1892 (Srisumdeang 2004:12). Thus, a systematic and unified national Sangha hierarchy was created in Thai history and had made it very simple for the central government to establish a centralized authority to control the decisions of the monastic community. Sangha and state now had parallel hierarchies. The Sangha welcomed and co-operated with the government in the Act of 1902. This is clearly seen in the statement of the Supreme Patriarch of that time as follows:

"It is, however, my opinion that education in the wat (Temple) is difficult to deal with in isolation. It must be planned as part of the system of ecclesiastical administration and must also be co-ordinated with the policy of the government (Phra Sasana Sophon 1967; Cited in Somboon: 1977: 39).

During the Ayutthaya period (1350 to 1767) the administration of the Sangha appeared to be that of two orders of monks; the Gamavasi or Town Order and the Arannavasi or Forest Order, each with a head monk appointed by the king. In the early Bangkok period (1782-1851) the Sangha was reorganized into four Kanas: the Northern, the Southern, the Middle, and the Dhammayut. They still regulated and supervised the Sangha himself. In the event of controversy, a royal decree had to be obtained (Phra Rajpanyamedhi 2006:17:32).

The Sangha Act of 1902, passed in King Chulalongkorn’s reign, seems not to have accorded the forest-monks a formal administrative recognition. The act

7 The objectives of the government in drafting the Sangha Act of 1941 (BE 2484) and abolishing the Characteristics of Sangha Administration Act of Roh Soh 121 1902 (BE 2445) may be divided into two: 1, To change the administration of the Sangha to a democratic system, following the example of the national government. 2, To pave the way for a merging of the two main order of the Thai Sangha which was divided into the Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttanikaya orders.
changed the previous central division of the forest-monks into a central geographical division of the Mahanikaya sect; therefore, until today, the forest-Sanghas have not enjoyed a separate administrative recognition in either the Mahanikaya or Dhammayuttaniyaka sects, which constitute the two major divisions of the Thai Sangha (Ibid.).

According to Tambiah the fate of the forest-monk (arannavasi) tradition in Thailand during the last 140 years or so is not simple to recount. On the one hand, there have been attempts from the time of King Mongkut onward, since the 1840s to encompass some of its aspirations within the Dhammayutta movement. On the other hand, the bureaucratization thrust from Bangkok, especially at the turn of the twentieth century with the objective of forming a hierarchized national Sangha has tended to obliterate it as a formal division of the Sangha (Tambiah 1984:70).

The 1902 Sangha Act by King Chulalongkorn went hand in hand with the civil bureaucratic reforms of the time. It stipulated that there be a body of monks, called the Council of Elders (Mahatherasamakhom), which would oversee Sangha affairs and represent different regions of the country. This Act, interestingly, left out the office of the Supreme Patriarch, thus giving the king the last word of approval in matters pertaining to the Sangha (Mahamakut Buddhist University 1965).

8 The administration of each of the sections of the Sangha was in the hands of the section head. The King, who was the supreme patron of the Sangha, himself, governed the national Sangha body. Thus this Royal Decree lays down that section heads and assistant section heads form a Council of Elders to serve as the King's advisors on religious matters.
The organization of the Sangha may be described by the following diagram. This is based on Sangha Act, 1902

For each of these sectors, (mentioned in the figure) a high-ranking elder serves as the head with the responsibility of overseeing the administration of all the temples and the Sangha under his jurisdiction. According to Na-rangsi, the Supreme Patriarch holds the position of supreme head of all the Sanghas in the kingdom. As for the king, not only he is the head of the kingdom; but he is also legally the highest administrator of the Sangha, having the power to appoint or dismiss the Supreme Patriarch as he sees fit (Na-rangsi 2002:60-61). Having divided the Gamavasi into right and left sections, the title of Phra Vannaratna, the former head of the Arannavasi was changed to the name of Jaowkhana Yai of the southern section or right division of Gamavasi. A new title for the head of Arannavasi known as Phra Buddhachariya was also established (Lavangkure 1962:54). (Name of the Sangha
has changed according to the rank). In the early Ratanakosin era, the administration of the Sangha was not different from that of Ayutthaya. However, after the Sangha Administration Act Roh Soh 121 and later Acts were implemented, Thailand became the Theravada Buddhist country with the most systematic Sangha administration in the world.

In the announcement for the enactment of the Sangha Administration Act Roh Soh 121, there appears in the Royal Command the following word:

"And in the Buddhist realm, the administration of the Sangha sphere is of great importance both in terms of the benefit of the religion and in terms of the benefit and prosperity of the Kingdom. If administration of the Sangha sphere is based on an orderly plan, the religion will be prosperous, long lasting and inspire the people to have faith in the Buddha's teachings, to practice correctly and study more the good teachings with the monks. The King wishes to support and foster the Sangha sphere in maintaining their qualities firmly in the religion, so His Majesty graciously ordains to herewith issue this Act" (Na-rangsi (2002:61) Cited in Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya, History of Administration of the Thai Sangha, Bangkok: Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya Press, 1976:14).

The more democratic Sangha Act of 1941 seemed to come as a delayed response to the revolution of 1932 and the end of the absolute monarchy. A more decentralized approach was taken; instead of Council of Elders, power was separated into various "ministries" or committees (Ongkan) that decided on the activities of the Sangha. The Act stipulated a Supreme Patriarch, but his decisions were subject to the approval of the members of the various committees. However democratic the Act may have appeared, the Supreme Patriarch was still appointed by the king who, as a Constitutional monarch, acted on the advice of the government (The Sangha Act 1962: Article 6).
The Administrative structure of the Sangha based on Sangha Act, 1941*

Sanghasapha (Ecclesiastical Assembly)

Somdej Phra Sangharacha (Supreme Patriarch)

Kanasangkamontree (Ecclesiastical Cabinet)

Kana Winaidhorn (Ecclesiastical Courts)

Central Administration

1, Ongkorn Salharanuprakara (Public Works)
2, Ongkorn Phueyphae (Propagation)
3, Ongkorn Seuksa (Education)
4, Ongkorn Pokkhrong (Administration)

Provincial Administration

Phak (Region)

Jungwat (Province)

Umphoe (District)

Tumbol (Commune)

Wat (Temple)
Jaow Awas (Abbot)

*Source: Administration of the Sangha Act Rob Soh 121 (1902) Provision I
Article 4. MCU :2004 (in Thai)

Figure: 5
Provincial Administration of the Sangha

The administration followed the civil pattern by which it was hierarchical in nature. The largest unit was Monthon, each Monthon (region) was under the charge of the Jaow Khana Monthon. As the head of the largest unit of administration of which there were many subordinates attached, the main function of Jaow khana Mothon was to carry his Majesty the King’s idea of administration of the Sangha through the Council with the acknowledgement of Supreme Patriarch, to the lower units. The rest of the functions were common to each level as, appointing the subordinate, jaowkhana Khvang (district) for this level, helping Jaowkhana Moung (City) arrive at solutions, judging the appeal of the subordinate decisions, delegating authority to the subordinate jaowkhana Rong (deputy); exercising the affairs of the Sangha according to its vinaya (discipline) and Buddhist Sangha Act, Supervising and administering the subordinates and recommending them for promotion, and so forth (The Sangha Act: 1962, ). Jaow Avas (Lord Abbot) was the head of the smallest unit, a monastery; lord abbot of the royal monasteries was generally appointed by the king. Duties and responsibilities of lord abbot, as the head of the community, included the full power to govern the members of his community, Bhikkhus, Samaneras and resident layman. He had the authority to give verdicts upon the cases happening in his responsibility and to impose a physical labour punishment for the Bhikkhus and Samaneras (novices) cases for disobeying the rules and offences to the superior (The Sangha Act 1962, Chapter 15, Clauses 3, 4).

In 1932 the civil government was changed from the absolute monarchy to the Constitutional monarchy. With regard to Buddhism and the Sangha, the 1932 revolution did not bring about, despite its apparent progressiveness, the denial of the traditional Buddhist value system which had long underlined Thai society Buddhist value remained intact and unchallenged throughout the revolution. The disruption of monarchical government brought Sangha administration into a new political arena to which it adapted itself remarkably well (Ishii 1986:134). They thought that the Sangha was worth supporting only in so far as it constituted a force for achieving national unification, and so long as it co-operated with the government. Despite this attitude of the new rulers, the Sangha adapted itself to the policy of the government. As the concept of democracy was fashionable, it was thought proper that the Sangha
administration should follow democratic principles. The evidence from Virgina Thompson as follows:

"In February of 1935 a delegation representing some two thousand monks from twelve provinces arrived in Bangkok to petition the premier to bring government control of the Buddhist church into line with the democratic regime." (Thompson 1941:639).

However, the Sangha Act of 1941 was passed as a measure to introduce Sangha administration to the principle of democracy. This law, the organization of the Sangha was adapted to the state patterns of parliamentary government. The Sangha Act of 1941 remained in force for 21 years, until 1962. The Government under the premiership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat found that the ecclesiastical administration should be based on the process of centralization, not decentralization. As a result, a change in the organization of the Sangha was made by the Sangha Act of 1962, which came into force on the 1st January 1963 (2506 B.E). For that reason, Sarit promulgated the Sangha Act of 1962, contending that democratic 1941 Act had led to an inefficient administrative of the Sangha (Phra Dhammapitaka 2001:30). Sarit describes that the reason for the enactment of this act is that the administration of the Sangha is not a matter to be based on the principle of separation of powers for the sake of balance among them as is the case under the current law. Such a system is an obstacle to effective administration. It is therefore appropriate to amend the existing law so that the Supreme Patriarch, head of the ecclesiastical community, can command the order through the Council of Elders in accordance with both the civil law and the Buddhist principle, thereby promoting the progress and prosperity of Buddhism (Ibid., p.31).

At the opening ceremony of the first session of the Mahathera Samakhom on 21 January1963, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the late Prime Minister, mentioned in his message to Somdej Phra Sangharacha, the Supreme Patriarch, its President, that it was the intention of the government that the Sangha Act of 1962 should be passed in order to reintroduce the organization of the Sangha as similar as possible to that in the Buddha’s lifetime, and that it was the intention of the government to give support in every possible way to Buddhism which has been the state religion from time immemorial and whose culture is deeply ingrained in the national character.
Under the Sangha Acts of 1962 and 1992, the administration of the Sangha is divided into central and local (Suksamran 1977:41).

Sarit revived the motto "Nation-Religion-King" as a fighting political slogan for his regime, which he characterized as combining the paternalism of the ancient Thai state and the benevolent ideals of Buddhism. He spoke of his intention to "restore" the king, a retiring man, to active participation in national life, and urged Bhumibol Adulyadej and his consort, Queen Sirikit to have more contact with the Thai public, which had a strong affection for the monarchy. Royal tours were also scheduled for the king and queen to represent Thailand abroad (Phasudharachati 2002:272). Sarit likewise played on the religious attachments of the people. In 1962 he centralized administration of monastic institutions under a superior patriarch friendly to the regime, and he mobilized monks, especially in the North and Northeast, to support government programs. Critics protested that Sarit had demeaned religion by using it for political ends and had compromised the monarchy by using it to legitimize a military dictatorship. They asserted that the regime's policies, rather than restoring these institutions, had contributed to the growth of materialism and secularism and to the erosion of religious belief in the country (Ibid. p, 273).

Sivaraksa criticism of his countrymen and fellow Buddhists has been no less stinting. "We Thai have been completely brainwashed by our educational system to respect dictator and admire those in power, even if they are cruel and evil," he charged in 1991. "As long as we retain this mentality, there is no hope for democracy in Thailand." The authoritarian regimes implemented policies, such as the Ecclesiastic Law of 1963, which weakened and corrupted Buddhist institutions by placing them under direct government control. As a result, "those monks who are in the Council of Elders (the Sangha's governing body) are very old and without any political or social awareness." They accepted honors and welcomed overtures from the repressive junta of Thailand, which has shown extraordinary cruelty to its own monks and Buddhist citizens (Sivalaksa 1998:60-62).

9 In 1992, Thailand was in a brief period of military dictatorship under Sujinda Kraprayoon (P.M. from 7 April 1992-10 June 1992). This short-lived military government amended the Third Sangha Act. It tried to settle the power struggle amongst members within the Maha therasamakhom for deciding who would be the next Supreme Patriarch. Thus in 1992, the Sangha Act was amended to rule that the next Supreme Patriarch would be a high ranking monk of longest standing rather than the most senior monk of that rank. Thus, Third Sangha Act of 1962 amended in 1992 became dictatorial in nature.
The Central Administration of the Sangha

His Majesty the King appoints a selected "Thera" or "Elder" to be the Supreme Patriarch, Head of the Buddhist Order. He (Sangha Raja) is responsible for all ecclesiastical affairs of the order. Under the Sangha Act of 1962, the Sangha Supreme Council, the Mahathera Samakhom, serves as the Consultative Council, to the Supreme Patriarch who, according to the law, possesses absolute power. In reality, he never makes use of such power, but listens to every suggestion presented by members of the council and calls for votes if the matter is controversial (Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya Education Council 1982:39).

The council consists of Somdej Phra Racha Khanas (i.e. high dignitaries in the hierarchy of the order next in rank to the Supreme Patriarch) as ex-officio member, and not more than twelve nominated by the Supreme Patriarch from Phra Raja Khanas (i.e. high dignitaries below the rank of Somdej Phra Racha Khana) to hold office as nominated members for a term of two years. Both ex-officio and nominated members act as advisers to the Supreme Patriarch in the council. The Supreme Patriarch appointed these sector heads and gives them their duties, to be in conformity with the motions of the Council of Elders (Clause: 6). According to the Sangha Act BE 2505 (1962) regional administration of the Sangha is divided into regions (Phak), Provinces (Jungwat), districts (Umpher) and shires (Tumbol). There are 18 Sangha regions, each made up of a number of provincial sectors according to the Council of Elders regulations (1962) and the agenda (The Sangha Act, 1962 Chapter1, Section 9, 15).

From the preceding discussion it is clear that the organization of the Sangha and its administrative structure parallels the administrative structure of the government and is closely integrated into that of the civil government, and that the Sangha is effectively incorporated into the governmental structure at the higher and administrative levels in such a manner that the government can exercise effective control over Sangha policy and procedure at the higher administrative levels. As we look at in the figure 6 and 7 in the next page.
ORGANIZATION OF THE SANGHA ADMINISTRATION
ILLUSTRATES HIERARCHICAL LINE OF CONTROL

Somdej Phra Sangkharacha (Supreme Patriarch)

Mahatherasamakhom (Council of Elders)

Jaow Khana Yai (Sangha General Governors)
Appointed from 5 Monks with at least Somdej Phraracha khana Rank by Supreme Patriarch

Jaow khanaphak (Sangha Regional Supervisors)
18 Appointees from Phraracha khana by Joaw Khana Yai

Jaow khnana Jungwat (Sangha Proviscial Governors)
71 Monks Appointed by Jaow Khana Phak

Jaow khana Umphoe(District Head Monk)
510 Monks Appointed by Jaow Khnana Jungwat

Jaowkhana Tumbol (Commune Head Monk)
3,650 Monks Appointed by Jaowkhana Umphoe

Abbotts (20,455) Appointed by Jaowkhana Umphoe

Ordinary Monks

Source: Somboon Suksamran (1977), Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia, p.42
Figure: 6
ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE SANGHA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOVERNMENT*  

KING  
Protector of Buddhism  
Constitutional Head of Government  

Supreme patriarch  
(Somdej Phrasangkaraja) 

Direct liaison  
(official consultation) 

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS  
(CABINET) 

Council of Elders  
(Mahathera Samakhom) 

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
(DEPT. of Religion Affairs) 

Sangha General Governors  
(Jaow khana Yai) 

OTHER MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS 

Indirect liaison 

REGIONAL INSPECTORS 

SANGHA Regional Supervisors  
(Jaow khana Phak) 

REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS  
(Jaow Khana Jungwat) 

Official consultation takes place 

PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS 

SANGHA Provincial Governments  
(Jaow Khana Jungwat) 

DISTRICT OFFICERS 

Official consultation Takes place 

COMMUNE HEADMEN 

District: Head Monks  
(Jaow Khana Umpheo) 

Unofficial consultation takes place 

VILLAGE HEADMEN 

Commune Head Monks  
(Jaow Khana Tumbol) 

ABBOTS  
(Jaow -A -Wat) 

Unofficial consultation takes place 

VILLAGERS 

ORDINARY MONKS 

*Source: Swearer (1999), Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand: p. 213  

Figure: 7
The operation of the Sangha council is similar to the operation of the worldly parliament. When the Sangha Council was first established, it was attended by members from both sects, but the meetings became less and less peaceful. Puntarigvipat, (2005:4) pointes out that at present, the Sangha Supreme Council is composed of senior monks, and some say that this traditional structure needs to adjust to today's realities. But some believe even these debates do not necessarily help address the challenges Buddhism faces today. “Even if the government acceded to the opposition's demand (against the reform bill), the crisis plaguing the clergy would not go away.” This is because the draft bill is based on the present Sangha bill that is dictatorial in nature. The first such bill was passed in 1962 with support from then military strongman Sarit Thanarat in order to centralize powers within the Sangha council and, at that time, to end an attempt by progressive monks to democratize the monkhood's governing body (Ibid.). The measure was revised in 1982. There are only two advantages that can be seen from this new Sangha bill (Ibid.). First, the proposed council of 30 younger monks would infuse more strength in monastic activities. Second, having a proposed office called the National Buddhism Office would make it easier for clergy to be in contact with monks and lay people. However, the bill still allows a small group of people to rule over the monks and direct monastic affairs in the country. “Structurally, there is no difference in that it only shifts the power from the Sangha Supreme Council to the new appointed-council, said Maha - Kanissorn.” But others do not favor the idea of a council, possibly composed of younger monks, becoming superior to the Supreme Council in the first place (Puntrarigtvitavat 2006:3-6).

This, they add, would undercut the authority of the Supreme Patriarch, who heads the council, in governing the monastic community. The bill would also eliminate the king's authority to appoint the Supreme Patriarch, critics argue. Puntrarigtvitavat comments that the past 40 years have proven that the centralized structure of Sangha council has failed to handle the problems Buddhism faces in the country. These problems include cases of sexual abuse and impropriety and acquisition of wealth and property by monks, offenses that violate the monkhood

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10 Eventually only a minority of members continued to go to the meetings. Importantly, most of the senior elders ceased to participate.

11 In the new Sangha Act 1992, the Maha therasamahkom becomes an advisory committee and a new group of younger monks called Mahakanissorn, which literally means great independent group, would be promoted as a new administrative body. It is claimed that because the Maha kanissorn is comprised of younger monks (30 monks), it would be more active and efficient. Now the draft is under review and revision by the government’s Law Department.
and have been widely reported in the media. Puntrarigtaivivat further argued that deeper reforms are needed. If we are serious about a new bill, the draft council should be set up in order to hear what monks and lay people have to say about it. Buddhism belongs to these people as much as it does to others (Poonyarat 2003). Amid the controversy created by the proposed bill, the Thai government has avoided jumping into the politically charged atmosphere. Last year, thousands of monks, nuns and lay Buddhists took to the streets to demand the setting up of a Buddhism ministry. Under a compromise solution to that row, Buddhism affairs are being looked after by a national Buddhism bureau under the prime minister's office (Phra Sripariyattimolee 2004:7). Under this, there are 8 seniors in the top of Council of Elders as follows in the table in appendix (Phra Mahadevid 2002). Each Thera has their own duty to perform, it is depended on the Sangha Bills (see Supreme Patriarchs Rattanakosin Ere from 1782-2008 appendix -v).

The Functioning of Administration of Buddhist Sangha

When we examine the form Sangha administration in Thailand has taken so far, from the past to the present, it may be said that administration by a Council of Elders may be the most suitable form of administration according to the Dhamma- Vinaya, (Doctrine and Discipline) in which the Buddha made the Sangha the highest authority in all religious activities and had the monks revere and obey the Theras, the elders, who were of greater experience, the fathers and leaders of the Sangha, by stating that as long as the monks respected and obeyed the words of the elders, prosperity and not decline would be assured for the Sangha (Mahamakut Buddhist University1978). Na-rangsi explains, while the administration of the Sangha via Council of Elders is appropriate, the Sangha Act of 1962 now in use has a number of weak points which require correction. Na-rangsi (2002:71) argues that, one fact to be considered and acknowledged is that the members of the Council of Elders are entirely Mahathera aged 60 years and over. In a worldly government, they would all have been retired and relieved of their duties on account of age. According to Sangha Act of 1962 (B.E.2505) they must continue to work, even though many of the elders are almost 80 years of age. However, considered in terms of the natural facts of human beings, people of such an age are classed as elderly people. It is appropriate to have these great Theras as members of the Council of Elders, the
highest administrative body according to Thai system of Sangha administration, in a policy making, advisory, and judiciary capacity at the highest level, not on the level of practical operation requiring examination and seeking out suitable ways or methods to carry out the administration of the Sangha, as it is in present time. It is true that, Sangha Racha is 93 years of age now.\textsuperscript{12} (Phra Dhammapitaka 2003:2) emphasizes that their operation should be in the form of a committee. The Council of Elders should only have the responsibility of defining and controlling policy, being available for consultation or advice to the secondary organ, and passing motions adopting, rejecting or giving final judgment on the matters proposed to them by the secondary organ. If it is possible to do this, prosperity and growth for Buddhism, and progress in Buddhist activities, can be certainly expected.

In addition to this, Na-rangsi (2002:71) suggests that, in order to reduce the burden on the Council of Elders and bring about a stable growth of Buddhism in this global age, four secondary organs should be established as follows:

(i) \textbf{Office of the committee for Sangha Administration}
This office will have the responsibility of taking the policies of Sangha administration determined by the council of elders and putting them into real, effective practice.

(ii) \textbf{Office of the committee for Sangha Education}
This will perform the function of drafting policies and plans for the education of monks and novices in every aspect and on every level, to be submitted to the Council of Elders for their examination and approval (Ibid. p., 72).

(iii) \textbf{Office of the committee for Sangha propagation}
This office will take on responsibility for the propagation of Buddhism, both within Thailand and in other countries, determining policies and forming plans of operation for propagation in keeping with the times, improving the methods used to present the Buddha’s teaching to target groups of specific age and social status (Ibid., p., 73).

(iv) \textbf{Office of the committee for Sangha public services}
This office will perform the task of determining policies and forming work plans in regard to public services within the Sangha throughout the kingdom, such as policies concerning the building of the temples, establishing training centres and other kinds of social welfare work that do not conflict with the proper conduct of a renunciant (Phra Tepsopon 2002, Phra Phaisal Visalo 2003).

\textsuperscript{12} Somdet, Phra Nyanasamvara (from 1989- present), Bangkok: Wat Bovorn-niwes vihara
Thus, there should be an amendment to the Sangha Act 1962 (BE 2505) for the four secondary organs to the Council of Elders. Not only will this be reducing the burden on the Council of Elders, but also be putting the policies into steady practice, allowing the various activities of Buddhism to progress in step with the age void of communications frontiers in this era of globalization. Phra Dhammapitaka (2001:55) noted that, usually the Thai Sangha administration does not show either active support or active opposition to the initiatives and activities of the private sectors. Thus, the traditional Thai Sangha has a strong tie with the polity and has developed a tendency to place reliance on the secular government. It readily joins or cooperates in the programme and activities that are operated or supported by the government or government agencies, although such undertakings might have a tone of some modern social or even political ideologies (Ibid., p.57). He further argues that on the whole, the Thai Sangha is weak in its structure and in practice and action, but it finds its strength in a negative way, in inaction and the attitudes of indifference and strict traditionalism. He further said that, under such a condition, it is difficult to begin any new endeavor without opposition from or conflict with the Thai Sangha (Ibid.). However, in spite of no strong visible conflicts and violent challenges, many undesirable things are there particularly in the form of a vaguely unharmonious development. An important point here is that although the young monks are aware of the drawbacks of the existing Sangha Act and the need to amend to adapt to the changing forces of globalization, they are not listened to for fear of a shift of power to the young monks (Thammasat University 2002). Neglected unsolved problems pile up and increase in intensity. This will develop into a latent or passive, not readily visible, conflict perhaps worse than strong visible conflicts which leads to disadvantages in the long run. This is evident in the problem of ecclesiastical education,\(^\text{13}\) which is a fundamental problem lying at the bottom of all other problems.

Phra Dhammapitaka (2001:21) commented that, concealed behind all the conflicts is the conflict between traditionalism and modernization. Strict traditionalism becomes an extreme which not only hinders effective adjustment but also causes a reaction in the form of another extreme, that is, extreme

\(^{13}\) The present state of monastic education is similar to the sky which, although with some spots of sunshine, is in face full of cloud. The sky is not clear. When monks themselves see the dull and overcast sky may feel disheartened, tired and might as well fall asleep.
modernization. By modernization it meant good and effective adjustment to the modern changing world. But extreme modernization will go so far as to result in secularization or even politicization. The argument advanced here is that, in the age of social change and political instability of today, there is a fear of going from one extreme to the other. A mistake of this type would mean a danger and perhaps even a discredit to Buddhism. To avoid this, the Middle Path must be secured. Phra Paisal Visalo (1999:239) observes that, under the new centralized structure, monks of all localities in the country came under the power of the hierarchy, thus making them less responsive to their own communities. Moreover, allowing the state to exert influence in many important aspects of the Sangha, this new structure virtually transformed the Sangha into an extension of the state. Monks are therefore more inclined toward the state than the people. The reason that the Sangha stays close to the state is mainly because the Sangha’s leadership believes that its unity, cohesion, and orderliness depend upon the state’s support. But the price of having state protection is the loss of autonomy. Further, many religious affairs that were once in the control of the local communities, for example, the bestowing of ecclesiastical rank and the establishment of temples, have been monopolized by the state almost completely (Ibid.). In fact, there are other factors that contribute to the widening gap between the monks and the people. Some of them are the institutionalization of such social services as education and medicine, which were once provided by the monks, the decline of ecclesiastical education, and the lack of motivation in providing education for monks. Compounded by the centralized and bureaucratized structure, these factors contribute to the reduction of the Sangha’s role in promoting morality in Thai society (Ben, Baragul 1999). With it also obstructs and attempts to reform the Sangha or improve its social role in response to the changing world. This structure, merely maintaining the moral standards of the monks is almost impossible as shown by the Sangha’s failure to cope with all the recent scandals.

**Sangha Administration: A Need to Reform**

Santikaro and Phra Phaisal (2002:3-4) suggest a Buddhism that is under the dominion of consumerism is not conducive to the good life and peaceful society. Instead, it chains our lives to suffering and enslaves us to material things, not to mention increasing social conflicts. Even the worldly achievements that it promises
are hardly realized since it does not encourage effort, self-reliance, or cooperation. The current economic crisis and military coup (19/9) in Thailand is the most recent example of how its promise has failed. The consumerist domination is only one aspect of the problems that face Thai Buddhism today (Ibid., p. 6). Liberation from consumerism is therefore only part of the solution, although a vital and necessary one. The revival of Buddhism needs a comprehensive reform that copes with other factors as well. It is suggested that, there are three main factors on the part of Buddhism that have had a great impact on the beliefs and practices of Thai Buddhists, and on the quality and role of the monks during the past century, resulting in the decline of morality in Thai society. Real reform of Thai Buddhism for the betterment is possible, when Sangha structure and its relationship to society are addresses through Buddhist teaching tolerance and non-violence effectively with greater moral responsibility (Phra Dhammapitaka 2002 140-141).

Jackson comments that the Sangha Acts in Twenty-first Century in Thailand remains the Act enacted by Sarit Thanarat in 1962. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra sought to maintain the status quo of the 1962 Sangha Act and pledged that changes to the Act will not go further. While there were two minor amendments made to the 1962 Act in 1992 and 2004, little attempt by the Thai government to make major changes to the Sangha Act has been made. The Act also allows the Sangha Council to take legal actions against defrocked monks who continue to dress up as monks. (e.g The Case Santi-Asoke and Dhammakaya) Those who are arrested for doing so will also be sentenced to imprisonment for not more than six months. Strict measures stipulated in the Act allow the religious authorities to enforce religious control over the monkhood and to ensure the purity of the religion and the Sangha by getting rid of ill-disciplined monk (Jackson 1997: 75). All these have directly and indirectly resulted in the decline in the discipline of the Sangha. The need to strengthen the moral principles of individual monks has become an important concern to the Sangha authorities and the Buddhist communities at large.

This reciprocity between the institution and the followers of Thai Buddhism is one of the main reasons that the religion has been woven into the social and cultural fabric of Thailand, and it is this kind of give and take which is now needed if the religion is to really offer anything to people in these difficult times. The laws governing the Sangha are outdated, having been framed at a time when a more dictatorial lay government was the norm and when the Sangha was less subject to
public scrutiny as well as less prone to succumb to the pleasures and blandishments of a consumer-oriented society which was not yet fully matured. The law, at present, has not yet caught up with the new social reality of a public no longer prepared to give unquestioning loyalty to the Buddhist monkhood (Phra Paisal Visalo 1999:239, Klausner 2006:19). Much as changing perceptions and expectations define new patterns of political behavior, so too do they characterize altered religious belief and practice. Without corresponding changes in the law which are responsive to these new convictions and behavior, there will be a public backlash. Dissatisfaction will manifest itself in increasingly confrontational terms, and pressure for reform will continue to escalate. Social and political disorder and unrest will follow. Moreover, the lack of correspondence between the law and behavior, attitudes and expectations will have contributed to destabilizing Thai society. Puntarigvivat (2004) suggests that the new Constitution should only stipulate the King as a Buddhist and upholder of religions. And the King should have full authority to appoint a supreme patriarch. He said the state and religion should be separate, and that politics and bureaucracy should be kept out of religious affairs. Puntarigvivat called for the National Buddhism Bureau, the Religious Affairs Department, the Ecclesiastical Act, and the Islamic Act to be abrogated, to allow the public to take over and look after religious affairs for themselves (Hutasingh, Onnucha, Bangkok Post, February 10, 2007).

Scholars like Jirakrasiri suggests that the Sangha should have a political role and a duty in helping the state. Academically speaking, this conforms with the idea of the structure and duty of a political system as a compound of various institutions working and interrelating with each other like a machine to help alleviate the problems that arise from human beings living together. Each of these institutions performs its duty in response to the needs of the members of society and also of other institutions, and the performance of these duties will ultimately be mutually supportive. As one of the institutions of Thai society, the Sangha, whose members are responsible for the perpetuation of the religion, should have a political role as spiritual leaders of the people (Jirakrasiri 2004:119).

Thus, the administration system of hierarchical echelons under the present Act is a method of administrative control and command appropriate for central government to various subordinate units. It is strongly centralized control, which may lead to an organization of political echelons, and the development for strong
political force as has happened in neighbouring countries. It is not impossible that community of the Sangha may be used as a tool in political campaigns, in promoting the campaigns of numbers of candidates in the House of Representative, in the general election or likewise any other elections. If the sacredness of the Sangha is damaged by political scandals it may result in alienating the respect and affection of the people. At present it is slightly to happen due to circumstance.

**Relationship of Temple and Sangha in Thai Society**

Buddhist temples are constructed from charitable contributions from the general public. In order to obtain a permit to build a monastery, the promoters must submit a detailed proposal of the construction to the Sangha Supreme Council through the Director General of the National Buddhism Office. After the Sangha Council has granted a permit, the monastery can be built but it will retain the status of a Bhikkhus’ lodging. It will be granted a Visungamasima (Supra), and will become a juristic person when the promoters of the monastery have certified to the Sangha Supreme Council that the construction of the monastery has substantially been completed and that Bhikkhus continuously stay for Retreat at the monastery (Sangha Act, Chapter 47, Sections 1 and 2).

The Sangha Act stipulates that any monastery where the Bhikkhus no longer reside is regarded as an uninhabited monastery. Its property is to be transferred to the General Fund of the Buddhist Order from which expenses for the general promotion of Buddhism may be drawn. There are about 32,000 temples in the whole of Thailand. In Bangkok alone there are 439 monasteries. Mahanikaya and Dhammayutta Nikaya, within the Bangkok area, as follows: Mahanikaya 393 monasteries and Dhammayutta Nikaya 96 monasteries. Maha Thatu Temple, Benjamabopith Temple, in Bangkok has as many as resident monks and novices. Temples are centers of Thai art and architecture. Thai culture, to a considerable extent, flows from temples (Phra Dhammagosajarn 2007:30, Office of International Buddhism of Thailand 2006). The monastic life-style is very different from that of the laity. It is designed to be conducive to spiritual practice and suitable for a life of dedication and service. As such it has to be kept simple. It should also be free from family concerns and obligations. Whereas wealth is considered a symbol of success and social status, it is an impediment on the spiritual path, especially as far as monks are concerned. Monks’ daily routines are also markedly different from those of lay
people. Thai society is traditionally based around the village, or group of homes. As well as a site for religious rituals and worship, temples served as schools where children were educated, and were the centre of social and cultural festivals where young people from different villages could meet. Monks could be consulted by villagers on matters such as social disputes, family problems, or even on business or official matters. In return for their leading role in the community, monks were revered as teachers and advisors, and thus contributed significantly to the well-being of the people, who would present them with alms each morning (Phra Dhammapiaka 1994:14-15). By giving food to monks, or providing labour or money to the temple, villagers would be providing substantial support to their community, and would thus make merit in a real, meaningful and practical way. In most of the ceremonies and rituals, whether private or public, monks' cooperation and benediction are indispensable. Indeed, in the life of the average Thai Buddhists, from the cradle to the grave, monks are persons to whom they constantly turn for moral support. It has been suggested that the monk primarily acquires respect and prestige by reason of his being a model of behaviours. He is highly respected as a mediator, and as a vehicle for other people's merit-making activities. At the same time the monk finds satisfaction in fulfilling his role as monk (Ibid. p, 16).

Thus, Sanghas are very close to the hearts of the people. In times of crisis, it is to monks that people bring their problems for counsel and encouragement. With few exceptions, the Sangha has well justified this attitude of respect and honor shown to it on the part of the laity and, on the whole, has lived up to the dignity of the Faith. After the Second World War, some prominent monks became social leaders. Social involvement by monks is generally accepted today (Irene 1999). Both government and non-government organizations find that monks' contributions in social action today are indispensable, since monks seem to be the only persons fully respected by the people, especially in the rural communities.
Changing Political Scenario and the Role of the Sangha in Politics

According to Daniel politics has changed almost beyond recognition in Thailand over the last two decades. The extension of formal democracy at village, sub-district, provincial and national levels has given rise to new political networks and strategies. Capitalist transformation in provincial areas has been similarly dramatic, and has led to rapid and far-reaching changes in local political economies. However, at the same time, mainstream rural temples have retained much of their former importance in relation to local communities. Given the continued relevance of rural temples and their abbots we should not be surprised to find that they play an important role in electoral politics, both actively and passively (Daniel 1999; Swearer 2006:7-8) Swearer further points out that, temple leaders are sometimes considered an election candidate’s best canvassers. As Prime Minister Thaksin has told the monks should not involve themselves with the politics of the ballot box. But they are often entwined in complex webs of obligation which impose expectations of reciprocity, and that demand their political involvement (Santimatanedol 2004 Bangkok post 22, July).Keyes comments that the Buddhist sangha in Thailand became fragmented and a variety of moral voices emerged. This religious multivocality has significantly contributed to the replacement of assumptions of unquestioned hierarchy with practices of open debate that are today seen as characteristic of a civil society in Thailand (Keyes 1999).

The monks are also sometimes consulted on political issues particularly at such times as elections, though they are not supposed to partake or take sides in politics. According to Isdulya, 731 monks were interviewed as to whether they were consulted in political matters by villagers. The responses are as follows: 62.4 percent said they were asked for an opinion, while 37.6 percent were not. Therefore, the political parties themselves were also aware of the influence of the Sangha (Isdulya 1972:80). According to Jacobs, Buddhist Sangha can also influence the political authority, and ultimately the social order with the selected representative of religious organizations serving as moral advisers to key political decision makers. These advisers are predominantly but not exclusively from the Buddhist Sangha (Jacobs

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14 Senior monks have described Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as being eccentric and too keen on power and questioned whether he should stay in the office.
An ancient tradition, the advisers are supposed to provide a moral check on the unlimited powers of patrimonial, political leadership in order to prevent the rise of despotism, and they are supposed to influence political decision makers in using their power to provide satisfactory, morally inspired service for the worthy in the Thai society. For example, Phra Vanarata, sometimes called Phra Banarata, was very well known in Ayutthaya's history during the reign of King Naresuan (1590-1605). Phra Vanarata saved many military leaders from execution. The advice offered by the Sangha representatives, not unexpectedly, has been principally theological or ritual, but it also has included secular matter (Phra Dhammapitaka 1999:464).

The advisory role does not exhaust the Sangha's moral-inspirational role in political action. The patriarch, for example, takes part in many politically inspired programs for national well being (Jacobs, p., 250). It is reasoned that if the nation prospers, the religion prospers; hence, the cosmic order prospers. For example, if a prime minister upholds religious codes and glorifies the Buddhist Sangha on one hand and provides patrimonial-prebendary service to moral members of society while preserving general peace and harmony on the hand, he is as worthy a representative of the moral-cosmic order as is monarch. However, he is worthy of sangha sanction and active support (Ibid.). Nowadays, in the case of Thailand the political order is blessed with a moral monarch (King Bhumibol). Hence, regardless of its specific political form, the sangha organizations with Thai Buddhist values continue to sanction Thai political authority on issues of morality (Jackson 1999).

At the same time, Jackson emphasizes that Buddhist Sangha is still marshalled to construct emotive arguments in support of political action. He argues that the participation in the religious ceremonies that revolved around the temple was a political and a religious act (Jackson 1997:84-85). In present day politics and even those of the past in general, politicians would like to influence all institutions including religious institutions to further their political ends (Aoesrivong 2004:14). Thus, to challenge the moral, patrimonial-political order is to challenge the Buddhism, and vice versa. This system of check and balance between the two institutions of the Sanghas on the one hand and the political institutions on the other paves a way for various social movements thus espousing productive, qualitative, development changes in the society, especially, but not exclusive, on religious grounds.
Rural Politics in Thailand

A common conception of rural Thai politics is that Thai villagers make no demands on the political authorities. Those who argue this position generally support their view by citing the Thai political culture, which sets up narrow criteria of appropriateness both for demand articulation by the villagers and for demand conversion by those in authority. According to Neher the political culture has been characterized by deferential authority relationship, isolation of the villagers from political authorities, and non-binding social and institutional relationships. It is argued that these basic orientations have mitigated the number and intensity of demands which come from the general population especially after 1973-1976 (Neher 1972:201-216). Furthermore, Neher observes that the conception of a political villager from the all-powerful officialdom has led to a simplified view of the Thai political system. Such a view, however, ignores the persons and institutions which acts as a bridge between the great masses of villagers and the minority group of authorities (Ibid., p. 214). In fact, Young had studied on the Northeastern Thai Village, and it was cleared that the members of the village political stratum who are in contact with the officials, who join interest groups, and who participate in political activities cannot be classed as ‘villagers’ in the same sense that the political villagers can. Teachers, temple priests, merchants, wealthy landowners, middlemen, commune leaders (kamnan), and village headmen (puyaiban) have both village and urban interest and ties a dual existence which allows them to play an important role in national integration and the villagers’ development (Young 1979:251-252). The growth of functional associations, too, has made a change in the simplistic notion of a two-class society imperative. The economic and social self-sufficiency of the Thai village leads to the welfare and development even at district and national system. At both the village and district levels, there exists a competent group of individuals who have the capacity to carry out the changes that are necessary in order for the system to survive and develop.

According to Neher during the last decade, decentralization of power and authority has been the government’s main policy toward local government. At the

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15 A broad description of Thai political development from a monarchy through an authoritarian “bureaucratic polity” to a semi democratic “bourgeois polity” is offered. The body of the article deals with the time from about 1960 to present, particularly 1992-1996. Prospects for further democratization are seen in the “routinization” of democratic procedures, regular elections without interference by the military, an open press, a growing economy and middle class, and the lack of international conflicts as well as internal ethnic strife.
tambon level (Tambol an administrative unit, one level above village organization normally covers a number of villages) a new body of local administration has been established. Members are locally elected and form a new organization called Tambol Administrative Organization or (TAO) (Neher 1975:153-163). The TAO is independent organization with its own budget and administrative personal. Each village has its own representatives elected within its own constituency to sit in the TAO. The village headman does not have a role in TAO but remains with the official domain and is responsible directly to the district officer (Ibid.). At present, some TAO may be administratively viable on their own, but there still may be many TAO which need guidance and supports from government officials. Whatever is going to happen, the TAO is underway and that Thai society is seen to be approaching to a more democratic society (Neher 1996: 301-321). According to Missingham the studies of local political processes point to significant institutionalized limits to popular participation in local government and local decision-making processes. Tambol Councils are usually dominated by local wealthy elites and bureaucrats, who seek to maintain state patronage (Missingham1997:153). Hirsch describe two villagers committees and Tambol councils as more relevant as tools of state power at the village and sub district level than as vehicles for articulation of community interests in dealing with the state authorities (Hirsch, and Lohmann1994:439-51).

**Changing Local Powers**

While talking about local governments and administration in Thailand, we cannot disregard the role of local power structures that could heavily influence the formation of local formal political bodies and hinder people's active participation. Here is referring not only to the popular figures of chao pho (provincial godfathers that dominated the PAOs) or the so-called ithipon muet ('dark influences', i.e., those mafia-like powerful individuals or groups that control some localities), but also to the general Thai social structure believed to be based on patron-client relations (Orlandini 2003:104). Changes in the power structure are occurring at least at two levels. Firstly the new electoral process attempted to restrain the influence of provincial godfathers over national politics, after the introduction of nationwide party lists, single-member constituencies, and the alleged increased importance of
party affiliation. In fact many candidates from influential families, which did not enter the TRT party disappeared in the 2001 elections (Phongphaichit & Chist Baker 2003:5-8). Secondly, reinforced local government bodies, such as TAOs,\(^{16}\) show a gradual emancipation from the state administration system and local influential people.

Now it is all in the hands of Thaksin’s government, which so far has sent mixed signals in terms of commitment to decentralization. While the reforms at the provincial level suggest a weakening of the provincial administration in favor of local government bodies, the new Prime Minister is calling for the transformation of provincial governors into chief executive officers (CEOs), following a strategic reform of the bureaucracy (Painter, Martin 2005:1-23).

Moreover, to maintain a family’s and phuak’s political position in practice means competing for local political offices (including kamnan and village heads). The election of nayok PAO and council members, as well as the municipal and TAO elections held both before and afterwards, were thus mandatory occasions to proof the Phakphuak’s and the Trakun’s relative strength vis-à-vis other such groupings in the province. This included trying to expand one’s area of influence to local government jurisdictions that were not previously in one’s fold, and strengthening influence in places it seemed weak. Groups of local candidates, perhaps especially when they run as a new group, may look for a thi phueng (supporter, patron) for their bid, and they may well find it in an established phakphuak not in a political party (Nelson 2005:12). For the Thai, a man of power is man of amnat (power). (For example Thaksin has power, because he is a politician and businessman.)

Government officials (civil bureaucrats and military officers) head the ranking, followed by politicians (cabinet ministers, members of parliament, provincial assemblymen, and municipal councilors), with kamnan (commune chiefs) and village headmen in the third place. According to Nelson (2005:13) this situation necessarily follows from the personal and relational nature of local political groups and networks. There does not seem to be a generalized mechanism of integration, such as abstract political convictions that may bridge personal differences to an

\(^{16}\) At the provincial level new laws have given Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs) a modest increase in autonomy. But these bodies remain largely ineffective due to structural weaknesses vis-à-vis line departments. Additionally, they are overwhelmingly dominated by provincial economic elites. The devolution of control to Sub district Administrative Organizations appears to have been at the expense of PAOs, leaving them with a poorly defined formal role. Elections for SAO and PAO council members has certainly deepened and invigorated ‘democracy’ in the Thai context, but not in the way governance specialists might wish.
extent and allow stable cooperation, and that may span broad geographical areas (such as the entire territory of the country). Political loyalties are not directed towards ideas, but towards leading figures. Countryside political structures thus do not depend on the power of ideological persuasion, but on the leadership qualities of individual politicians (whatever factors that is based on). The sons and daughters of such leaders may find it difficult to fill their fathers' shoes. If they cannot acquire their fathers' barami or leadership legitimacy, their phakphuak will split, and new leaders will try to take their place (Ibid, p, 14).

Furthermore, Pongsudhirak (2003:284) points out that it is difficult to be optimistic about the democratization of Thai politics, because it is these participants in the politics of itthihol who are the main supporters of increasingly powerful political parties. Thaksin was enjoying various privileges through the politics of itthiphol to endorse the further development of representative democracy in his own style. For example, Thaksin's policies, both domestically and externally, have a number of important implications for the calibration of Thai domestic politics as well as for the region. Domestically, there are two clearly discernible strands of policy output. The first of these is the articulation of populist policies to invoke broad-based electoral support for TRT while consolidating the present party system overwhelmingly in its favour. The second and perhaps more discreet stand is Thaksin's co-option of the traditional centres of power in Thai politics (Ganesan 2004:26-44). Arising from Thaksin's confluence of power is the possibility of another major development in Thailand's present domestic political developments augur the potential to radically transform the country's political economy. As Laotheramatas (1988:451-407) argued, Thailand changed from being the bureaucratic polity described by Fred Riggs into a more liberal state power by independent business associations. The business associations that Laotheramatas credited for bypassing formal controls and transforming the bureaucratic polity are no longer as cohesive and certainly not out to circumvent Thaksin's bid to enlarge his power base. Rather, as mentioned earlier, powerful traditional business interests have already been co-opted by Thaksin. Moreover, Thaksin try to change all administration structure in his own style, as he said that we have to run the country like a business company (Phongpaichit 2004:7).

Before the political crisis in early 2006, the Thaksin government had a huge majority in parliament and this allowed the Thai Rak Thai party to dominate
political society. Thaksin’s business corporation could also buy shares in the media and put pressure on the media to support the government through threatening to withdraw advertising revenue. However, the claims that this was a “parliamentary dictatorship” or that there was no democracy under Thaksin, are without foundation. His power ultimately rested on the number of votes his party could win from the poor (Reilly 2006:187). Nelson (2007:10) points out that the great majority of voters living outside of Bangkok and bigger cities were openly denounced as uneducated, uninformed, open to bribery, and morally deficient. This presumption of a significantly privileged political understanding on the side of the activists and their supporters provided the ideological basis for giving much greater weight to the mostly Bangkok-based anti-Thaksin forces than to Thaksin’s rural supporters in deciding the question of legitimacy.

Nelson further analyzes actually, executive legitimacy has two components: The first is the legitimacy that comes from power granted by the people through the democratic process (elections) The second, which is more important than the first and which is essential to legitimacy, is the legitimacy that comes from the exercise of executive power for the benefit of the nation and of the people. The Prime Minister relies only on the first kind of legitimacy and proceeds to act only for his own benefit and he invokes this one kind of legitimacy to suppress the rights of the people, besides disregarding the royal power under the democratic system (Ibid, 11).
In order to understand the local-national political Structure in Thailand as the following chart:

- **National Level**
  - Government
    - Parliament
      - Political leaders
        - MP candidates/Cliques
          - Families political recruitment
            - Families political recruitment
              - Local governments: PAOs, municipalities, TAOs (the section of a Phuk running in a local election is called klum or thim)
  - Political Parties
    - Factions of MPs under a leader: provincial, regional interregional
        - Vote canvassers (hua khanean)
          - May over the entire province or more limited area; territories may overlap, causing electoral competition; leader might not be a candidate himself

- **Provincial Level**
  - Sub-district chiefs, village headmen, members of TAO councils, TAO executives, other village-level leaders, teachers, religious leaders, field officials

- **Local Level**
  - Village/tambon and family based, politically unspecific social networks and relationships, e.g., village/tambol-level factions or cliques

**Source:** Nelson 2005: Chulalongkorn University and Orapin 2001: Office Public Sector Reform Project

**Figure:** 8
Thus, as power tends to corrupt and information is power, absolute information-control tends to corrupt absolutely. The contention between imported liberal democratic values and traditional Thai Buddhist values has been creating rifts, cracks and powerful social forces that have dramatically changed Thai social and political structure in the past. The tendency of changes will continue towards the liberal democratic values whose seeds have been planted in Thai history. The consequences, directions and costs of this process lie in the hands of those in high places with powerful face (Connors, Micheal 2003:9-10).

Administrative, religious, and legal reforms were used as tools to build a modern state. The reform was founded on the growing importance of education. From its religious roots in the monks of the villages to the current educational structure with its modern schools, vocational colleges and universities, the foundation of national identity in this respect has remained intact. Even today, the Buddhism (sasona), nation (chat), monarchy (phra maha kasat) remains the foundations of Thai cultural identity.

Religion in Thai Village and Sangha’s Social Work

Buddhism in Thailand has long been seen as a holistic cultural system, with an all-embracing normative cosmology that provides meaning of everyday life to people. However, it is also a diverse cultural system that produces alternative or other counterstatist practices that have at times contested the power of the politico-administrative center (Jim 2003:293-308). Kuwinpant (2002:5) in his article entitle “Thai Society and Culture” focuses on traditional village life centred around the Buddhist temple. All rituals concerning birth and death have taken place in the temple (Wat). Temple functions as a centre for education, ordination, social gatherings in all-important religious ceremonies and festivals as well as village social welfare. It is a place where rich and poor and people of different social and economic statuses meet and participate in all kind of temple activities. Buddhist monks enjoy the highest status in the Thai social hierarchy. In religious ceremonies, even the King and Queen themselves have to pay respect to the monks (Ibid. p.9). The Buddhist Order serves as the mooring place for all Thai society. The specifically religious hierarchy interpenetrates with the social order. This interpenetration is most clearly seen at the uppermost levels of Thai society, most
notably in the role of the monk as a super-ordinate symbol and in the role of the king.

Monks who are not burdened with educational careers do take an active part in religious and social concerns, especially if they are senior members of the Sangha. In fact, their responsibilities increase with age and seniority. At an age when most laymen would retire to enjoy their leisure, these elderly monks have to meet the increased expectations and demands that people have of them. Often they work hard until their last breath or until they become completely invalid, so great is their spirit of self-sacrifice and dedication. One of the reasons why this is not widely known to the public is because these selfless monks would rather keep to the tradition of silent service, quietly working for the benefit of others, than working to gain personal benefits and fame. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the social contributions made by the Sangha are, indeed, of inestimable value (Klausner, William 2000:204).

Today the monks' social roles are more visible in the rural areas or villages, where the bond between the Sangha and laity is still relatively unaffected by the urban culture and patterns of behavior. Poor villagers often turn to monks to mediate land disputes, family problems, and differences among neighbors. Unruly and stubborn children are taken to a monastery for training in discipline and other social values; sometimes boys are even ordained for that purpose. The village monastery also functions as the center of social activities, where most community affairs take place. When and where necessary, monks take initiative in various social projects, mainly by giving guidance and leadership, such as construction of schools and hospitals, roads and small reservoirs, and at times even the digging of a village well. They also take leadership in raising funds for such projects. In times of natural calamity there have been instances in which monks provided the most effective leadership in pooling resources together to help ameliorate the suffering of victims and their families (Phra Dhammapitakal992: 9). Even forest monks, who are known for their natural inclination for meditation and solitude and who spend most of their lives in forests, contribute valuable services to society. They are looked upon with

17 Although Forest monasteries exist in extremely rural environments, they are not isolated from society. Monks in such monasteries are expected to be an integral element in the surrounding society in which they find themselves. Again, this is in part a reaction against the huge urban monastic communities which were primarily concerned with scholarly study and scriptural translation, which thus effectively shut their communities off from the surrounding environment.
great respect and their counsel is sought after. They are either directly or, more often, indirectly instrumental in setting up charitable programs or foundations for the welfare of society (Ibid.). They help preserve the forests and water resources of the country. In most cases their influence and intervention in such matters prove more effective than those of government agencies. Again little or no efforts have been made to publicize their achievements and social contributions and a wider section of the public remains unaware of the fact.

Thai society is traditionally based around the village, or group of homes. As well as a site for religious rituals and worship, temples served as schools where children were educated, and were the centre of social and cultural festivals where young people from different villages could meet. Monks could be consulted by villagers on matters such as social disputes, family problems, or even on business or official matters.

**Forest Sangha Relationship with Ruler**

There is a triadic relationship between the king or ruler and the ‘establishment’ Sangha of primarily village- and town-dwelling monks on the one side and forest-dwelling ‘ascetic’ or “contemplative” monks on the other. This triad is the result of the interplay of two variables. On the one hand, the Sangha has always from early or classical times manifested two modalities or “vocations” that ideally should be ‘combined’ but frequently in practice got polarized. This polarization also usually had a politico-spatial expression in the form of the location of monastic communities at the ‘centre’ (that is the political capital and satellite-town centre) and at the ‘periphery.’ The centre-periphery grid divided again into two contrasts (Tambiah 1973:8). There was the centre defined as the limits of the capital or town. There was the centre of the kingdom or city and its outermost periphery of border regions, deep interior, and satellite principalities. Now the triadic configuration is the product of the interaction of the ruler of the kingdom at large with the bifurcated Sangha. Because the ruler was located at the capital or town, there was always a primary alignment between him and the town-dwelling monks. But this established Sangha itself fragmented for various reasons into sects, which competed for political patronage and became embroiled in notoriously volatile palace politics (Ibid. p.9).

The rulers themselves and their political machinery have always buttressed their legitimacy, and indeed fulfilled their role, by supporting the Sangha and being
supported in turn. We have already remarked that the forest-monks were effective groundbreakers, colonizing and civilizing the forest frontiers and attracting settlements around them. However their better documented role historically is their acting as a vitalizing force and as a countervailing agent to the religious establishment during periods of religious purification and cultural renaissance. In normal times, the king and his political satellites, the supportive Sangha at the capital, have both symbolized and realized the Buddhist values associated with cakkavatti (king of king), bodhisattva (Buddha in the future), the Dhamma realm in which the religion flourished, and the exemplary center. There may be times when the only way the forest-monk communities can preserve their integrity is to set a distance from polity and society at large. But this again is not necessarily an enduring stance, for in the final reckoning the Buddhist Sangha cannot exist apart from society (Bobilin 1999:297).

For instance, King Bhumibol likes to visit forest Sangha in the Northeast Thailand. In the early 1960s, some senior bureaucrats and some senior monks of the royalist Dhammayutta sect became interested in the intensive methods of meditation practiced by Phra Achan\(^{18}\) Mun Phulithato, who lived a life of an ascetic religious until his death in 1949. In the late 1960s, one of Achan Mun’s pupils published a biography claiming that Achan Mun had achieved the status of an arahan or Buddhist saint. The growing fame of his spiritual achievements sparked a devotional movement focused on Achan\(^{18}\) Mun and his disciples. Leading participants included senior bureaucrats, military officers, and the royal family. By patronizing Achan Mun’s monastic lineage, they aimed to tap the spiritual power of Mun’s saintliness (Phongphaichit 1999:316). They presented gifts to the monasteries. The King invited some of Achan Mun’s surviving pupils to Bangkok, and built a monastic dwelling for them in the grounds of the palace (Ibid. p. 317). Today the Master’s elder disciples, through his training and guidance, have been firmly established in the Dhamma and have now become master in their own right, leading people along the Right Path. All have large numbers of disciples in various parts of the country. And there are still other disciples who are millionaires in the Dhamma, but who prefer a solitary, secluded life. Bhikkhu Sumedho makes conclusion, forest monasticism offers the modern world a gift. We offer the simplicity of our lives, the morality of our lives, the dedication of our lives, and the realization of our lives. The modern

\(^{18}\) Achan means teacher
world receives this blessing and encouragement to develop in wholesome ways (Bhikkhu Sumedho 1999:478-479).

**It is shown how ruler relationship to the Sangha (both in the town and forest Sangha) at the figure below:**

![Diagram showing ruler relationship to the Sangha](image)

**Source:** Tambiah, S.J (1984), *The Buddhist Saints of forest and the Cult of amulets: A study in charisma, hagiography, sectarianism, and millennial Buddhism*, London: Cambridge University Press p, 72

Hence, one notes that every factor in Thai politics, Buddhism and Sangha have involved most of the places. Thailand was constructed, and by which Buddhism was transformed and defined as the national religion, transforming notions of Dhamma, kamma and so on. Modern and national epistemologies are two sides of the same coin, and together they have contributed the orthodoxy that Theravada Buddhism is primary in Thai life from the very beginning Sukhkothai era (Vandergeest 1993:867).

Thai society, although the new educational system has come to replace the traditional one, school facilities are often found located on monastic property donated by the Sangha. In addition to their assistance in raising funds for construction, monks also contribute their teaching skills in a number of those
establishments. Naturally, monastery grounds where school facilities are located are often turned into playgrounds for the children. Noise and mischief spill into monastic environments. Good-naturedly, the monks put up with them and watch the children grow to become good and useful members of society (Santikaro Bhikkhu: 2007).

However, the goal of a good government is similar to that of the Sangha, that is, the achievement of the good and happiness for the people. Then, if the government or the ruler is a good one, the cooperation between the Sangha and the ruler or the government will render the mission more effective. The government or the ruler can even be a medium through which the monastic Sangha carries out its mission for the good of people. At least, a good government or ruler can provide the people with conditions and circumstances that are favorable to the practice of the Dhamma (Phra Dhammapitaka 1986:4).

Kirsch comments that Buddhist rituals serve as paradigmatic events that instill motives and provide models for secular as well as religious action. Hence, Buddhist ritual not only teaches the Thai villager that there is an underlying moral hierarchy; it displays that hierarchy in his everyday life, in the streets of remote villages. Ritual points out that the individual's interests are not linked exclusively to maintaining particularistic ties to kinsmen, to localities, or to particular styles of life. Thai society in the villagers the individual's interests are linked to a universal order that transcends the particular (Kirsch 1973:192). He further explains the individual is freed to seek out his fortune in a broadly based Buddhist-defined society. Then in terms of political order is symbolically linked to the Buddhist moral order, particularly through the role of the king who bridges the sacred and the secular realms (ibid.,p.,193). Ungphakorn (1975:179) viewed the ethical precepts of Buddhism as insurance against oppressive national development. Although the fundamental role of development was to improve the welfare of the villagers, in a number of nations without the protection of religion the rights of the villager were often abused. In Thailand, according to Ungphakorn, the peasant, like the urban dweller, has an individual identity protected by the shared belief in Buddhism.
The Sangha’s dependence upon lay approval

Most Buddhist monks in Thailand are regularly made aware of the fact that they depend upon their being accepted by lay people for their very survival. The rules of the order prescribe that every day at sunrise they go collecting food. In rural monasteries the monks’ food supply is secure; a rural monastery never runs out of victuals. In cities this direct link is not present, many monks must walk long distances and compete with dozens of other groups from various monasteries at the places where lay persons often have set up a table and donate small portions of food to a regular stream of yellow-clad monk until their supplies run out. While in the village, the one group of monks that comes along can be timed almost to the minute and always contains the same set of familiar faces, in the city, it is often an irregular and anonymous procedure. In the village, it is the housewife who cooks at half past five in the morning so as to be ready with her donation when the monks pass by her house (Terwiel 2005, Thich Nguyen 2007:4-6). In the modern parts of Thailand many commuters, factory and office workers cannot fit in a food-donation in their early-morning routine.

Monks are not directly involved in earning money but are supported both by the government and by private donations. Members of each district and sub-district support their local temples and monks by donations of food, clothing, money, and work in the monasteries. In turn, the local monks provide a range of services to the people, including educational, medical, ceremonial, and religious services. Sarmela comments that in recent years, the government has encouraged the monks to provide missionary activities and to work in remote hill areas, helping to eradicate the growing of opium poppies, the selling of daughters into prostitution, and engaging in other social and economic development activities. The presence and participation of monks in ceremonies and activities is seen to bring merit to the lay participants (Sarmela 2005:98). The relationship the village and town householders (the political power and merchants included) pursue them because they wish to partake of their supernormal power, which they are credited with on account of their meditational exercises and ascetic lives (Phra Dhammapitaka 2002:19).
In a Buddhist society, the monastery is a foundation we could build on, a field for social action. Because the monastery is dependent on lay people to support it, there is a day-to-day connection with the neighboring society. It is a web of support and interaction, so that when there is a problem in the community, we can easily recognize who is interested in helping. At first there were a few volunteers. When there was too much work for volunteers to do, we hired some people. Again, the money for their salaries came from offerings to the monastery from people in the community (Phra Promkunaporn 2006:18).

Thus, the temple, under the monks’ guidance, assumed such diverse roles as a school, a clinic, a juvenile correctional facility for unruly youths, a vocational education centre, a hostel for travelers, an entertainment complex, a community kitchen and even a bank. However, by the early 1960’s it was becoming increasingly
evident that with the expansion of government services and advances in technology, the monk's position as a repository of knowledge was being seriously challenged. Phra Pormkhunaporn comments that Politicians who are abreast of problems in the future will have to rise above the contemporary situation and see things in a more universal perspective. They must be able to rise above temporal restrictions and aim for solutions for the human race as a whole, bearing in mind the universal problem that exist the world over - lack of fraternity, (Phra Pormkhunaporn: 1994:27).

This is the main reason why a good group of monks in the rural areas have started to search for a new role by becoming involved in community development. They feel not only "spiritual" responsibility, but also responsibility for the welfare of the community and society as such. Their actions are their own initiatives. They are convinced that liberation has to be appropriate. From the doctrinal point of view, the social dimension is nothing new in Buddhism any more than it is new to any other religion. It is the interpretation of the founder's message that matters. Phra Dhammagosajarn points that monks in the rural areas see that their actual situation does not permit them to wait around in the temple for food to be brought to them by the villagers. They know that the temple is no more the center of community life. They have to go out to meet and assist the people in the midst of the many problems that confront them (Phra Dhammagosajarn 2007:19). The religio-cultural structure of village community remains unchanged. It is the wisdom of the leadership to find out measures to conserve, to renew, to re-adjust, and to recreate cultural traditions which embody Buddhist doctrine within the bounds allowed by the official Buddhist institution (Simpson 1999: 508-510 ).

Hence, the experiences of the monks and Buddhist lay leadership in the rural areas are convincing and are of seminal importance for Thai society today. At the same time, I have the feeling that the Buddhist movement in the rural areas is isolated movements. They are making their own way without any serious support from the educated and middleclass in urban centers. It is not primarily material support we have in mind, but rather moral support and solidarity. The same is happening with the poor masses in the rural areas and urban centres.

In order to address this most deep-seated problem, a certain amount of genius is required. The problem is beyond the scope of political, administrative and economic means, which are materialistic approaches. It is more of mental one, connected to attitudes and values, and it requires the collective wisdom of religion,
philosophy, ethics and the humanities to address. In short, all branches of human knowledge should be applied to addressing this problem, and it will only be solved if humanity can progress to a new level of being. Next we will focus on the role of Buddhism and how it interacts with the government during the democratic movement in Thailand. Buddhist monks have also taken the initiative to refine and expand developmental works in rural areas as a traditional leadership role in community service, during Sarit and Thanom regime. The future role of Buddhists Sangha and the State modernization will also be discussed in the next chapter.