CHAPTER – IV
Buddhism and Government during the Democratic Movement

This chapter investigates premises of Buddhism and government in Thailand during the democratic movement. Owing to chapter 1, concerning on how absolute monarchy overthrown by the People's Party, appointed itself as provisional parliament, and formed a government, which was acceptable to both the king and the People's Party. So thus, the early constitutional period had experienced. It's an extremely important period, strengthening to this argument; Wilson once states that peculiarity of the constitution was the provision for a period of tutelage before the introduction of a full democracy (Wilson 1968:17). After a thorough conceptualization of the previous chapters, this section will analyze Sangha's participation in variety of activities. It includes public affairs, and other social and political arenas to widen the civil space, to uplift democracy during the period of 1963-1976, where dictatorial (military) ruled was in Thailand, and had communist threat from Indo-China to dominate the country.

History is proving that Thailand has witnessed forms of government, both in the forms of a representative democracy and military rule. Historically, democratic government proved to be short-lived, though its development rooted a long period of time. It first appeared in Thailand in June 1932 when a group of senior army, navy, and civilian officers overthrew the absolute monarchy and established a constitutional regime based on the rhetoric, if not the reality of democracy governance (Logerfo 1996:904). But, the move towards democracy was not long lasting since a drift toward military dictatorship began in 1939, after Phibun Songkhram became Prime Minister. The fact was that Pridi Panomyoung, who is considered to be the champion of democratic government, accepted a cabinet post in the Phibun government and cooperated closely with him until the Japanese invasion and its occupation in 1941. The clear indication is Pridi was not alienated by Phibun's nationalism and authoritarianism, as might be expected of a strong opposition leader (Nuechterlein 1967:40-41). Basically Phibun's philosophy was anti democratic: he believes that authoritarian government based on military strength was the most efficient way to achieve progress in an underdeveloped nation such as Siam (Ibid. 43). As Marks comments, the army officers saw themselves as the protectors
of the kingdom; and what was good for the army was good for the nation. Bamrungsuk also emphasizes that Thai politics had been regulated by a series of military interventions. The struggle to control the government was exercised by coup (Bamrungsuk 2001:78).

The military controls continued further, the rationale behind this control is describe by Aphornsuvan that in order to cope with the new internal and external political and economic situation of the war period, the Constitution of 1946 was written with a different idea to restructure the form of Parliament. The Constitution of 1946 replaced a unicameral form of parliament with bicameral form, calling the second house as the House of Elders. From that time onwards, the upper house or later Senate would become another institution in the growth and development of parliamentary government in Thailand. The 1946 Constitution was dissolved shortly by the military Coup on 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 1947 (Aphornsuvan 2003:2). Macdonald remarks the event as such,

"The coup d'etat which took place on the night of November 8, 1947, was so well planned that even Pridi Phanomyong could not have known just who the enemy was. No blood was shed and no lives were lost; but 'those who saw the tanks rattling along the street or the machine-gun nests springing up, or saw the bare blades of the bayonets knew how ugly and serious it could have been" (Macdonald1949,Bangkok Editor pp.42-43 cited in Nuechterlein 1967:52).

Following the election of January 1948, Kluang again formed a government on the basis of parliamentary majority. However, after four months the military seized power and the authorization of the government was granted to Phibun Sangkram. Thus, civilian government in Thailand had ended (Neher 1974:20b). Despite a number of attempts to oust him from power, Phibun managed to retain leadership of the government for nine years.

Within April, 1948 to the end of 1951, the Phibun Songkram government couldn't ignore the national assembly completely. During this period the assembly constitutes two houses, a fully elected lower house and a royally appointed upper house. And, the government faced many threats (Wilson 1967:209). So, Phibun searched for a wider base of popular support in the mid 1950s; however, it proves to be failed. He proclaimed for a new policy, "era of democracy" which has to encourage freedom of speech and press, multiple political parties, and plans for a new election in 1957. Meanwhile, Sarit Thanarat, commander of the Bangkok army seized power in September of that year, suspended the constitution, dissolved the
National Assembly, and declared martial law forcing Phibun to flee into exile (Neher 1974: 22). Aphonsuvan argues that the formation and growth of the new monarchy in Thailand was finally completed under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat’s regime that had overthrown the Phibun regime in 1957. He argues that modern Thai politics has been dominated by tension between two sources of political legitimacy, constitutionalism and people’s sovereignty, more or less, as represented by Phibun, and despotic paternalism, as represented by Sarit. Pattiwat or Revolution in new sense began with the coup on October 20, 1958 that ushered in a New System of Thai-style democracy. That meaning of democracy was not western liberalism from which the 1932 Revolution had drawn its ideology, but rather it was a return to “Thai political ideology.” (Aphornsuvan 2003:3-4). In the next section, different aspects of Sarit era would be discussed elaborately.

**Sarit Thanarat Era 1958-1963**

Sarit era marked a multifaceted social and political order in modern Thai history. Girling observes the period as political authoritarianism, economic development, massive corruption, and external alarms. There was no letup in military-enforced controls. Sarit took charge of Prime Minister and the Army Commander-in-Chief, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Minister of National Development, and also the charge of the police. Sarit epitomized the drive for national development, recruiting Western-educated technocrats, authorizing planning (Budget Bureau, board of investment, five-year economic plan), and enforcing decisions. He placed his trusted friends in key positions to make money for him and held people’s loyalty by both gratitude and fear (Girling 1981:112-113).

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1 In the wake of a World Bank 1957-58 Study Commission, new institutions were set up to take care of the shift from nationalist state capitalism towards a more open private sector driven development. The National Economic Development Board - that in 1972 became The National Economic and Social Development Board - was among these new apex agencies. The NESDB was located in the Office of the Prime Minister and consisted of two entities: a governing board (The National Economic and Social Development Committee (NESDC)) and a secretariat to that committee (The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board). NESDC comprised core Cabinet members, appointed members plus the Governor of the Bank of Thailand, the Secretary General of the Civil Service Commission, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, the Director General of the Fiscal Policy Office and the Secretary General of the NESDB.
The main theme of the government policy under Sarit was socio-economic development, aiming at internal peace and unification of various classes and ethnic groups in the country under the rule and guidance of the ideology of "nation, religion, and king." Therefore, Sarit's first plan in the southern Thailand's Phongpaichit and Chingong was accounted to integrate the Malay Muslims who continued to resist the spread of the centralized educational system. Contrary to the policy, 1960 witnessed opening of 500 pondok schools which taught Islam and Malay language as main themes, rather than Buddhism and Thai. Sarit forced them to include the Thai language and other selected parts of the central curriculum. In 1957, Amin Tomina, the son of Haji Sulong who had allegedly been liquidated under Phibun, became an MP and raised Malay Muslim demands in Parliament. In 1961, Sarit accused Amin and a fellow Muslim MP as plotting a separatist revolt. They were jailed, and after release fled to Malaysia (Phongpaichit 1999:272-273; Chingon 2006:89-90). Thomas analyzes that over the last 100 years or so, the Thai government has sought to achieve political integration of the Thai Muslims, but mostly in vain. One exception was the centralization of administrative control over the Muslim provinces in the beginning of 20th century, and another was the forcibly attempt for cultural assimilation from 1939-1944. The latter involved pressing Thai Muslims to wear modern Thai dress, adopt Thai names, recognize Sunday as the weekly day of rest, and speak only the Thai Language, abolishing religious advisory bodies at the local levels of government, and closing many of the religious schools (Thomas 1975:550-551).

Aphornsuvan comments that from the 1960s onward, the government introduced developmental policies aimed at raising social and economic conditions of the Malay-Muslims, convinced Thai government’s progressive intention in development. The policy involved projects, programs, and activities on different levels of the government and the local communities. Many promises were made concerning the practice of religious freedom for the Malay – Muslims and the respect of Islamic law and customs in the four provinces. The government also provided funds (about two hundred thousand dollars) for construction at Pattani, the largest mosque in Thailand (Aphornsuvan 2003:24). Here, it is difficult to pinpoint all of the components of this approach; since many of the key programmes either had been operating in the Muslim provinces prior to the mid 1960’s or was subsequently initiated in other parts of the country as well as in the south. Surin suggests that
social harmony and political stability can only achieved when all elements of the society are given due respect and full freedom to fulfill their communal aspirations within the framework of the law. Social justice, equal economic opportunity and political freedom should be the biding forces of the society, not force alone (Surin 1988:199). Other important statement from Chularajamontri’s office read as the following:

“The phrase ‘Thai culture’ should not be confined to mean only the cultural practices of the Thai Buddhists. It should be extended to include practices of the Islam as well. This is because the Muslims have been a part of the Thai society since the Sukhothai period. The phrase Thai people as used in the Constitution is not defined by religions, languages or cultural practices and their Islamic culture does not mean that they are destroying the Thai culture. On the contrary, that will give it a unique feature and will convince foreigners that one dimension of the Thai culture is cultural and religious tolerance true to the principle of religious freedom enshrined in the Constitution.” (Office of Chularajamontri 2007: 21).

The above statement gives religious freedom to all the communities, not exclusive to the Malays but similar attitude to the other ethnic minorities viz., the Chinese or the Indian settled in Thailand (Yusuf 2008:21).

The role of the Sangha became more profound during this period. Sarit held power of the prime minister and abolished constitution and parliament. He carried out a revolution (Patiwati) of a paternal government based on the “nation-state, Buddhism and monarchy” (Riggs 1973: 476). As a part of cultural and political integration, Sarit had formed a Sangha council (the national order of Theravada Buddhist monks), and engaged it in missionary work targeting the northern hill tribes and other ethnic minorities near the Burma-Laos borders as well as in the Northeastern area. Sarit got a huge amount of military and development aid funds from the United States, who had been looking for anti-communist allies, in return Thai authority allowed US air and naval bases in Thailand. He also repressed the Communist Party of Thailand which had its core base in the Northeast region. As conciliatory measures, he developed the area. So, for this proposed the role of the Sanghas became more vital (Stuart-Fox 1979:333). Besides, details about the history of social development during the era are discussed in the following section.
History of Social Development

It is important here to provide a brief summary of social development in Thailand during Sarit Thanarat era. For the word “development,” the Thai word “Phattanaa” meaning social progress or advancement is used. However, since its definition changes depending on the political or cultural context, it is difficult to exactly say what Phattanaa is. Considering the historical fact that only social reforms and cultural innovations have been officially and politically acknowledged as Phattanaa, this word is merely a discourse in Thailand (Phongpaichit 1998:60-61: Omar 1999: 229-230).

In this section, we will examine what political practices have been regarded as Phattana, as well as the history of social development in Thailand, especially in the Northeast, while paying attention to the relationship between development subjects and objects. Phattana was understood as a development-oriented ideology by Prime Minister General Sarit Thanarat, who deposed the then Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram in 1957 by staging a coup d'état. He would draw up and implement the economic and social development policy from 1961 (Phuangkasem 1984:3). That was when the word phattana was explicitly used as a political slogan for development.

As mentioned above, Sarit centralized of the power prime minister and abolished the constitution and parliament, carried out a revolution (Patiwati) with a paternal government based on the “nation-state, Buddhism and monarchy” (Riggs 1973:476). His clean and organize political concept was applied extensively, not only to public hygiene, but also to moral policing of corruption and crimes, and excluding malcontents. Under this so called “paternalistic leader,”’2 “Father Sarit,” the people were urged to contribute national development with one heart (Samakkhitham). He even created Thailand’s distinct subjects of development. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1932, the king and royal family had been distant from politics, but Sarit urging them to attend national events and make progress

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2 The leaders of the 1957 coup differed fundamentally from those of the 1932 group by the fact that most were army officers who had had no real foreign educational experience. Their political outlooks had been shaped almost exclusively by what had happened in Thailand. They were naturally much less impressed than their predecessors with the ideas that Western democracy was the final goal of political modernization. It was the members of the Sarit 1957 coup group who were responsible for shaping a new format of Thai politics which endured until October 1973. Under Sarit's leadership a formal rationalization of “democracy in the Thai context” took place, a development that presents students of Thai politics with a most challenging analytical problem.
inspections in various regions. He created the model of development projects patronized by the royal family members (Neher 1974:65)

State Administration and Local Government Structure during the Sarit Period

Sarit also amends to the existing administrative structures. For instance, bureaucracy and development plans had already been started from King Chulalongkorn's period. Namely, the position of village headmen (phuyaiban) and sub-district headmen (kamnan) had been established in 1897, but for the next half century these local officials remained relatively independent of the central administrative machinery. King Chulalongkorn had started to control over such machinery effectively since 1891. In this period several newly specialized departments were formed with the help of Western advisers, and it carried out new essential activities of limited scope (Riggs 1967:111). King Chulalongkorn was able to wait for the strategic moment to carry out his reforms, thereby permitting the transformation to occur without violence or much apparent break in political continuity. Choowong observes, this stage has no definite trajectory, but it may be convenient to think it as a continuing through the 19th to 20th century, where the basic pattern of new governance had been established (Choowong 1997:261 in Thai).

The existing structure went through certain changes after Sarit came to power. For instance, the position of the headmen (phuyaiban) and sub-district headmen (kamnan) were chosen locally, either by seniority or election. Since 1943, candidates for these posts had to be able to read and write, and those who had served in the army or the police force were given preference. Many village elders were disqualified. This was the first step taken by the central government to assume control over the villages. Changes in the Sarit period had stopped in the transition. Government began to sanctioned more funds to the villages for “development” and to inoculate the villagers against communism. Administering these funds, the village

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3 This so-called Chakri Reformation contained various elements: a tax reform leading to increased revenues, a Westernized reform of the military organization leading to a standing army, a centrally controlled police force, a new centralized juridical system and a bureaucratic reform bringing the provincial administration and establishing a modern bureaucracy. The bureaucratic reform was inspired by European and in particular French experience led to unusual centralization of administrative power in Bangkok. The Ministry of Interior emerged as the main mechanism of effective political control of provincial administration.
heads became more closely attached to the bureaucracy than to the village. They began to have closer connection with the district-level bureaucrats, and misused government funds together (Herbert and Irenes1973:270-272). In addition to the fund sanctions through government departments, in 1975 Thai government set up the “Tambon Development Fund” (TDF). Tambon is an administrative unit, consisting of 10-15 villages and its headman called kamnan. A headman of one of the villages is chosen as a collective head by all of them (Morell1972:672). In 1975, 2.6 billion baht was made available to 5,000 Tambon councils. The scheme continued later as the “Rural Employment Generation Project” under the control of the Ministry of the Interior (Fry 1982: 48-49).

Another administrative structure was created during his period, that is, “Department of Community Development.” Since its establishment in 1962 during the Sarit administration, this Department has closed contact with villagers and has played a role in reinforcing the state development ideology to local people. It emphasized on the improvement of material conditions, establishment of group works for market production, and promoting body docility, order and hygiene. The village development competition is one of the concrete development strategies of the Community Development Department to train people the ideas of community development and to develop a rural community and its people (Ratana Tosakul and Boonmathya 2003:287).

The monks have been involved with the government’s politically defined policies of national development and integration, which is also held to be a means of modernization. The argument whether or not the monks should be involved in these activities can be dealt with as follows. National level high-ranking members of Sangha are of the opinion that monks should take part in the process of nation building and modernization for the following reasons (Suksamran1993:70-71) The Sanghas virtually depend upon the material support from the common people. They have duty and responsibility for the common men’s welfare. It is maintained that the government and the king give support and protection to the Sangha, and this enables them to enjoy a satisfactory monkhood. In return, they should render every possible aid to the government in needed situations and be loyal in interest of the nation. It is assumed that presently there are perils which jeopardize Buddhism. These dangers may arise from political invasion by hostile foreign countries; from converted Thai who themselves turn to oppress Buddhism; and exploit others (Phra
These factors enable many people to seek their own evil interest and to gain power to mislead people. Thus, the Sangha’s involvement in government policies of national development and integration not only helps the government, but also restores Buddhism. It is asserted that in the process of modernization, Thai society has rapidly changed and all its components have thus been affected. Its effects on the Sangha might result in either progress or deterioration, depending on the Sangha’s own determination to adjust its role and adapt itself to a changing society (Klausner 2000:159-160). It is believed that if the Sangha remains unchanged while society is changing, it will become moribund. If the Sangha cannot keep pace with society, the fear is that young men will no long volunteer to enter the monkhood. The new generation would then gradually lose faith in Buddhism. The concept of merit and merit making, Phra Dhammakosajarn (2006:36) observes that high-ranking members of the Sangha and members of the influential Buddhist association often interpret merit and merit-making behaviour as conducive to nation building and modernization. Thus, it is argued that the Sangha’s engagement in community development activities, such as the building of schools, wells and roads, earns as such merit as the construction of temple because they bring about progress and require co-operation. For these reasons, individual and groups among the administrative monks are actively engaged in promoting social activities (Suksamran 1977:68b).

Various governmental programmes were carried out through the Sanghas. In their opinion the promotion of religion should be their central concern, because a pure Buddhism would operate as an important moral force in Thai society, encouraging the people to make merit and to care for each other’s welfare, thereby promoting the welfare of the country and the prosperity of the religion and the country. They were therefore opposed to the idea that monks should operate as teachers of secular subjects or as practitioners of modern medicine because these activities were incompatible with the Vinaya (Buddhist Sangha discipline) and this would lead to the moral degradation of the monkhood (Bunnag 1973:50-51). But this point of view of the junior monks is overshadowed by the determination of members of the Sangha at the higher level. It is hardly surprising that since 1964 both the Buddhist universities in Bangkok have run training programmes for monks who are to be assigned up country and engage in the politically defined programmes of the
government. However, it is believed that the national development and integration policies will help the government to mobilize popular support, and to legitimate the government's campaign against antagonistic ideologies, i.e. communism (Kirsch 1969:481).

In the course of history, religion has often been used to give legitimacy to those in power and their exercise of that power. Religion was used to justify wars and conquests, persecutions, atrocities, rebellions, destruction of works of art and culture (Ven: Sri Dhammanada 1986). He further observes that when religion is used to serve political whims, it has to forego its high moral ideals and become debased by worldly political demands. The quest of the Buddha's Dhamma is not directed to the creation of new political institutions and establishing political arrangements. So, Phra Promkunaporn comments that problems of society should be solved by reforming the individuals itself, because individuals are the constituents of the society. He focuses to suggest some general principles, through which the society can be transform into the greater humanism, which can improve welfare of the individuals, and overall the whole society with an equitable sharing of resources. Usually Thai Buddhist monks were not involved in public protests, but they would protest mainly for the spiritual cause like, to uplift moral awareness, social values, etc (Phra Dhammapitaka 1994:3-6). Stuart-Fox contributes that, nature of the relations between Buddhism and the State will vary in accordance with two factors, one being the nature of State itself, and the other is relative strength of the Buddhist population. In a predominantly non-Buddhist State, Buddhism would expect to enjoy the same rights as other religious minorities. That is to say, it would demand complete freedom to practice and propagate its tenets (Stuart-Fox 2006:11-11). Knox suggests that, in a predominantly Buddhist State, Buddhism would naturally expect official recognition as the State religion. Under democracy, the State is the people, and the government is only agency through which will of the people is carried out. If, in their individual capacity citizens support Buddhism, it is only logical that they should do so in their collective capacity too. The current social and economic climate is presenting a potential crisis for Buddhism, and without appropriate responses, the religion may well be abandoned by the people (Knox: Bangkok Post: 22: March 1998).

In Thailand, the primary role of the Buddhist Sangha in political arena is as
Phra Thebvisuthikavee argues that beyond self-interest, urging social unity in contrast to the aims of self-interested politicians. However, these monks see themselves as legitimate actors in the political arena and as protector of Buddhism. They often find themselves at a loss when it comes to dealing with the pragmatic realities of day-to-day politics. As a result, they often end up with feeling of exclusion from what they considered to be their duty (Phra Thebvisuthikavee 2007:2-3 in Thai). After conceptualizing various nature of Thai administration, the next section will deal about the role of Sanghas in the process of modernization in Southern Thailand.

Sanghas and Modernization in Southern Thailand

Concerning the Sanghas and the process of modernization in Southern Thailand, Mahakanjana (2005:6) argues that from 1960s onward, the government introduced development policies aimed at raising social and economic conditions of the Malay-Muslims. Although Thai Buddhism has been a means of building identity in the South, Southern Thai monks traditionally served both Muslims and Buddhists. Marddent and Jerryson observe that, whenever a Thai Muslim woman had problem, she could not confide to her parents, Tok Guru or Imam, she came to a monk. If Western medicine was too expensive, Muslims would come to the temple (wat) for help. During national holidays or celebrations, the monks acted as communal leaders and organizers for both Muslims and Buddhists, such as during the King’s birthday or the Thai New Year called Songkran. This has changed in the past couple of years. Local Muslim officials avoid contact with the wats (temple) as much as possible. Muslims no longer come to the wats for advice or medical help, and in fact, many Muslims considering to go to the temple as a sin, (Marddent 2007: 56-58 Jerryson 2006:4-6).

According to Nantawan, for the South especially the Muslim provinces, the government believed that the social chasm, which separates Thai-Buddhist and Thai-Islam communities were mainly economic in character. But for the Muslims to be able to receive the material progress from the government, they had first to relinquish their unique identity and merged into the national one. Consequently the national development policy became a contradictory force within the Malay-Muslim society. It did bring about social and economic improvements to the people but at the same time it also weakened the social values and cultural institutions that had
existed for a long time, served to resist government penetration into their society (Nantawan 1976: 198-199). As John Ungpakorn and Jeumsak (2006:4-6: in Thai) commented, the resistance put forth by some religious leaders and younger Muslim activists led to the emergence of the violent separatist organizations rallying under the banner of Islamic principles. Interestingly while the government succeeded in gaining national security from its development and pacification programs in the sensitive areas, a sense of insecurity, however, was created among the minority groups of people.

Sattayanurak points that instead of creating a modern state based on western model, Sarit turned to the Buddhist conception of political sovereignty, which had historically been regarded as the essence of Thainess. 4 By employing the monarchy, Buddhism and the national bureaucracy as instruments for the national development, the government forced a particular form of Thai-ism into the Malay-Muslim communities (Sattayanurak 2005:4). One blatant example of such national policy was the display of a Buddhist image in front of schoolyards in every school with no regard to the sentiment of the Muslim teachers and pupils in that school.

The Sarit government policy of integration of the Muslim in Southern Thailand marks seized control of the traditional institutions of religious purification and transmission, “pondok.” 5 As mentioned above, in 1961 the ministry of education launched a unified system of public schools with a common curriculum throughout the country. In the official mind pondok schools offered low quality education. So, the government used “carrot and stick strategy” in dealing with the Muslim schools in the south (Horstmann 2007:2). They were persuaded to bring their schools into line with national education standards. Or they would not get financial aids and supports from the government.

As mentioned above, implementation of common syllabus has been an obstacle in Thailand due to diverse socio-religious structure. In the so called “secular

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4 The term ‘Thainess’ was created by King Rama VI. The definition of “Thainess” originated within the context of the centralized political structure. This construction of “Thainess” then became the basis of the ideology that maintained the centralized political regime and the hierarchical social structure. Thai people have been dominated by this overarching ideology since the end of the 1950s, since then, the ideology has functioned as an obstacle to prevent Thai people from adapting themselves to the rapid, crucial changes in Thai society.

5 Pondoks are residential religious schools in Malay Muslim communities. Pandok teachers are known as ustah, and the head teacher as tok guru. Pondok students may be adults or children, but are generally young people of secondary school age. Pondoks are mainly supported by donations. Pondoks are known as ponoh in Thai.
government curriculum" there are representations of the religious minorities. So, the
government's secular courses have also incorporated some basic principles of Islam
and Buddhist rituals in the main curriculum. Secondary students read the Quran, its
exegesis and the Prophetic Traditions, Islamic jurisprudence. But all textbooks
designed by the Ministry of Education were either in Thai or Arabic, not in Malay.
In 1970 all textbooks were declared illegal, despite the fact that they were still
popularly used by local instructors. The semi-secular curriculum introduced into the
pondoks actually had lowered their academic standard. Since the Muslim community
did not satisfy with the quality of religious education in the government-controlled
pondoks, but it takes a role of social institution. Besides, many younger generations
were being sent abroad for the Islamic studies, (Aphonsumvan 2003:25).

Thus, Pondoks are not merely educational institutions of the Muslims, but
also social institutions. Pondoks are historically important to the Malay-Muslim
community in Thailand. They perform a key role in providing religious instruction
and deepening the community's understanding of Islam. Moreover, they are closely
associated with Malay-Muslim identity and often act as a pivot for Malay social life.
South Thailand comprises fourteen provinces such as Chumphon, Trang, Phuket etc,
but the great majority of Thailand's Muslims live in the four southernmost provinces
of Thailand: Satul, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The Malay culture, though clearly
a Muslim culture, which is demonstrated through local customs and traditions such
as marriage ceremonies, dance and arts, a complex mix of Buddhist, Muslim and
early "Langkasuka" Hindu cultures, (Moawad 2005:4-6: Laffan 2005:20-21),
Lungkasuka is the same as Langyasiew, as mentioned in the archives of the Tang
Dynasty, which was evedent in 6th century and flourished in 8th and 9th centuries
A.D. due to extensive trade and commerce, and it is proved by the archeival and
archeological sourcess. The Langkasuka culture extended political economic, social
and cultural network with the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin, (Srisakra:
1993).
The map below is provided the location of 14 provinces situated in the Southern Thailand. Figure: 11

Map of Southern Thailand, there are Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat

Source: UNESCO; Moawad, Darwish 2005

According to Thai government report, Muslims comprise of 4% Thailand's population. Although the Muslim population in Thailand is only about 4%, but still they are the majority in the southernmost provinces, which comprises approximately 71 percent of the total population (Thailand National Report ARRDT 2006). Therefore, in these four Southernmost Provinces, Muslims speak mainly Malayo language, besides Thai language. Few people can speak Arabic and English languages. The remaining populations are Chinese Buddhist and Christian. Songkhla is also considered as a Southernmost Province with 19% Muslim population. The root cause of the problem in southern Thailand is complex; history, ethnic diversity, religion, socio-economic disparities and poor governance can be mentioned. More details regarding the history of Muslim in Southern Thailand will analyze briefly in the following section.

The languages spoken by the Malays were classified in the Malayo-Polynesian family of languages which is now known as Austronesian family of languages which includes the language spoken by the Merinas in Madagascar, the Maori language in New Zealand and other Polynesian languages such as Samoan and Hawaiian.
A Brief History of Muslim Southern Thailand

As Storey and Melvin indicates, the three southern provinces wracked by violence, Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani, originally formed part of an independent entity called the Pattani Kingdom which was slowly subsumed by the Thai state (then called Siam) from the late 18th century onwards. Two Anglo-Siamese treaties in 1902 and 1909 resulted in the formal incorporation of these three provinces into Thailand, while the rest of the Pattani Kingdom became part of British Malaya. The majority of the population of Thailand's three newest provinces was Malay-Muslims, they speaks Malayu and adhered to Islam. Beginning in the 1920s the Thai government initiated a policy of forced assimilation with the aim of turning these Malay-Muslims into Thai-Muslims (Storey 2007:3-4; Melvi 2007: 12-15).

Historically, there were two types of rule conducted by the Thai government over Pattani region. One was direct rule and the other was indirect rule. The direct rule involved sending Thai officials to rule over the Muslim kingdom; the Siamese ruled over the local ruling group and population. The result was resistance and dissatisfaction of the Patani rulers and people. Indirect rule, however, tended to allow more role and interests to the local Muslim elite and thus provided longer terms of peaceful relations between both sides. Usually, the Thai kingdom would appoint a local Muslim ruling family whose loyalty to the Siamese king was guaranteed to rule over Pattani as an autonomous state (Yusuf 2009: 44-47).

By the late Ayutthaya period and the early Bangkok period, the Thai rulers adopted a policy of divide and rule in dealing with the Muslims states in the South. After many rebellions of these Muslim states, Bangkok divided them into smaller cities and delegated authority over the vassal states in the South to a major Thai-Buddhist city in the area, which acted on behalf of Bangkok (Forbes 1982:1058). Baker contributed that, Songkhla and Nakhon-Sidhammarat were the chosen cities. This arrangement reflected the limitations of the Bangkok bureaucracy and the desire to rule over these distant tributary states by political means of creating multiple powerful groups among the local elites. So that, no elite was strong enough to make a successful rebellion against Bangkok. Such policy of divide and rule proved to be effective in spite of the inefficiency of the Siamese bureaucracy (Baker 2003: 41).
As cited above about the reaction, an armed separatist movement emerged in the early 1960s that campaigned for a separate homeland for Malay-Muslims. By the late 1980s, however, the Thai authorities had essentially defeated the separatist insurgency in the south, through a combination of improved governance, economic development projects, blanket amnesties for the insurgents, and stepped-up security cooperation with neighboring Malaysia. Marddent points out that, although the broad thrust of this revival in Thailand has not been political, it has nonetheless become interwoven with the instability in the South. This close interrelationship may have played a role in changing conflict identities from ethno-nationalism, which was at its peak from the late 1960s to the 1980s, incorporated much more overt religious themes (Marddent 2007: 2-10).

Since the late 1970s, violence in Pattani has increasingly been characterized as between Buddhists and Muslims rather than between ethnic Thais and Malays. Nevertheless, how far religion has replaced ethno-nationalism as the driving force of the insurgency is open to question. Harish (2006:55-56) comments that, the majority of other Muslim communities settling all over Thailand are from the earlier Pattani Kingdom, and have the same ethnic origin of the Malay Muslims who live in the southernmost province. Consequently, it is obvious that the southernmost region is crucial importance for socio-economic, political stability and security in Thailand. Muslims in Southern Thailand is conflicted from Thai government policy, especially Sarit’s legitimization of his authoritarian regime. He used development and nationalistic ideology as rhetoric to strengthen the Thai nations, Theravada Buddhism and Monarchy.

In Jerryson’s article entitled “Issues of Representation: A Militant State Buddhism” argues, a Thai Buddhist monk is more than a monk; he is a symbol of political power. As a walking embodiment of Thai nationalism, his actions reflect that of Thai society and its normative identity: Thai Buddhism. In Thailand’s southernmost provinces, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, the State politicizes monks in violent areas. By politicizing Buddhist monks, the State sets in motion a series of events that leads to death of the monks. This in turn positions religion prominently in the public eye, escalating the violence (Jerryson 2008:1-2).

This nature of violence and the misused of religion by the state is seen from the Buddhist Sangha’s view as a novel phenomenon. One monk from the Yala Buddhist monastery comments; this is a starting point of the new conflict which is related to dark politic. Further he said,
“There were no discrepancies between Buddhists and Muslims. But if there is, head of the village, imam, Tok guru and me were mediators whom the villagers respect and solve the problems. Now, things change because the world goes so fast. Young generations don’t know me. When the issues come to this different time, it is more complicated and now our land are controlled under the dictators who don’t want to listen the other... we cannot find relationship and environment as such, it will no return any more.” (Quoted from Marddent 2007:8-9 interview with an abbot before the 2006 Thailand coup d'état took place on Tuesday 19 September 2006)

The above statement reveals an important point that the ‘losing space’ for the monks and civil, due to dictatorial nature of the Thai politics. The monks’ have always been dangered and ‘soft targets’ from Muslim fundamentalist, because state politicized the Buddhist leaders. Such affairs had changed the nature of conflict, for instance, murdered of monks in southern Thailand transforms the conflict between State and the militant Muslims into a religious warfare. As a result of violences, the tolerance of Thai Buddhism is under question, especially in its relations with Islam and Christianity. Muslims have become increasingly threatening in the eyes of conservative Buddhists, (McCargo: 2009). But, the underlying current behind the violence is how it had transformed into a sectarian religious basis, instead of its separatist agenda. Lack of effective state response and mechanism to solve the demand is perhaps being the main reason of the increasing anti-religious sentiments among different religions in Thailand.

After a thorough understanding of the Muslim problems in Southern Thailand, the next section will deal regarding the role of Buddhist Sangha in the development process in North and Northeast rural areas.

Buddhist Sangha’s role in the Development Processes of North and Northeast Villages: 1960-1963

Historical and political context in which monks have been involved in development during democratic movement discourse was initiated by General Sarit Thanarat in the 1960s. This research will clarify the history of cooperation between development-oriented policy and the Thai Buddhist Council, the activities and the practices of monks, and the relationship between the rural community and folk Buddhism (White 2003: 4-5).
Despite Sarit's despotic rule, he had not forgotten his promise to modernize the country, and a variety of drastic policies for national development were carried out. Virot comments that in this period, even after Sarit's reforms the dominant force in politics was still dominated by the military. However, the reforms also promoted the influence of an identifiable new group of influential forces connected to the state, the technocrats. Technocrats were the group of people who used their expertise in conservative economic policy making, and with their administrative skills, came to dominate the key agencies of macroeconomic management (Virot 2000:10-13). Sarit also enjoyed the support of many assembly members. His successor, Thanom Kittikachon, followed Sarit's policies in both domestic and foreign affairs.

In fact, the Sangha were just used by the rulers to strengthen or legitimize their rule. They, as mentioned above, were occupied more with the developmental works in various parts of the country. The subsequent section further discusses the role of the Sangha during the Thanom era. Thus, the use of Buddhism to serve political ends as in such programmes like Thammatutta (Buddhist Missionaries) could also have unfortunate consequences for the Sangha itself. As Keyes points out in modern Thai history, the Sangha has maintained a significant degree of freedom of action within the religious sphere. The freedom has not been threatened by the restrictions imposed by the government on the Sangha nor by the frequent involvement of monks in ceremonial activities sponsored by the State (Keyes 1989c:121).

The implicit premise underlying church-state relations during most of the 20th century seems to have been that since most Thai are Buddhists, Buddhism should be a mechanism which could be manipulated by the State in achieving secular goals. In so far as Buddhism becomes an instrument of national policy, freedom of action by members of the Sangha could become severely limited even in the realm of religious affairs. This is not to argue that Buddhism is somehow incompatible with economic development (Phra Dhammapitaka1992:14). However, the character of the role of Buddhist monks suggests that the contribution of monks to development lies more in the providing of spiritual advice and solace to those who labour to bring about the transformation of Thai society. The following section will deal about the struggle for democracy in 1960's and the early 1973's.
Demonstrations and Struggle for Democracy: Thanom, Praphas Era 1964-1973

Sarit died in 1963, though his deputies, Thanom Kittikchorn and Praphas Charusathira, have continued the authoritarian rule for another decade. They justify their authoritarian nature is due to the threats of communism internally and externally. Hewison observes this phenomenon as such; the spectre of communism was used to tarnish virtually all opponents, including those who called for a constitution and parliamentary forms. This was reinforced internationally by the Cold War, and especially by US intervention in Indochina and its use of bases in Thailand (Hewison: 1997:13). The US's commitment in the region and in Thailand had declined due to the changing International political order of the then. As a result, in Thailand the military's control of the political sphere began to show some cracks, and a widened political space began to be created. There were demands for a more independent foreign policy and pressure for the promulgation of a constitution increased. After a decade of 'drafting', one was finally produced in 1968. Mezey pointed out that, three years and five months later, on 17th November 1971, the Government announced the failure of its "constitutional experiment," martial law was declared, the legislature was closed, the political parties were disbanded, and a military junta asserted complete control of the nation (Mezey 1973:306).

As result of the coup d'état on 17th November 1971, the 1968 constitution was abolished, the parliament dissolved, and Thailand was put under martial law. Under the chairmanship of the former Prime Minister, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, a National Executive Council (NEC) was to govern the country until the drafting of a new constitution could be completed. In addition to this the other four members of the NEC were the former Deputy Prime Minister, Police Director General Praphas Charusathira; Air Marshal Dawee Chulasap; Police Chief Prasert Ruchrawong; and Pote Sarasin (the only civilian). Heinze states this act as the NEC justified their actions with the necessity to counter the threat of communist insurgency but promised to return the country to democratic rule as soon as internal security had been restored (Heinze 1974:491). There were little public outcry against the coup d'état, main reason behind this is, whenever the ascendancy of elected persons in the legislature, they were mostly unable to fulfill common masses' demands. Simply, the entire concept of 'representation or delegation upward associated with downward responsibility between people and the elected authority'
is alien. Referring to Mezey for proving the statement, legislators are lacking of political power, they are unable to deliver on election promises and therefore can do little to raise their visibility or credibility with their constituents. The result is that those who plan and execute coups against the parliament in Thailand need not concern themselves with public outcry or opposition (Mezey 1973:315).

There was strong opposition of the coup particularly from the academic circles. At this juncture, Morell comments that, the Army coup of November 1971 brought forth a new response for the Thai political system, opposition from a group of sincere, dedicated intellectuals who were convinced that the coup decision was wrong, and constitutional rule based on representative government could and must work in Thailand. They believe that repressive military rule must be end (Morell 1973:166b). Griffin also described when the National Executive Council (NEC) started publishing numerous “Revolutionary Decrees” to reorganize and streamline the government and announced a campaign to crackdown on crime, including the execution of criminals, many citizens reacted favorably. But only five days after the coup, Praphas may have had a premonition. He publicly warned the students that they would be severely punished if they created disturbances because ‘the nation is facing great danger from internal and external threats (Griffin 1973:1038). The following section will focus about the university student’s movement for democracy in Thailand.

A review of University Student’s Demonstration for Democracy

History is witnessing that the role of students in many progressive movements. In Thailand too, students took leading role in the movement for democracy. A group of Thammasat University student demonstrated around Democracy monument, Rajadamnern Road in Oct. 1973, they were arrested but released after a thorough investigation, and continued public life as usual. Students at the nine state Universities had also begun demonstrations for the first time in the history of Thailand. The National Student Council of Thailand (NSCT) was virtually formed at this time, and appointed Thirayuth Boonmee as its new Secretary—general. There was ‘an uncoordinated association of small campus enclaves’ at the beginning, and later it has been transformed into a “powerfully-controlled organization with 100,000 members” as described by Charnvit (Charnvit 1998:181-
215 Kershaw 198251-62). In fact, Thirayuth had created the Thai student movement and become himself Thailand’s first genuine national student leader.

Griffin (1974:1044) observes that Thirayuth was extremely shrewd to bring up the question of constitution before this group of dissenters, largest ever assembled. A new constitution was becoming his raison d’être and he was determined to focus the energies of the student movement on getting one. Immediately focusing on this issue, he commented as followed:

"We want to show the government that we are not satisfied with the present government and want a permanent constitution. We must fight for a constitution because the government of the country must be run by the people, not by the military" (Cited in Griffin 1974:1045).

Here, Thirayuth clearly puts the need of a stable constitution, based on the people's power as a protest agenda. Meanwhile, King Bhumibol, a long time ally of the students had been helping behind the scenes. He had instructed the Police Commissioner not to use violence against the students and those instructions were also followed. It was also later learned that the King had anticipated a march to his palace and had prepared food and tents for the students on the palace grounds. It was a real revolution in the history of Thailand, and regarded it as a prerequisite show of people's power and political maturity. The demonstrators were traditionally apathetic students, who after two weeks of demonstration at Thammasat University in Bangkok, took to the streets against the police and army. Thus, the movement spreads rapidly and had transformed into a mass movement in a short duration. At the end, not only the military government fell, but also the "tyrannical trio" as they were commonly known, was forced out of the country. As Griffin comments that it may have quite likely been the political event of the year in Southeast Asia. At any rate, things have changed in Bangkok. One student puts it simply as, "our Democracy Monument is real now" (Zimmerman 1974: 509; Heinze 1974:499-500).

It can be observes that the overall picture for the struggle of democracy in Thailand was largely a product of Cold War international politics in Southeast Asian countries. Especially in the case of Thailand the period covered from 1957 to 1973, where the rise of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and ended with the demise of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn in the student-led popular uprising of 14 October 1973. In the movement for democracy, this uprising is a landmarked; Heinze puts the event as it would perhaps be significant as the Coup of 1932 against the monarchy in Thailand’s political history, (Heinze 1974:495). In October 1973 the
curves finally intersected between the decreasing popular tolerance of autocracy and
the increasing incompetence of the regime, ending one of the political mysteries of
Thailand. Though the actual revolution appeared at the moment to follow from some
most fortuitous events, it was still within the context of important secular changes in
Thai society. The upshot of Thailand's "October Revolution" is that many long-
delayed and long-overdue institutional changes are now taking place, ratifying these
inevitable secular trends; there is a new spirit of optimism about the country's
political future; and King Bhumibol has enjoyed a boost in political influence and, if
possible, an increase in prestige as well (Race 1974:192). As Race further indicated a
chronicle of Thailand in 1973 is in fact a chronicle of loss of confidence in the
regime's ability to govern among broad sectors of the population (Ibid, 293). King
Bhumibol appeared on television to announce to the country that he had appointed
Professor Sanya Thammasak, Rector of Thammasat University, to be the prime
minister to replace Marshal Thanom who had resigned (Darling 1974: 5-19)

Thus, the existence of democratic setup had rooted in Thai political life. Here,
Maisrirod has made the conclusion as this period marked a break-up of a strong
alliance between the military and the capitalists which, in turn, allowed the
intellectuals and the middle class to emerge as strong political actors in the polity.
However, it is crucial to understand the notion of democracy as perceived by various
political forces during this period (Maisrikrod 1997:143). The following section
concerns about the role of Buddhist Sangha and political modernization in Thailand,
particularly in Thanom era.

Buddhist Sangha and the Political Modernization: Thanom Era

The various military and elected governments over the past sixty years have
generally asserted that the Sangha should play a more practical role in modern Thai
society and become more socially engaged. By 1965, Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist
University and Mahamakut Buddhist University stated that its students should
provide voluntary social services, both material and spiritual, for the welfare of the
community, such as giving advice and help in the event of family problem.

In 1965, the Thai government, through the Department of Public Welfare,
launched a programme of Buddhist missions to the hill tribes of North Thailand that
was to be carried out by members of the Thai Buddhist clergy, the Sangha. The
purpose of the programme was to strengthen sentimental ties with the tribal people
and to create loyalties (of the tribal people) to the nation through development of strong beliefs in Buddhism (Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of Interior: 1968). This policy aims at the bringing of marginal people into the national fold of Thailand through conversion to Buddhism, it seems to have origins in policies concerning the relationship between Buddhism and national integration that were first formulated in the reign of King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) at the end of the last century (Keyes 1970:511-567d). Thus, Buddhism becomes a source of socio-cultural orientation for those who study and practice it to construct and engage the society in daily life.

According to Keyes (1989:134-135) in 1965, the Dhammatutta programme was initiated by the Department of Religious Affairs to propagate Buddhism by dispatching Buddhist University graduates to various regions. This project had its objects (i) to control locals who were unsatisfied with their economic inferiority in relation to the central Thailand, (ii) to internalize the ideology of worshiping the Nation (State), Religion (Buddhism), and (King) (iii) to suppress sympathy with communism. As Chayan comments, to protect the northeastern region from Thai communists and to integrate Thai-Lao ethnic people into central Thai culture and administration, the government made use of the Sangha, which was meant to arrest the secularization of Thai people due to the communization and westernization of people (Chayan: 2005:154-155).

In this regards, Ishii further analyzes that the northeastern region accounted for about half of those volunteer graduates, who had come from poor peasant families and then returned home in glory or aimed at contributing to rural development. The leaders of the governments during the 1960s and 1970s justified their mobilization of Buddhism in several ways. For example, the prosperity of Buddhism and the Sangha was closely related to that of the nation and the government (Ishii 1968:134-140). Thus, the Sangha adjusted their roles to help the governments in national development. Time due course, people were becoming materialistic and neglecting their religion, as a consequence, ties of kinship and community were weakening, rendering village society more prone to communist infiltration. So, in twenty-first century, the Sangha has to deal with the “social actions” intended to benefit mankind. These actions range from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training, organized kinds of service, “Right Livelihood” in and outside the helping professions, and through various kinds of community
development as well as to political activity in working for a better society (Junes 1981:2). The first is the new politico-economic role of monks themselves as promoters of government-sponsored community development activities (Tambiah 1973:9).

Some monks were also hardly accepted concerning the state sponsored development programmes. For instance, Phra Kittiwutdho was critical about the Government-sponsored Development Programmes on the grounds that they are too short and only scratch the surface of the problems created by rural poverty. As Gosling points, his own training schemes for monks and novices, though imaginative in conception, have political overtones which many Thais find unacceptable (Gosling 1980:416). In the mid 1970s, Phra Kittiwutdho also became a strong supporter of right - 'experiment of democracy', and in between 1973 to 1976 has ended with a bloody military crackdown on a student demonstration at Thammasat University in Bangkok. In an infamous speech at Cittaphawon College in July 1976, printed under the title “Killing Communists Is Not Demeritorious.” Phra Kittiwudho declared that soldiers who kill communists gain more merit for protecting the nation, the religion and the king that demerit from taking life, (Swearer1999:213-214). In 1973, over 3,000 monks had graduated from the community development training programmes held at Kitthiwutdho’s Cittaphawan College (Keyes 1989:134). The Cittaphawan programmes urged monks to instil work ethics in villagers. The monks carried on working in rural areas, and in the case of Phra Kittivutdho, he was directly involved in politics too during Thanom era.

Thus, Phra Kittivutdho believes that the Sangha has to defend Thailand from foreign invaders and the threats of communism. Buddhist Sanghas were also involved in helping the government pacify policies, and to incorporate hill tribes and Muslim populations in the north and south of the country into the popular Thai society. The next section deals about the rural development programmes in Northeastern Thailand.
Rural Development in Northeastern Thailand

Unequal regional development has brought dissatisfaction in Thailand. The rapid pace of the integration process and the anti-Communist policy has also conversely heightened dissatisfaction of local residents. In this regard, Neher observes that a large disparity was born between developed villages and other surrounding villages, creating numerous problems, such as lack of compensation for land expropriation and the infiltration of the commodity economy due to the highway network (Neher 1974:23). It was beyond the farm villagers’ economic capacities, and caused increasing numbers of indebted peasants. And in the implementation of economic and social development programs in the 1970s, the importance of developing rural areas was particularly emphasized. According to Chulalongkorn University reported in 1975 the Kukrit Pramoj administration spent 2.5 billion on the projects of rural development and new employment creation during the agricultural off-season (Chulalongkorn University 1998 in Thai).

This section will mainly focus on Phra Nakputthana (development Sangha) in the Northeastern Thailand. Phra Khru Supajarawat of Wat Tha Lad in Yasothon is one example of monks working in community development. There is no grandiose praying hall. Wat Tha Lad is famous nationally for its non-mainstream development work that focuses on villagers’ well-being and self-reliance instead of money (Sanitsuda: 1999: Bangkok post, 23, March). The work includes encouraging villagers’ self-care through traditional medicine, self-sufficiency farming, chemical-free agriculture and a community rice mill for chemical-free unpolished rice, which is now popular in Thailand. In 1983, he turned the temple into a centre of traditional medicine. As well as alleviating the villagers’ dependency on expensive Western medicine, Phra Khru Supajarawat saw such a move as a means to restoring the communities’ self-esteem (Yano: 1999:148).

Thus, monks had been played a vital role in the overall development process in Thailand.
Sangha’s development programme in the Central North of Northeast Thailand

There were many developmental activities and projects in Thailand. NGOs had helped to carry out such establishment of self-help organizations, including rice banks, saving associations, flood control, and forest protection, etc. Contrasting to the other regions, in Central North of Northeast Thailand, there were relatively few NGO-related projects, so the area is a fertile ground of developmental work for the monks. In this region, many disciples of Phra Ajarn Mun (a renowned monk), have practiced ascetic wandering in the woods. They built basic social infrastructures in...
the region, performed offerings items, which are necessary to the temples, (Tiyavanich 1997: 254). In the cases of Kamalasai Province, many held annual events in rural communities and donated money to local schools from the proceeds. Others prepared to build day-care centers on the premises of temples under the policy of the Religion Bureau. As Swearer states, these aged old culture of charity and educating people are rooted in a Buddhist worldview, which also identifies village culture in Thai society. The education includes aspects social life and organizations, oral history, old sayings, folk tales, folk music, and folk Buddhist rituals, (Swearer 1995:54-55).

Thus, in light of the rapid socio-economic changes in Thailand, the monks have also been playing to the villagers in different aspects of socio - economic life. Interactions between the new governmental projects and the existed Buddhist cultural works have emerged a wider society.

Historicity of the Meo (Hmong) Tribe in Northern Thailand

In the late 19th century, Thai monarchy had sought to consolidate its authority with the Meo hill tribe, within Bangkok's centralized authority. This tribal people, living in the mountains of Lanna kingdom (previously known) led a relatively autonomous life. Once inside the boundaries of the Thai State, while no longer external, they did not however cease to be alien. Thus, they were included in the popular Thai culture, and its history has been reconstructed. As Tracy observes, it is with the advent of Hmong into Thailand with record as a part of modern Thai nation – state (Tracy 2003:2-4 Mottin, Jean 1980: 54).

Although, the area had neglected long time and unknown to the outside world, but with the subsequent rise of communism during the greater Indochina War, it became a focal point. The Hmong, previously considered as alien and as being far from outside were now conceived as Thailand's natural borders, and assumed by the Thai government to be the natural constituents of the Communist

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6 There were about 58,000 Hmong living in Thailand during this period, and many of them fell victim of the new regulation as a result of the so-called "Red Meo" insurgent activities in various parts of Northern Thailand. The Thai Ministry of Interior stated in 1974 that citizenship would be restored to all hill tribes with proven documents of residence, but this restoration has been very slow in the more remote provinces such as Chiangrai and Nan where small subversive groups were still operating until recently.
rebels endangering Thailand’s northern borders (Geddes1983;34). In order to prevent their collaboration with the communists, efforts at containing the Hmong were intensified with programs aimed at settlement and integration, as well as the introduction of crop substitution programs. Such programs have found their way to the village or Muban through the operation of the King’s Royal Project.7 Mingsarn Kaosa-ard and Jeff2002:8).

In 1960, rumors drift out that in the hills of northern Thailand, Communists had made initial step toward the infiltration of the hill tribes’ population which makes its home in the tortuous, jungle-clad mountain terrain of the region (Thailand Government 1972:35). A small minority of 250.000 among nearly 35 million Thai, the hill tribes had long been a source of possible dissidence and hence a latent threat to Thai security. The infiltration of Communist agents into the tribes, particularly the Meo, thrust the problem squarely in the face of the Thai government and began the chain of events which has led to the hill tribes making certain areas of the north their private domain (Marks 1977:929-944). The Thai Government had many problems from them in the following ways:

(i) destruction of forests and watersheds by the slash and burn style of agriculture utilized by the tribe,
(ii) opium cultivation,
(iii) the need for integration within the Thai nation, and
(iv) the danger they pose to Thai security.

The crucial importance to understand the Meo problem of northern Thailand is the recognition of the interconnection between these four above factors. Any move in one area will affect the others, thus making the entire scenario fraught with risk for the Thai government. Only the utmost skill and ability will enable the Thai to solve successfully the puzzle for the benefit of all concerned (Hanks1983:101-104).

The Meo are one of the four poppy-grower tribes, the others being Yao, Lahu, and Lisu, who together are estimated to produce approximately 185 metric tons of

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7 The King’s Royal Project is part of a large group of development and welfare programme which began in the 1960s and had as their original aims the elimination of destructive shifting cultivation, the eradication of opium crops, the grouping of hill tribes into settlements, and the integration of these hill tribes into the Thai nation-state so as ‘to induce the hill tribes to accept the important role of helping to maintain the security of the national frontiers.
raw opium each year. It is interesting to note that both Department of Public Welfare Survey conducted in 1961-1962 and an independent research found that opium production per worker to be one kilogram, an average-sized family being composed of seven members, four of these being considered workers. This leads to a figure of roughly 10 pounds of opium per annum for each family, or some 30 tons of opium per annum if the entire Meo population of 50,000 is divided into seven-man opium-producing blocks and the resultant output calculated. At the moment we are concerned how Buddhist Sangha converted all Meo into Thai lifestyle (Bradley1983:46-47). In a typical example, the Department of Public welfare launched in 1965, as part of the Hill Tribe Relation Programme, a series of Buddhist missions to the northern hill tribes “to strengthen sentimental ties (of Thai) with the tribal people and to create loyalties of the tribal people to the nation through the development of strong beliefs in Buddhism (Gosling1992:32). To effect the latter end, it is obvious that the government looks primarily to the Buddhist missionaries (Keyes1970:564). This following section concerns monks role in the implementation of developmental programmes.

Monks and the Implementation of Developmental Programmes

For the first two years (1964-65), the Programme was the responsibility of the Department of Religious Affairs. Its moral education division was responsible for planning, financial and personnel administration, co-operation, publicity and statistics. In planning, the Department of Religious Affairs made a careful investigation of the priority of concerns for Dhammatuta monks, and specific objectives to suit a particular designated area were formulated (Dhiravegin1988:93). The material and financial support required, and length of time for carrying out the task, were worked out. Dhammatuta monks were chosen from devoted volunteers, mainly from Bangkok, who possessed the following qualifications:

1 Willingness to be loyal to Buddhism and the nation and not distort the Buddha’s teachings.
2 Willingness to be tolerant of difficulty and all kinds of offensiveness.
3 Willingness to work with dedicated mind, and goodwill to the nation and religion, without expectation for material or non-material acquisition, or even praise.
4 Good personality, wisdom and ability to persuade.
5 Ability in speaking local dialect.
6 Possession of sufficient knowledge of Dhamma.

In the year 1965, the programme was expanded to cover another four areas in the western provinces of Kanchanaburi, Supanburi, Rachburi, Petchaburi, and Prajoubhkirikhun; the Northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampoon, Lampang, Phae, Nan, Mea Hongson, and Tak; the East coast provinces of Chachoegchao, Prajinburi, Cholburi, Rayong, Chanthaburi and Trad. In the North and the South, the areas covered were extended to include all provinces. There were 802 Dhammatuta monks divided into seven groups in that year (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya 1969:10). At the end of the experimental period (1965) it was declared that the Programme had been satisfactory, and had yielded a great deal of benefit, and that the Sangha had carried out the task effectively. It is argued there was a feeling that if the monks had run the Programmes themselves, the result would have been better, because they would not feel that the work was something ordered from higher levels of secular departments. If the government interfered with the programme, the communists might accuse the monks of being involved with politics (Suksamran 1977:90).

According to Yoshihide (1999:13-14) the quality of the Dhammatuta monks, it was believed that they should be better trained. As a consequence, a training project for Dhammatuta Monks was first operated in 1968 under the supervision of Buddhist universities. The monks to be trained are those who lead the mission in each province. After finishing the training, these monks teach the local monks. In the same year, the Sangha suggested that the government should support financially for the establishment of permanent Dhammatuta monks in some areas. According to this proposal financial was granted by the government, there would be at least one salaried Dhammatuta monk to be responsible for the Phra Dhammatuta programme in each area (DPW1969). The proposal was adopted and the training programme for Permanent Dhammatuta monks was established, and their achievements will further be analyzes in the following section.

8 Chulalongkorn Buddhist University and Mahamongkut Buddhist University
The Achievement of Dhammatuta (Buddhist Missionaries)

In 1970, monks and novice training centre was constructed at Wat Srisoda, situated in the foothills of Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai. Between 1965-1983, 2,143 youngsters, over 100 per year, have ordained into the monkhood, and undergone an elementary Dhamma training education (Wongsprasert: 1988:127) since 1966, the Dhammacarik Bhikkhu Programme (DBP) has involved the education of over one-third of the total tribal population. When working in the field, a Dhammatuta was granted 750 baht per month for its upkeep. Each monk works with an average of 1,440 villagers. The experimental project was claimed to be a success. According to the report, 5,000 hill people knew how to pay respect to the monks; 800 of them took a vow as Buddhists. More significant, twelve tribesmen were ordained as novices, and in some cases religious feeling became so strong that they wished to have the monks stay permanently in their villages. The ethnic groups were ordained from 1966-1983.

Table 2: Karen and others ethnic groups ordained at Wat Srisoda in 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Monks</th>
<th>Novices</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Htin</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meo</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahu</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akha</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lua</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisu</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmu</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan (or ThaiYai)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>100</td>
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Source: Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University: 1970 Dhammacarika Bhikkhu Programme (DBP) (in Thai)
The number of tribal people who have been ordained is also claimed to be an indicator of success of the scheme. In 1966 a major ordination ceremony of nineteen tribesmen was held at Wat Bencamabaphit in Bangkok which was sponsored by the government. In 1966, a number of monks were assigned to stay permanently in two tribal villages; the number of monks had risen to twenty-eight staying permanently in twelve villages in 1971 (Department of Public Welfare: 1971:38). Within 1967-1971, 249 hill tribes were ordained; forty-six in 1967, thirty-three in 1968, twenty-in 1969, twenty-five in 1970 and 117 in 1971 (Ibid. p, 39). However, of those ordained, not many remained throughout the Lenten period. Then, some of these tribal monks were sent to propagate Buddhism among their own communities. It is to note that since the beginning of the programme, the emphasis has been firstly on the Meo and secondly on the Karen. Meo is obviously a consequence of the great concern which developed in the past few years regarding this group. The most receptive to communist propaganda, the Meo have also been the most actively and aggressively involved in communist insurrections. That is why, the great emphasis on integrating them into Thai culture is very necessary (The United Nation: cited in Somboon 1977:106).

Many senior hill folk require their sons to enter the Sangha in order to have a chance to learn about the outside world. According to Keyes (1970:566) who interviewed the director of the programme, the high dropout rate was a consequence of the fact that the adult men involved had to return to support their families and many were illiterate and thus could not take part fully in all the activities of life in the Sangha. It was commented that, these folk enter monkhood just because they want to see Bangkok rather than because they really believe in the religion. If this were true, the success of the government’s attempt to integrate the tribal people into Thai culture through the Sangha would seem to be very slight. The role of the Sangha in this respect would, therefore, simply be to legitimize the government’s activities among the hill people.

Problems and Obstacles

Winning the loyalty of the tribes requires understanding and the ability to communicate with them. Most of all hills tribal do not speak Thai. There are many problems and obstacles faced by the Buddhist Missionaries. Some Buddhist Missionaries are not qualified enough to communicate with them. The Buddhist
Sangha in tribal villages has no other option to share their meal with children. Hill tribal prepared food to suit their taste and many Monks complained that the food is very hot, salty or oily for them (Wongsprasert 1988:126). On the other hand, some Buddhist missionaries do not have a strong educational background and also have little experience to deal with problems that are quite numerous and quite different from those of the average Thai peasant (Wanat: 1983: Report in Thai Language). Communist were hostile to the Buddhist monks and in some parts of the provinces of Nan, Chiang Rai, Surachthani, Narathiwas and Petchabun, the monks could not carry out their work. In some area, the people were so poor that they expected material help from the monks rather than spiritual guidance. The monks suggested to the government that it should provide them with more commodities such as medicine and clothes, to distribute to the villagers so that they would be willing to listen to the monks, teaching (Reports of 1971, 1972 in Phra Dhammatuta, vol.1:51-69 in Thai).

Although, Thai governments have promoted policies that have allowed for peoples with markedly diverse traditions to find a place within the Thai nation-state, their policies toward the hill tribes have been very negative. Although few tribal people have actually been forced to leave the country, many of them have been denied citizenship and are relegated to a very tenuous marginal existence within Thailand. The number of people in the hill tribe category is only about one percent of the total population of the country, the tensions between the Thai government and these people poses a serious threat to the long history of inclusivist nationalism in the country. Non-governmental organizations who work with the tribal peoples have begun to have some success in effecting some changes in government policies, but the conflict still remains (Lee 1986:4-7). The next section would discuss about the Sangha’s role on development projects.

Sangha in Development Projects

In the beginning of 1970s, a handful of monks began independent rural development projects based on their interpretations of Buddhist teachings and in opposition to the capitalism promoted by the government. Of particular concern was the impact of the government’s rapid development program on rural people’s lives, and because of the government’s emphasis on Buddhism as a form of nationalism, the erosion of traditional local Buddhist values. These monks feared the effects of
growing consumerism and the dependence of farmers on outside markets. Working in specific villages and addressing localized concerns and problems, these self-proclaimed "development monks" began conducting alternative development projects (Phogpaichit, Pasuk and Chris Baker 2004:4-5).

These monks are known as Phra Nak Phutthana and spread throughout the rural areas, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. They perceive themselves not only as the spiritual leaders but also the leaders in development works. They devote themselves to all kind of development projects even in collaboration with the government officials sometimes. As a monk, he can influence villagers to cooperate. Main success of development monk depends very much on his personal devotion as well as his own personal charisma. Relations between village community and the temple are congruent (Darlington 2000:2a). As Hayashi suggests that the well being of the villages reflects in the environment and conditions of the temple compound (Hayashi 2000:202).

One of the first development monks, Phra Dhammadilaka formed his own NGO, the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA), in 1974 just outside of Chiang Mai city in Northern Thailand (Darlington 2000:3). He realized that if people are hungry, cold, and sick, they will not and cannot devote their energy toward religious ends. Similarly, without spiritual development and commitment, they cannot overcome material suffering. FEDRA was established with the goal of developing spirituality and economy simultaneously. The organization has four major objectives: 1) to support agriculture; 2) to encourage education (specifically that which is appropriate for the rural occupation of the farmers; 3) to promote religion; and 4) to develop local areas (Phra Thepkavi 1987, FEDRA 1985) "Local areas" means the people, land, institutions, traditions, and cultures of the rural Northern Thai. FEDRA's projects, located in over thirty-five villages today, include rice banks, buffalo banks (which provide buffaloes for poor farmers to plow their fields), credit unions, small revolving funds for agricultural development initiatives, integrated agriculture projects, and training for rural women in traditional handicrafts and sewing to enable them to supplement their agricultural incomes.

The discussion above, we have described the development monks in terms of social history and social development in Thailand. It is imperative that we
understand the social history of development monks in order to evaluate their social roles. That Buddhist temples and monks can exercise leadership and contribute to society is largely due to Thailand’s distinctive historical development and regional background. By stressing this point, it is believed, that we can more broadly expand the horizons of the issue of development by the Thai Sanghas. From 1981 onwards, communism had begun to decline in Thailand. After conceptualizing the above facts, the section will discuss details about the civilian and military rule in the 1970’s.

Civilian and Military Rule: 1974-1980

In early 1975, Kukrit Pramoj had served as Prime Minister for ten months, one of the longest periods for an elected civilian politician at this post in Thai political history. This feat required an astute balancing act among a coalition of 16 political parties and his own Social Action Party, which controlled a majority of sets in the national legislature. Much of the credit for the achievements of this uncertain period of civilian rule goes to Kukrit himself. In this regard, Darling noted that 1973-1976, period of civilian rule was one of greatest political conflict and competition as rival political groups, interests and movements jockeyed to establish positions in a political environment where the military was clearly in disarray and unable to mould political developments (Darling 1977:117:118;Girling, 387-405 ). The Kukrit Coalition survived every major tests and contests to retain its power with ease, including successful passage of its National Budget. Moreover, they had linked with public mind even with more leftist students, and other political activity groups which are, in turn, held in low repute by many segments of the Thai population, which are usually consider as threats to the Nation, the King and Thai Buddhism (Zimmermam 1975:159).

In fact, from 1976 the democratic system in Thailand still lacked of stability and institutionalization. The political process was highly fragmented among numerous contending parties and factions, and it was becoming increasingly polarized between conservative interests among the traditional upper class, the wealthy, and the military on the one hand. And liberal and radical elements, among includes; students, intellectuals, journalists, and labour unions on the other. When Kukrit proposed further economic reforms at the end of 1975, the coalition parties, which are supporting his government, began to collapse. Under the pressure from many sides and rumors of a possible military coup, the Prime Minister decided to
dissolve the National Assembly and call for new national election (Darling 1977:118-119; LoGerfo 1996:905).

Thus, the civilian period between the capitalists and the intelligentsia, including the progressive students, ended up quickly when the latter began to be critical of capitalist ideology and embraced socialism as their guiding principle. The political contentions between the two ideological camps were very tense. Alleging that the life was out to destroy the three national pillars—Nation, Religion, and King—the conservatives in a concerted move mobilized bureaucratic, business, as well as religious groups for the crushing of the Leftings during 1975-1976 (Maisrikrod 1997:149-150). Before 6, October 1976 military coups in Thailand were remarkably nonviolent despite the movement of troops and strategic placement of weaponry. Moreover, the government which came to power following the coup engaged in unprecedented repressive policies.

The bloodless October 1977 coup led by General Kriangsak against Thanin’s one year rule returned the Thai government to a more traditional pragmatic approach to the democracy (Wilson 1979:280). After three years military ruled until 1976, and there was again a coup in 1977. The 1977 coup was especially interesting; in the sense the new military government was markedly more liberal than its predecessors. Kriangsak’s government policy toward the countryside was no less contradictory. His main objective was to link the bureaucracy, including key supporters in the armed forces, with an assembly effectively under the control of government-appointed members and sympathizers. With this aim in mind, the appointed National Assembly of the Thanin era was transformed in April 1979 into an appointed Senate and an elected House of Representatives. Under this constitution (approved in December 1978), that was masterfully manipulated by Kriangsak to assure his continuance as head of government to an established basis rather than as leader of a successful coup, (Bamrungsak 2001:78-79; Girling 1981:220-223). Within 1978 to 1980, the down fall of Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanan, due to several factors, such as the economic problems that proved so intractable and structural, for which there are no easy solutions. This problem has been compounded in recent years by factionalism in the military, which has made it difficult to gain stable support from the traditionally dominant force in Thai politics (Ramsay 1980:122).

Prime Minister Kriangsak was unable to consolidate support for himself in 1979, and his prospects for doing so in 1980 are poor. The key promotion had been
that of General Prem Tinsulanon to the powerful position of Army Commander — in-Chief. Prem was highly respected for his professionalism, and he was generally sympathetic to Prime Minister Kriangsak’s policies, and had a substantial following among young officers (Ramsay 1980:112-113). As Phongpaichit explains with the decline of the alliance of metropolitan capital and enlightened royalists represented by the Social Action Party, General Prem Tinsulanon became the keystone of a new dominant alliance between royalism, the military, and the provincial politicians. Prem was propelled into the prime ministership by the military (Phongpaichit 1999:346).

Like most of Thailand’s former military leaders, Prem’s power base derived from the support of the country’s key institutions — the military, monarchy, bureaucracy and legislature. Before becoming prime minister in August 1980, Prem was a commander of the Military Second Region in the north-west; he had played an important role in successfully implementing the national policy of political struggle against the communist insurgency (Gunn 1989:17). Neher comments that Prem’s position was strengthened, when in the annual reshuffle of army officers, General Arthit and his closest supporters lost their influential positions. Members of Classes 1, 5 and 8 of Thailand’s elite Chulachomklao Military Academy, who are supporters of Prem and Chaovalit, were placed in key positions. Such as division commanders with access to crucial combat units (Neher 1987:227c).

For example, the most serious combat forces to Prem came from his own people, in another word who supports him, are in power in 1980. They were mostly young army officers, led by Colonel Manoon Rupkachon, who became disenchanted with Prem, whose political actions and policy programmes were seen as too accommodating to the capitalists and at a disadvantage to the underprivileged in the provinces. By 1981 Manoon Rupkacorn started military coup, Sirikrai and Suchitra analyze that on the night of March 31, the two key leaders of the Young Turks, colonel Prachak savangchit and Colonel Manoon Rupkachorn, approached Prem and proposed that the Premier’s either resign or stage his own coup. The reports of that crucial moment in the coup are controversial, but most maintain that Prem chose to resign and asked permission to submit his own resignation to King Bhumibol. This turns out to be a trick, since it is reported that Prem went to the Palace and then slipped out of Bangkok to Nakon Rach srima that night. Prem refused to resign and instead set up a transplanted government based in Nakon Rachsrima Province (200
miles apart from Bangkok) with the whole royal family on his side, the coup was doomed to failure (Sirikrai 1982:1096). Sirikrai further argues that the royal family’s decision to flee from their Bangkok palace to Nakon Rachsrima and to side with the government’s forces against a coup attempt was a rare event in modern Thai history and against their traditional practice of staying above power politics (Ibid.). The triumph of the government forces over the coup attempt reflected the prevalence of the conservative mood both in the government and outside it.

However, the new attempt to develop democracy in Thailand during Prem period of 1980-1988 was only semi – democracy. As Dhiravegin notes, the period were appropriatedly characterized as “Half-way Democracy,” the military continued to play a strong political role within the parliamentary framework. Most significant of all was that Prem was a non- parliamentarian and was practically chosen by the military. To a large extent, political stability and economic growth were given higher priority than the development of political rights and the deepening of parliamentary politics (Dhiravegin 1988:16-17).

During 1980 – 1988, Prem’s government had slightly changed in a form of social compact with the Malay-Muslim community. That comprises over eighty per cent of the population in the border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Prem’s administration used special administrative and security structures, fronted by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre. However, through the centre, the Thai state bought off Malay-Muslim’s religious and political elites. Religious teachers received generous funding to offer the secular Thai curriculum in their schools, while Muslim politicians were able to win parliamentary and eventually some ministerial seats (McCargo 2006:12-13).

As Maisrikrod notes, this period was very crucial, it indicated a strong likelihood of the country taking towards an authoritarian path. It also marked to create bureaucrat-authoritarianism was diverted (Maisrikrod 1997:158). McCargo contributes that, the kingdom lurched fit-fully toward democracy and a better quality of life, but the direction was clear and sustained. Prem was stepped down in August 1988, following a petition of his group of academic militaries, such as General Chatichai Choonhavan, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, General Chamlong Srimuang, and General Chaovali Yongchaiyud, who was appointed commader- in-chief following the ousting of General Arthis Kamlongek (McCargo 1998:137-
Thus, the prevailing political and economic conditions, it can be termed that there were semi-democratic system in the period.

**Chatichai Choonhavan Era: 1989-1991**

The election of 1988, which resulted Chatichai became the first prime minister to be elected after 12 years of military rule. And barring exceptional events such as a vote of no confidence or a coup, where the current parliament will run until 1992. However, Chatichai and his Chat Thai Party had earlier been the most pro-military among the political parties. This era swept ahead by the growth of business power, accentuated by the boom conditions of double-digit growth (Phongpaichit 1999:363). After Chatichai took the office, the government development Plan was organized with three specific guidelines: Increase the efficiency of national development; improve the production system and marketing and raise the quality of the basic economic factors; and increase the distribution of income and prosperity into provincial regions and rural areas (Laothamatas 1998; 452). This Plan aimed to achieve economical and social objectives simultaneously. As Thailand entered “the Golden period” in late 1986 helped by a de facto depreciation real exchange rate of 30 per cent from 1986 to 1990 (due to the baht being pegged to a declining U.S. dollars), by lower oils prices and by a new round of relocation of industries from Japan and the East Asian (Newly Industrializing Country) NICs. The latter was the combined result of increasing labour costs, soaring land costs, the competitive loss due to the post-Plaza appreciation of their currencies and quota-hopping (Jitsuchon 2007).

In this period, democratic consolidation had witnessed through mass opinion. This period of Chatichai-Choonhavan held together the country’s “semi-democracy” while encouraging debate over numerous national interests, unraveling the loose consensus afforded by eight years of centralism under Prem Tinsulanond. In terms of foreign affairs, senior officials approached Hanoi with new ideas for peace and cooperation, business ventures were opened, and economic issues gained momentum in the conduct of foreign policy. The policy plan to convert resource-rich Indochina from a “battlefield into a trading market” had been promoted earlier by Chatichai. The idea launched a gold rush among competing political forces (Christensen 1990:178-181a). Chatichai became famous in the first year of his premiership through decisions to increase salaries of civil servants, restructure the salaries of
state enterprise workers. At the same year (1989-90) Chaovarit complained about corruption among government officials, and stressed his commitment to a "war on poverty" and to building "democracy" through grass-roots development and environmental programmes (Ibid. 185). On the other hand, Chamlong Srimuang’s Palang Dhamma Party, which promotes traditional symbols and Buddhist values while waging a battle against corruption and machine politics. With his campaign pledge to make Bangkok a better place to live, he has directed efforts to upgrade living conditions of the lower economic classes, creating new employment opportunities and improving pollution control and waste disposal (Handley 1997:98-99). Christensen points, Chaovarit followed through his promise to retire early from active duty. He was succeeded as commander by General Suchinda Kraprayo post of supreme commander also held by Chaovarit. And it was given to General Sunthon Kongsompong. Initially Suchida aroused concern because of the unequivocal loyalty, he commands among entourage of high-ranking ‘class 5’ army officers who were promoted to the highest ranks of the army leadership, making the army more united than under Chaovarit (Christensen 1991:196b). Ockey points out that, Chaovarit joined the cabinet as deputy prime minister and also defense minister, a post held by Chatichai. His willingness to do so sparked controversy because he had previously despised the coalition for being hopelessly corrupt and controlled by dark influences.

Thus, Thailand’s experiment of democracy in 1989-1990 was seemed to be collapsed. The Thai democratic political system is still finding its feet, and the military remains a strong influential factor. An additional uncertainty relates to the succession to Chatichai. It is argued that Thailand’s cup of democracy is either half full or half empty. Here, Winichakul argues that many political elite remained very powerful at least until the late1990s. Truth might have been devastating to the society and to those who try to get to the truth themselves. Silence is therefore mostly self-imposed, either out of fear or out of concern for the unthinkable consequences to the country. The massacre of 1976 was, so to say, in the realm of the unspeakable silence. Its full history is probably impossible to write under the present system of “Democracy with the Monarchy as the Head of the State.” (Winichakul 2001:3-5).

As noted above, under the Chaichai administration, Thailand turned battleground for a market friendly environment, which was challenged by the
military. This was also tied to a confrontational stance toward the country's Indochina neighbours. Besides, its emphasis on economic development and trade, the huge defense budget came to be seen as luxurious and unnecessary for fulfillment of the military. The next section will discuss extensively about the economic boom period in Thailand.

**Economic Boom in Thailand: 1986-1990**

New policies along these lines are now taking shape in a new political structure. The latter part of the 1980s saw the continued process of democratization in Thailand. The government of Chatichai Choonhavan and members of the cabinet were involved in business both at the local level and nationwide. This reflected the increasing involvement of business in Thai politics (Kraiuydht 1995: 110). This development has been widely regarded as one of the economies with the most successful industrialization based upon an export-oriented policy, although, this belief is under questioned. Here, Christensen observes as such, Thailand's success can be largely explained by highly disciplined macroeconomic management policies, despite the fact that all Thai governments have lacked of sound microeconomic policies (Christensen *et al.*, 1992). As Nipon (1995:118) observes, Thailand’s industrialization is highly concentrated in and around Bangkok. Industrial decentralization has just started but the extent of rural industry is very limited, largely because of rural poverty, small market size in the rural area, inadequate and poor infrastructure facilities and negative government policies against rural and small-scale industries. The former kind of speculation, which Thailand will soon join the class of newly industrializing countries to become the fifth tiger of Asia, and the economic boom of 1986-1991, has heightened the belief. Strengthening the narratives of economic boom, Patmasiriwat puts, Land prices raised sharply, stimulating a further increase in aggregate demand through wealth and expectation effects (Patmasiriwat 1995:143). He further describes that higher economic growth induced by an inflow of direct foreign investment, strengthened the momentum towards export activity and industrialization. It convinced the government about the importance of export-led growth. Land speculation and the boom in tourism hastened the decline of farmland as many farmers gave up their land in exchange for unexpectedly high land prices (ibid.p.144). As small firms grow and expand to medium size, they need more space and infrastructure.
Moreover, firms whose activities are highly polluting, and frequent complaints from nearby residents. They are not able to obtain a factory permit to locate their enlarged plants in residential areas, but the choice of new locations is limited. So, they cannot locate on underdeveloped private lands far from the main road and infrastructure facilities because the initial capital-investment costs are too high. This is why a large number of factories have clustered along the roads in Pra Pradeang and Pu Jhaow Samingply in Samut Prakan (Nipon 1995:126).

However, economic reforms had undertaken during the first half of the 1980s transformed Thailand into a strong position to take full advantage of the US-led world economic recovery. It began earnestly in the latter part of the decade. As a result of this, inflation was brought down to about 4 per cent in 1986, formerly fiscal deficit had reached 5% in 1984-85. This has turned into surplus in 1986-87, and then it increased at 5% in 1990 during the Chatichai government, (Naris 1995:162-163). As cited, the Thai economic performance from 1987 – 90 was impressive, even when judge in terms of its past commendable standards. As Naris remarks, real GDP growth was 9.5 per cent, 13.2 percent, 12.2 per cent 11.6 per cent, respectively, in the four consecutive years of 1987 – 1990. This growth resulted primarily from a boom in manufactured exports, which averaged about 30 per cent annually, and the massive inflow of private foreign investment particularly into the export-oriented manufacturing sector. By 1989, it had become clear that bottlenecks were fast emerging and the economy was in danger of overheating. Lack of adequate transportation, port capacity, and electricity and water supply were becoming more and more apparent. Shortages of skilled personnel, especially engineers, were another emerging problem. More importantly, the capital inflows and balance of payments surpluses resulting from direct foreign investment was accelerating monetary growth, a trend that the Bank of Thailand increasingly found difficult to sterilize in view of the growing openness of the capital account.

It is important to notes that, during the boom, there were middle classes going up at the same time. The period from 1989 to 1997 was one of unprecedented economic boom, with Thailand achieving some of the highest growth rates in the world, and real increases in per capita GDP. These growth rates were indicators of the industrial transformation of the society. Thailand attracted enormous foreign investment, especially from East Asia, and the economy grew rapidly (Hewison 1999:3; Jansen, 1997). The boom saw confidence brim, employment opportunities
grow, absolute poverty decline, although wealth inequalities increased, and fabulously wealthy magnates and business empires created.

Manufacturing expanded through incentives for foreign and domestic investment. While the export-oriented agriculture remained dominant, development plans and investment promotion laws directed resources to industry. Local manufacturers gained protection, and local business gained space to invest, free of state competition. Meanwhile, foreign manufacturers were able to establish behind protective barriers (Hewison 1985: 280-281). But the boom did not last, and after early warning signs were ignored, and devaluation resisted, the bust was spectacular and the recession deep. Growth predictions were the lowest for years, bankruptcies mushroomed, investment dropped, unemployment increased, and even the largest companies reported flat profits or losses.

The IMF was called in, implemented stabilization and structural adjustment programmes, and urged increased liberalization (Hewison 2004:503–522). As Phogpaichit and Chris Baker (1999: 65-6) note, technocrats were unsure of the appropriate response to the downturn. It was the recognition that commodity prices were not going to salvage growth that brought devaluation and the fuller adoption of EOI. The devaluation immediately made Thailand’s manufactured exports more attractive, and especially for manufacturers from Japan and the East Asian NICs (Newly Industrializing Countries). By 1986 Japan had become the leading investor, and the levels of net inflows from Japan increased nine-fold between 1987 and 1990 (TDRI 1995: 17). The boom pulled the domestic market along. While this was especially noticeable in Bangkok, urban centres nationwide experienced an investment spurt. According to Jansen (1997) domestic savings were insufficient to finance the economic boom. However, as Phongpachit and Chris (1996: 35a) explain, ‘Foreign investment may have sparked the boom. Thai investments made it a big boom.’ The huge growth of domestic investment was made possible by the liberalization of the finance sector that allowed Thai companies to borrow from overseas banks. The following section will discuss details about the social impacts in Thailand during the economic boom.
Thailand has experienced the impact of rapid industrialization as it was in any other countries. Phongpachit and Chris (1998:281-282b) states that in a decade, Thailand became one of the most unequal societies in the developing world. There were few efforts to limit the impact of growth on the environmental issues as well. Three decades of boosting agricultural exports stripped away most of the nation’s forests. A decade of industrialization brought major problems of pollution. By 1990, agriculture was reduced to a minor role. Industry contributed twice as much to GDP. Industry was growing at 15 percent a year while agriculture stagnated. Among major exports, rice had slid from first to tenth.

The economy was powered by exports of manufactures. Urban business now looked on the countryside as a source of cheap labour for urban work, land for housing and factories, water for the generation of hydroelectricity, raw materials for industry. With business, very much driving the boom, these attitudes mattered. Thailand had the world’s fastest growing economy in between 1982 to 1995, with the World Bank calculating the growth at an average of 10 per cent a year. The factories growth was basically unplanned, and the economic growth has not been accompanied by industrial and technological deepening. As Bello et al (1998:54-55) indicates that part of the problem of the economic development has been the lack of government’s initiatives on private sector to implement strategic planning in the area of technology. But greater part of the problem was the resided and its practices of multinational corporations, which have spearheaded the drive of industrialization in Thailand.

Safeness of working condition is concerned, mostly pathetic. For instance, the incident of 10 May 1993, which had caused fire in Kader Industrial Toy Co-operation, situated 20 km apart from Bangkok. The factory was a joined venture of Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Thai businessmen. Death toll was 189 workers mostly girls, 17 were reported missing and 444 were injured. It was the world’s worst ever factory fire. In fact, the industrial safety department of the Thai Labour Ministry had issued several warnings to Kader, which was partly owned by the powerful Thai CP (Charoen Phokphand) group. The building’s fire prevention system was poorly constructed and illegally modified; there were no fire alarms or extinguishing equipments. Fire exits were blocked and all exits, except for the main entrance, were
sealed shut (Bello et al 1998:84-85). Not surprisingly, when the fire broke out, the factory became a death-trap. As one account puts it:

"high casualties from the incident were not caused by the outbreak of fire itself. Poor construction resulted in the factory building collapsing less than half an hour after it caught fire. Many workers were crushed to death by the tumbling building. Others had to jump from upper floors because there were no fire exits (Asian Labour Update 1993, No.12. p.4).

However, after the incident, many Thai NGOs pressured with the media in various forms like public demonstrations, boycotted foreign products, led the government to take action. Another example is Eden Company, maker of Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny wear for Walt Disney Corporation, became the key symbol of how the new strategy of flexibility was impacting on workers. Other companies took more drastic action: an artificial flowers company in a Bangkok suburb first farmed out the more labour-intensive parts of the flower-making process to subcontractors, paid 50 baht, compared to 157 for a factory worker, then went on to dispense with factory workers altogether, retaining only an office to receive orders and send jobs to subcontractors (Chitraporn 1996, Bangkok Post 6 January). Another impact is on child labor. While employers groups vehemently deny that using children has become less competitive, the fact is that child labour was prevalent in manufacturing work in Bangkok. In 1993, the Department of Social Welfare and Labour Protection inspected about 30,000 companies and found 21,648 child laborers. The department also admits that about 95,000 to 120,000 child workers are in industrial sector (DSWLP 1993). But, there were many cases remain unsolved.

The next section concerns about Phra Prajuk and his activism during the economic boom in Thailand.

Phra Prajuk and his Activism during the Boom

Since the 1990s, the Buddhism has expanded into new arenas of political concern, moving beyond the struggle for democracy to embrace local political issues and other welfare activities, it concerns to specific sectors for the welfare of the local people. At the same time, new socio – political problems have also been emerged, for instance, the declining importance of Buddhism to the legitimization of the centralized state, permits sectoral and regional religious movements, which sometimes antagonized between the monks and the government. Namely, monks like Phra Prajuk, an environmental activist, had focused his activism in Buriram;
northeast Thailand with drew support from many environmentalists to protect the forests. Taylor (1993:3) describes his activism as such, the conservationist activities of Phra Prajuk and the opposition that this monk aroused from logging companies, the military and police in Buriram province in the early 1990s, noting that the monk gained national attention by taking a stand against the civil and military bureaucracy and related capitalist interests in a nationwide plan to resettle Thailand’s frontier villagers. This plan was called the “Land Redistribution Project for the Poor in Degraded Forest Areas,” known as Koaw Joar Kor.

Phra Prajuk and his supporters resisted the military-led evictions and replanting. And they were accused by the government, of being subversives who hindered prosperity and development (Kurashima and Monton 2005:86-87). In this regards, Keyes (1999:134) states that, Phra Prajuk was concerned to preserve from logging the Dong Yai forest reserve, an area of 101,000 hectares covering parts of the three provinces of Nakorn Rachasrima, Prachinburi and Buriram. As Sivaraksa and Taylor observes, Phra Prajuk has taken up the cause of the forest settlers in opposing the state’s support for monoculture commercial forest as part of its new export – oriented development policies, and that the monk called for a decentralization of power structures, local and more equitable resource management, and the use of sustainable cultural practices leading toward a new self-reliance (Sivaraksa 1999 207; Taylor 1993:5). As cited above, Prajuk had strongly resisted the government’s policy of development at the expense of deforestation. So, the police arrested Prajuk in April 1991, after a confrontation with the army and police, where the army had beaten up villagers and destroyed the cassava cop planted within the reserved forest (Jackson 1997:92). Taylor (1993:81) further observes the event with referring to the history of extra – judicial killings, which critics of established state and bureaucratic financial and political interest are not uncommonly disappear, if Prajuk had been a layperson, he would surely have disappeared now.

Thus, we can observe that Phra Prajuk’s was a ‘soft – victim’ for his movement to challenged with great deal against state sponsored deforestation and forced resettlement programmes of the poor villages under the military regime of General Suchinda Kraprayoon in the early 1991.

Phra Dhammapitaka (1999:460-461), a Thai monk and scholar, he is primarily regarded as a scholar of Pali Canon and doctrines, has made the following comment, the case of Phra Prajuk can be separated into two parts, i.e, 1) whether Phra Prajuk
acted correctly or incorrectly; whether he broke the law and so on; and II) the general impact of this incident on Thai society, politics, and Thai Buddhism.

Owing to the above two points, the environmental activism of Prajuk, and its campaign was held back by the government authorities at the beginning. It also represents a grass root Buddhist movement in respond to the ecological issues in Thailand. But, particularly under the military government of Chatichai Choonhavan, he openly declared for the use of its authority to destroy forests for the nation's benefit. This resulted large scale displacement, and prompted people to organize protests (Prudhisar, Jumbala and Maneerat Mitprasat 1997:203).

In such situation, monks like Prajuk had stood for the people; it further demonstrates the great difficulty that monks have been facing. So, clerical activism has a problematic position in Buddhism, historically not being sanctioned by either the state or the Sangha. Phra Prajuk activism has made an antagonistic situation, which was resulted an uneasy situation to cope with between the main stream Buddhist Sangha and the government. The following section discuss about the coup and the movement for democracy during the boom.

Coup and the Movement for Democracy during the Boom: 1992

As cited at the previous part, during Chatichai era Thai economy improved tremendously, not only this, he also granted considerable autonomy to the technocrats and people. His administration marked a paradigm shift in Thai economy, where from a import substitution industrialization nation into an export-oriented strategy within a short span of 1986-90s (Phongpaichit and Chris 2004:155-158). The Thai's progress of economy during the period, amidst repeated corruption scandals in his administration is mostly credited to Chatichai. But, he was unable to prevent feuds among the coalition parties for saving the government. So he reshuffled cabinet ministry on four occasions to save his government. At the same time, the premier maneuvered constantly to fend off apparent challenges from military leaders, many of whom allege that corruption is a permanent ailment in the political process. As a result of his revolutionary reforms, his tenure came to an end in 1991, when the military led by General Suchinda Krapayoon, mounted a coup against the government with the helped of other political dissents from his government (Ganesan 2004:28). General Suchinda Krapayoon justify that the coup
is in the interest of national security and development at the expense of 'unusually corrupt' politicians. This coup was countered mostly by the liberals, keeping in view that the military expansionist role in civil space should be limiting.

These were accounted by Bunbongkarn and Hewison in early 1991, when the army forces took power from the elected government of General Chatichai Choonhavan on February 23, 1992, which ended a decade-long parliamentary democracy, came as a surprise to most politicians, political observers, and academicians. The three armed forces led by the supreme commander, General Sunthorn Kongsompong, seized power from the government and arrested Prime Minister Chatichai and Deputy Prime Minister General Arthit Kamlong-Ek, while they were on a plane heading to Chaingmai for an audience with the King. The constitution was abrogated, the National Assembly dissolved, and political freedom prohibited; martial law was enforced throughout the kingdom. Led by General Sunthon, the comprised the army, navy and air force chiefs: General Suchida Kraprayoon, Admiral Praphat Krisanachan, and Air Chief Marshal Keset Rojananil (Bunbongkarn 1992:131-132; Hevison 1999:155a). At this juncture, the army promised (called themselves, the National Peace Keeping Council, NPKC) that to hold elections within 1991 or early 1992, to helped and pacify the liberals, student groups, and politicians who detested the military role of expansion (Bunbongkarn 1992:133). The Military junta appointed Anan Punyarachun as the prime minister, which was surprised to almost everyone. In this regard, Samudavanija states, a principal reason for the civil groups was a lack of consensus on the need for a change of government. The 1991 coup against the Chatichai Choonhavan government was executed with a consensus among military and civilian bureaucrats and business interest groups (Samudavanija 1997:52a).

Nevertheless, well-known businessman, Anand Panyarachun often seen as a liberal, accepted the premiership offered by the military junta. Samudavanit further argues it as Anand was able to work cordially with them, but he did not launch any meaningful political reform (Ibid.). Despite, a dilemma here, military governments in Thailand have come and go, but they never succeed in institutionalizing their political control over society. And then, the economic related decision-making process under Anand government was highly secretive and technocratic. This would encourage greater transparency, and would help to combat corruption and reduce
monopolistic and oligopolistic tendencies, rather than to promote popular participation (Samudavanit 1995:249b).

Thus, Bunbongkarn (1992:139) asserts that Thailand was moving into another way of parliamentary democracy without much confidence. The transition is not a simple and smooth process. There were problems pertaining to the democratic development, such as political unaccountability, vote buying practices and the fragile party system, remain unresolved. In addition, the new Constitution reveals that the democratic consensus was not well entrenched, and 1992 will be a year of volatile political activity.

The year 1992 saw an exciting and violent political change in Thailand, which results the end of military rule and the dawn of democratic spirit. As Bunbongkarn states, the movement started in early May, three weeks after the General Suchinda’s appointed as prime minister, the Palang Dhamma Party, New Aspiration Party, and Democrat Party had started to protest. General Chamlong Srimuang, former Bangkok governor and the leader of Dhamma Party, was led the protest (Bunbongkarn 1993:220). The real cause of the protest was Suchinda’s acceptance of prime minister’s office, and it became the lightning rod for a social revolt in between 8 April to 24 May 1992. Choi and Phonpaichit describes, the movement was divided into three periods. Firstly, from 8th April to 3rd May, which was a period of hunger strikes of Chalad Vorachat, demanding Suchinda keeps his promise of not to hold the prime ministerial post. Secondly, from 4th May to 16th May, general Chamlong had joined the hunger strike. This galvanized the opposition, and days of massive demonstrations eventually forced the military-dominated coalition to agree on a constitutional amendment deal. The protesters demanded Suchinda’s resignation on the ground that he has not run in the election. Thirdly, from 17th May to 24th May, where protest was the largest number involved since the 1973 uprising, with an estimated about half-million people, participating in the demonstrations in Bangkok and other urban areas (Choi 2002:18-19; Phongpaichit 1997:28).

As Bungbongkarn points, instead of giving the demand, General Suchinda and his military decided to use force against the demonstrators, and on May 17th and 18th army units under the supervision of the army chief, General Issarapong Noonpakdi, responded the protests with heavy casualties. More that a hundred people were reportedly dead or had disappeared and several hundreds were injured (Bunbongkarn1993:220). A large number of protesters were arrested, including
General Chumlong Srimuang. On 20th May, King Bhumibol appears with Suchida and Chamlong on the television instructed both of them to end the conflict with reconciliation and not to use force. Suchida stepped down, and Anand returned as caretaker for second time (see more detail King Bhumibol Political intervention in chapter -12-13).

Due the above facts, Samudayavanij terms the present political system in Thailand as "ungovernable" or "institutionalized anarchy," where the military acts as opposing force. And there is no single centralized power, not even the most powerful army chef. However, above the military authority, King Bhumibol is still considered the sole foundation of political legitimacy (Samudayavanij 1995:245). As long as the monarchy continues to be legitimate and strong, it can be act as the force that holds these opposing fractions together. Despite these complexities, Samudayavanij believes that Thailand will remain dynamic to maintain its record of self-organization, and will not fail into decay (Ibid. p.246).

After uprising of 1992, politic remain unsettled. The first term of Democrat Party's led government by Chuan Leekpai was lost in the subsequent election, after two and a half years, and later it followed by a land scandal. Kusuma points, the government's image were dominated by political rivalries among the coalition partners and Chuan's indecisiveness were the main reasons of its short-lived. Besides his electoral defeats, Chuan had high expectation of democracy, which was unable to achieve. Chuan had taken many steps for a strong democratic setup, but it was slow and often appeared as half-hearted among his coalition partners for further democratization (Kusuma 1993:147-149a). Kusama further comments, in Chuan Leekpai's government second year, its mandate was to established a fuller democracy beyond the challenges. This was most evident commitment to amend the Constitution, which had brought the government collapsed. At the same Palangdham Party, led by Chamlong Srimuang, continued to create conflicts within the party and the coalition, and threatened the government's stability for the possible withdrawals (Kusuma 1995:194-195b). On the other hand, people's protest and demonstration at the grass-root levels continued unabated in 1994, and the issues involved remained unchanged, land ownership, falling prices of agricultural products, resettlement of displaced people from the reserve forests, dam-construction and the related issues of compensation for relocation (Ibid.p.198). Such protests and demonstrations
continued longer, supported by the various interest groups and politicians, which further arrests peaceful political development.

However, the two years and eight months lasted government of Chuan’s was progressive. He promised for constitutional reforms for further democratization through the legislative process, which was defeated by the combine coalition of the opposition parties, the military-appointed Senates, and the defector, New Aspiration Party from the government coalition.

According to King Daniel, from 1995 onward, pressure mounted on the prime minister to answer for irregularities in the government’s accelerated land reform programme. People have no confidence in Chuan’s government in a debate in May, but Chuan did not give a convincing defense of his government’s actions, prompting the Palang Dhamma (Righteous force) Party to withdraw its support from the coalition. The Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai quickly dissolved Parliament before a no-confidence vote that could take place and announced the next elections for July 2, 1995 (King Daniel 1996:135-136). King Daniel analyzes, the elections were marked by widespread vote-buying, despite the efforts of the Poll Watch Committee and several new committees had set up to curb electoral law violations. In this election, the Democrat Party increased its seats from 79 to 86, however, the Chart Thai Party (Thai Nation) came out on the top. Banharn Silapa-archa, the quintessential rural machine – patronage politician, became Thailand’s 21st prime minister. Banharn divided cabinet posts among party loyalists and the result was a disappointing cabinet lineup (Ibid. 137). Another significant problem was that vote-buying can not be banned in Thailand. Callahan and Ducan (1996:376-377) have comment that vote-buying became a matter of concern to academics and urban elites at the time of the March 1992 election. To address the problems of electoral fraud and to promote a citizen-based democracy, Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun had set up the Poll Watch Commission in January, which was consisted of 20,000 volunteers to monitor the March election.

The PollWatch Comission, which is funded by the government, was reconstituted its member in July after the government fell and the Prime Minister Anan set new elections for September 1992. Though vote-buying was still active in campaigning until present day. The mentioned argument was supported by Suntaree

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19 Banharn was a leading member of Chatichai Choonhavan’s the so-called buffet cabinet from 1988-1991, and was later among those investigated by the 1991 coup group for allegedly being ‘unusually rich’ a euphemism for corrupt.
Komin that most members of the present government have been elected, but one can hardly say that there is a true representation of the people in parliament because of the practice of "vote-buying." Without sufficient money, one can hardly be elected. It is said that a great number of MPs have bought their way into parliament, and into the cabinet. It has always been the interest of 'self', in group, personal relationships or personal conflicts that explain the vote-switching, party-switching behaviour of MPs. That is why; democracy in Thailand still has quite a long way to go (Suntaree Komin 1995:252-253).

In 1994, there was another development in Thai politics that retired general Chamlong Srimuang gave up the leadership of Palang Dhama Party to Thaksin Shinawatra, and Thaksin had also planned to run the next year national election. Prior to the election the Party leader Thaksin Shinawatra was appointed as deputy prime minister of the coalition government, with a promise to improve Bangkok's traffic system in six months. But, Thaksin was forced to quit the post due to the prolonged flooding in September and October, which concerns the lack of inadequate infrastructure in Bangkok and rest of the country, as well as the convoluted approval process of most infrastructure projects (Murray 1996:361). As Ockey commented since Thaksin become the Palang Dhama Party leader, its reputation had increased for their liberal policies and transparency, which had changed the image from its religious affiliation name to a more scientific and visionary party, (Ockey 2007:20-22). And, Thaksin Shinawatra was prepared for the new upcoming election.

Meanwhile, the future of Banharn led coalition government become uncertain. Political pundits have predicted the life span of the government may last about a year or even less, in this regard, Murray emphasizes that few months later the main threat to the government will come from the Chart Thai Party itself, due to the conflictual situation for the Interior Ministry's portfolio. And, this will lead cracks within the coalition, (Murray 1996:375). As he mentioned above, disagreements emerged within the party and its coalition's partners as well in few months; not only the Chart Thai MPs, the leader of the Palang Dhama Party (PDP), Nam Thai Party (NTP), and New Aspiration Party (NAP) members calling for a cabinet reshuffle. Murray further argues, significantly the powerful NAP retired general Chaovalit and the defense minister of the coalition government, could bring down the government of Banharn. But, he didn't do so, because in this period, Chaovalit is trying to
consolidate his power. As defense minister, he had further consolidated his position, ensured key post to his supporters in the annual army reshuffle, and he was playing a pivotal role in keeping the peace within the factions of the coalition partners (Yoshinori 2006:267-291).

Due to such unstable political condition, investors have less confidence to invest in Thailand, so there were only 18% in the value of share in Thailand’s Stock Exchange in the first four months of Banharn’s administration. As Handley states, (1997:104-105) the public investors were less sympathetic towards the new government. The market was declined until 1995, and it continues two years more. The government’s stiff margin lending policies results little attraction of the investor, and it shows lack of government support in the SET (Stock Exchange of Thailand). In November, troubled nature of the market development was underscored, when a suicide attempt by an investor protesting in front of the SET. Such protests against government’s economic policies ended only when the market finally climb up again at the beginning of 1996, following the resignation of the Banharn government, as a result of huge protests and conflicts within his coalition partners.

After the election of November 1996, Chavalit a former military chief became the prime minister of Thailand. His party won maximum seats (125 of the 393 seats), but failed to achieve majority in the parliament. So, he also had formed a coalition government with the help of provincial leaders, which had dominated the parliament since 1988 (Phongpaichit and Chris Baker2001:4-5). Unlike his predecessors, Chavalit’s made policies with more priority to develop the poor agricultural region of the northeast (Isan) Thailand, and other rural areas as well. As a result of his rural developments programmes, many military and urban elites felt discontent towards the government. And in 1997, he further attempted to change the constitution as “People’s Constitution,” to offer more power to the elected authority, and allow more autonomy for the people. This event provoked the urban elites, and middle class, which had led agitations. In this regards, Winichakul observes, one of the priorities of the 1997 Constitution was to end money politics, and to retire corrupt politicians from politics. Apparently, it did not work instead, the constitution, which promoted strong executive leadership, was said to be partly responsible for the Thaksin government’s parliamentary dominance and for a government that was said to be the most corrupt and abusive ever (Winichakul
2008:19b). Shortly after Chavalit took power and his political reforms, the "Economic Crisis" started. In July 1997, the Thai baht (currency) was floated in a considerable low level, which is also considered as the starting of the "Asian Financial Crisis." The subsequent flotation and collapse of the baht considerably worsened the situation. This crisis provided Chuan with a unique opportunity to lead a government after being approached by King Bhumibol. The Chuan Leekpai – led government, consists of six parties coalition, was weak to control the legislature, and this government was ended only with the electoral defeat in 2001 to Thaksin (Ganesan 2004:28-29).

After a thorough scrutiny of the above narratives, we observed that the inapplicability of the western ideas without any introspection has been leading many chaotic situations. The development of liberal political and economic system, which is based on European social context, has created instability when it applies to Thailand. In this regard, Thak analyzes that the government tends to concentrate on functional aspects of the modern political system and misjudge conceptually the central idea of modernization and development in the Thai context, which should be subsumed under the traditional concern for the consolidation of power and leadership position. Thai politics should be considered and understood from the historical perspective involving a study of traditional political values which were faced with stresses and strains from the impact of modernism (Thak 1976:3-5). It can argues that the main characteristics of modern Thai politics could briefly be listed as follows: authority is patrimonial and absolute, political behavior is affected by the interplay of royal, military, and bureaucratic power relations, the traditional political structure is hierarchical and segmented, the rigidity of the political structure persists in the face of rapid social change which causes tension and eventual political instability. The following section discusses concerning the impact of Asian Financial Crisis in Thailand.


The impact of Asian Financial in the socio–economic and political arenas in Thailand will analyze in this section. Phonpaichit states, Chavalit's government clearly marked a return to military-dominated governance. Ten months after Chavalit had become premier, the issue of constitutional reform brought growing divisions among the military heads (Phonpaichit 1998:266-268a). It challenged
many centres of power and influence, which left from the military dictatorship, further more, Chavalit government's emerged many corruption scandals around several ministers. Projects to buy computer equipments and fertilizers carried out suspiciously with high price tags. So did contracts for building local roads, and then the presses and oppositions laid out details of corruption. During his period, there were two cabinet reshuffles to aside the suspects of corruption. He had attempted to expand cities and to improved countryside as well beyond the difficulties, but little had achieved. Due to the worst economic situation, Chavalit agreed to step down from the prime ministerial position in October 1997. Thailand’s Economic condition of the then is concerned, MacIntyre remarks, when it hits by the crisis, Thai foreign exchange reserves plummeting from $ 38 billion in May 1997 to $3 billion in July. Thailand had agreed all the IMF conditions for the economic recovery and get loan, worth $17 billion from it, including increased access for foreign investors, privatization, legal reforms on bankruptcy and foreclosure, and enhanced transparency. Yet the New Aspiration Party government under Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh maintained support for financial firms rather than confronting their practices. Chavarit was highly constrained by an unwieldy institutional context, where a multi-member electoral system, a proliferation of parties, and a factured cabinet coalition provided far too many veto points to allow swift responses (MacIntyre 1999:6-10). Here, Solingen notes that progressive efforts of the finance minister and central bank governor to reorganize companies and financial management works were resistance from the coalition’s second largest party (Chart Pattana Party) and other politicians (Solingen 2004:204).

On 2nd July 1997, the float of baht, unleashed the most significant economic and social crisis that Thailand has ever experienced in the past half century. One of the reasons of this crisis has been so deep and so shocking was the long economic boom of 1987-96, convinced many Thais and international investors that growth and profit was a “sure thing” (Hewison 1999: 2-3a). Economic activities were fast and loose. Insider trading were easy and cheap finance, collusion, and expectations of state ‘guarantees’ encouraged a false confidence that saw the boom going on forever. The convergence of the economic crisis, constitution’s issue, and Chavalit’s decline made the politics of 1997 especially chaotic. This situation has made many people died (suicide due to heavy debt) of a political generation, that had failed to keep pace with social change (Phongpaichit 1998:280). In December 1997, after
heavy pressured from business leaders, mass demonstrations and opposition leaders, the former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai took over the prime ministership with the consent of the King for an orderly transition as mentioned above.

**Thailand under Chuan Leekpai and IMF**

As mentioned earlier, Chuan Leekpai government had agreed the conditions set by the IMF, under the conditions of IMF. Thai authority allowed further liberalization process more freely, closed various industries, and cut off the state’s subsidies on many public and agricultural sectors. Besides Thailand’s case, such crisis can be look as a part of the global process of capital accumulation and cycles of boom and blast. In the case of Asian Financial Crisis in general, and in Thailand in particular, the domestic capital did exceptionally well during the boom, when it became suffered, immediate victory has been the expanding international capital under IMF. In this regards, Hewison observes that the IMF response was in line with the need to restore the profitability of capital in general, rather than to help a particular national capital. Hence, many ‘blames’ has been made at home against the national government for the worsen condition of the domestic economy (Hewison 2004:7; Flatters 1999:4-6).

Bello further observes, when the IMF came to Thailand in July 1997, many sections of the Thai society had welcomed it, and they thought that the IMF could have more discipline than irresponsible, profligate gang of politicians, businessmen, and technocrats whose irresponsibility, profligacy, and ineptitude had brought the country to its knees. However, once the agreement with the IMF was announced in mid-August, doubts began to arise about the wisdom of the programme (Bello et al 1998:49).

Chuan Leekpai government didn’t have any alternative, so he has to follow the IMF instructions. In December 1997, he ordered to closed down 58 financial firms, the Bank of Thailand had pumped in an astounding 430 billion baht (over $17 billion at the exchange rate prior to 2 July ) trying to save them from further devalued (Asian Wall Street Journal 1997: 5-6 Dec, Cited in Bello et al 1998:31). Taking an example, the FISF’s (Financial Institutions Development Fund) wasting $7 million that was pumped, which tried to save the Bangkok Bank of Commerce
(BBC), a small bank that had run into the trouble two years, earlier it was channeling massive foreign borrowed amounts into politically motivated loans.

As cited above, Chuan government had agreed IMF’s reform proposal, so he was supportive to the foreign capitals. IMF instructed further demands to the government, including reform of alien business laws, revisions to duties, taxes and customs procedures, an end to corruption, deregulation, and a range of relaxations of rules and policies (Chuan 1998: Bangkok post, 1 August). Foreign capitals and its state bureaucrats have continued the pressure on the Thai government. The US government also appears to take responsibility for promoting the Washington Consensus (Economic Section, 1998: 1). As Hewison notes, it was the Chuan government to implement a bold programme, being careful to keep the IMF and its supporters on side, while being more facilitative of the entry and operations of international business. The problem was that this economic strategy, and the resulting recession, had considerable political implications (Hewison 1999:4). Social critic and historian Aoesrivong was reported, “Fundamental reasons for Thailand’s ... crisis are its shaky social foundations, misplaced development policies – which put economic growth before human resource development– and skewed distribution of wealth.” There are many scholars who agreed with him. For example, the “Forum of the Poor” demanded that the IMF should protect the poor, and that assistance “should be based on the principles of social justice, morals, sustainable society, global concern and equality which will bring peace to the community” (Gill 1995:399-423, Cited Hewison 1999: 2-4).

It can consider that the IMF package has been more problematic. It generates long – term foreign investment in business enterprises and privatization of state enterprises, which felt many discontent to the Thai people, and have worst affected to the common people. In late 1997, full foreign ownership of financial institutions was permitted for 10 years, with a grand of protecting the absolute amount of the foreign owner’s equity holding. Here, Sussangkarn comments, assets of closed down financial institutions are being auctioned off (to both domestic and foreign buyers). Privatization of state enterprises was also highlighted as a medium term strategy (Sussangkarn 1999:5). The following section deals regarding the impact of the Financial Crisis on the human resource development.
Impact on Human Resource Development

Other than the immediate effects on incomes and various service sectors, the crisis had also drastically affected in the long-term human resource development, mainly in the education, health, and other family and community sectors. Firstly, in education; School Dropouts and Child Labor, which concerns as the main priority of human resource development intensified as the crisis on progressed, with increased evidence of a number of students dropped out of schools and universities due the lacked of financial assistance. The Ministry of Education reported that in 1997, school dropout rates were 7.64 per cent for grade 6 to lower secondary level, and 13.17 per cent for lower secondary to higher secondary level; it increases from the previous years. The school dropout numbers were about 100,000 from primary schools, and 90,000 from junior secondary schools. As a result of the loss of family income, poor parents could no longer afford to send their children for higher education due to the privatization of education (Jitsuchon, 2007:2-9; United Nation 2006).

The Ministry of Education and the National Economic Council (NEC) estimated that due to the crisis, 126,000 students dropped out in 1998, 276,000 students left school early (after primary or secondary school), and others moved to lower-priced schools, or shifted from urban to less expensive rural schools. Generally, school enrolment dropped 7.2 per cent for private schools, and 1.8 per cent for public schools (Social Sector Program Loan (SSPL 1999). School dropout rates have other implications: an increase of it could lead to an increase in child labour and lower human capital. A study by the Primary Education Commission indicated that 3.7 million out of 6.3 million children suffered from hunger problems. A study by the NESDB estimated that in early 1998, almost 40 per cent of the poor were children (NESDB 1999). Estimates by National Economic and Social Development Board (1998) revealed that the crisis had led to a significant increase (of up to 0.35 million) in child labour, which would have a serious long-run impact on Thailand's human resource development.

The worst affected section of the crisis was the 'urban unemployed families,' they struggled to cope with the impact of the crisis, and manage their children's education. A survey by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), 1998 had found that about 32 per cent of the children had experienced reduced in educational expenditure, especially in high school education. About 10 per cent of
them moved to the public schools, particularly those in primary and high schools. About 9 per cent anticipated that they would not have tuition fees for the next semester, and the parents of about 5.6 per cent of children had asked others to take care of their children's burden. And about 3.6 per cent of the children had already dropped out from schools.

**Impact on Health**

Health sector was also massively affected by the Financial Crisis, as a result of privatization, it becomes more expensive amidst the economically torn period. According to Department of Mental Health (DMH 1998), the economic crisis has negative impacts on health, both physical and psychological. The health sector experienced a double impact, on the one hand; the effects of the crisis increased the need for public health services, especially for vulnerable groups. On the other hand, there was a cut in health service budgets. For example, in 1998, the budget of the Department of Mental Health was cut by 13.56 per cent (Thailand Bureau of Budget, DMH 1998). Along with general health problems, some groups were affected by crisis – induced problems. For instance, the impact of the economic crisis on long-term unemployment problem was very severe as the long – term unemployed obviously suffered from a great degree of “ill fare” (NESDB 1998). Psychological problems became critical. Records of 15 psychiatric hospitals indicated that there was an increase number of the out – patients, where 778,457 in 1997 to 804,906 in 1998.8. These increasing cases of psychological problems led to commit suicide among the Thai people, and this phenomenon were obviously linked to the crisis (Polity IV Thai government Report 2006).

**Unemployment and Underemployment Workers Rate**

Various comparative reports have been made regarding the pre and the post unemployment rates of the crisis, to start with the 1997 crisis, it estimated that unemployment might reach up to 2 million at the year. As Ungpakorn mentions (1999:10), the Ministry of Labour & Social Security issued figures for the total number of unemployed on 31st January 1998 puts as approximately 1.2 million, about 70,000 of whom were made unemployed after the crisis broke. And, earlier
figures of previous month had indicated that the rate was about 45,000 workers, 51% of whom were men.

The impact of the crisis on unemployment was significant. The NSO (National Statistical Office) data stated that unemployment in the dry season in February 1998 was at 1.48 million, the increased unemployment rate from about 2.2 per cent to 4.6 per cent during February 1997 to February 1998 respectively. During the same period, the open unemployment rate increased from 0.6 per cent to 1.3 per cent. By August 1998, 3 million workers were reported to be unemployed. However, accurate government figures were not available since there was no unemployment benefit system in Thailand (Ministry of Labour & Social Security document 1998). The tables below provide detailed information concerning the crisis’s impact on labor during 1995 – 1998.


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>59,112.9</td>
<td>59,750.4</td>
<td>60,350.7</td>
<td>60,949.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total labour force</td>
<td>31,347.9</td>
<td>31,898.4</td>
<td>32,000.2</td>
<td>32,143.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Employed</td>
<td>29,055.1</td>
<td>30,099.2</td>
<td>30,266.4</td>
<td>29,412.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Unemployed</td>
<td>723.5</td>
<td>641.3</td>
<td>697.9</td>
<td>1,479.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Looking for work</td>
<td>167.8</td>
<td>119.6</td>
<td>179.6</td>
<td>402.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Available but not looking for work</td>
<td>555.7</td>
<td>521.7</td>
<td>518.3</td>
<td>1076.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Seasonally inactive labour force</td>
<td>1,569.2</td>
<td>1,157.8</td>
<td>1,035.9</td>
<td>1,250.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open unemployment rate</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table: 4 Labour Force Status: from August 1995 – 1998 (wet season)

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>59,450,877</td>
<td>60,045,315</td>
<td>60,648,992</td>
<td>61,248,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total labour force</td>
<td>33,001,856</td>
<td>32,750,018</td>
<td>33,560,709</td>
<td>33,352,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Unemployed</td>
<td>375,100</td>
<td>353,948</td>
<td>292,571</td>
<td>1,137,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Looking for work</td>
<td>100,559</td>
<td>110,159</td>
<td>96,447</td>
<td>476,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Available but not looking for work</td>
<td>274,541</td>
<td>243,789</td>
<td>196,124</td>
<td>661,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Seasonally inactive labour force</td>
<td>51,671</td>
<td>163,711</td>
<td>105,769</td>
<td>76,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open unemployment rate</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Labour Force Survey, Round 1 and 3, 1995-1998, National Statistical Office

Notes: Unemployment rate = Unemployed population/Total Labour force
Open unemployment rate = Unemployed population looking for work/Total Labour Force.

As shown in the above tables, in August 1998’s wet season the unemployment rate was 3.41 per cent, which was lower than that of the dry season in February 1998. But, it had increased rapidly compared to the previous year. On the other hand, the open unemployment rate in the wet season was higher than that of the dry season (1.43 per cent versus 1.3 per cent). This indicates that a large number of the unemployed could not be absorbed by seasonal employment in the sector like agricultural. So, many unemployed labor were looking for jobs elsewhere. This may happen due to both the limited absorptive capacity in the agricultural sector, as well as the mismatch of labors’ in the non-agricultural sector and agricultural sector.

Despite the government’s initiatives in social welfare programme, Government also cuts budget, which led severely decline in supply of public and other social welfare activities, such as cut – off of the social insurance funds directly.
affected the poor. The impact of such cuts on the social security activities, deterioration the overall condition of the society. In addition, falling private investments in sectors like hospitals, schools, and other infrastructure pushed more people to use the limited supplies of government services. Such condition further leads to give pressure on government to provide adequate facilities. So thus, the poor and underprivileged groups were unable to use expensive health care, education or other amenities. Particularly, in 1998, the largest cuts of state budget were in social service and development, especially rural development. The budgets of social security, as well as urban and environmental development were also decreased significantly.

Thus, the economic crisis in Thailand had also fall the national output, decreased in employment and incomes, resulted an increase in poverty and social problems. The decrease in government budget expenditure in a number of social programmes during this period worsened the situation, leading to a reduction in the public provision of social services and welfare. The decline in family income as well as public services led to human resource problems, especially deterioration in education and health as mentioned above. These problems adversely affected child development, and therefore, have negative consequences for the country's development in the long run.

Despite considerable argument over the details and its impact, there is a consensus on the causes of the crisis amongst orthodox economists and policy-makers, Hewison thinks, the main reason of the crisis as the exchange rate misalignments, weak financial institutions, export declines, and moral hazard (Hewison 2001:14c). US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin (1998a: 1) also observes that Asian countries shared common problems: weak financial sectors, noncommercial relationships amongst banks, governments, and industrial companies, and a lack of transparency in financial transactions and government decision-making, to name a few – and all of this eventually led to severe financial instability. As a solution, he comments that the problems are not ... self-correcting; they require the help of the international community and a reorientation of the role of government and the political will to implement that reorientation. Contrary to the above narratives, Beams puts, a need to monitor in investment behavior during the boom, and other dimensions like over – expansion, over – production, and it led to declined earnings (Beams 1998: 3- 8).
Conceptualizing the above facts, the main challenge for the Chuan led new government was to lead the Thai economy out of the devastating financial crisis. In this connection, Denise states, in December 1997, the government made its first announcement that 70 diplomatic posts would not be renewed. And then, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) package to bring the economy out of the crisis had to be renegotiated in early 1998, due to the inability to meet Thailand’s one percent budget surplus requirement. The government claimed that implementing the measures would result in an even steeper recession (Denise Youngblood et al 2008:10).

Meanwhile, King Bhumibol suggested for “self - sufficient” economy, especially stress on agriculture. There were many that also call for a return to the agricultural sector, (Chai Pattana Foundation, 1995). So thus, rural sectors have been re - recognized, which had ignored so long during the boom. As Phongpaichit points, the economic crisis is a great opportunity for rural people to be left alone to think up their own sustainable solutions to some of the problems that they are now facing, (Phongpaichit1998: 23). In this sense, it presents a huge opportunity for the growth of local community groups, and for them to push forward debates about local democracy, participation and self – sufficiency economy as well. The next section discusses Phra DhammaVisuthimongkol’s role in politics during the crisis.

**Phra DhammaVisuthimongkol’s Role in Politics during the Crisis**

So far we have not discussed about how the Buddhist Sangha’s role during the financial crisis of 1997 – 1999. The well - known forest monk, Phra Phra Dhamma Visuthimongkol known as Loung Ta Mahabua, initiated the project for helping the nation at his temple in Udon Dhani province in the rural Northeast as a broker for the donations. The campaign is called dho pa pha Dollars chuy chat (Literary means to donate money to help the nation at the time of crisis). Phra DhammaVisuthimongkol collected more than $US4.3 million and 1,457 kilograms of gold through donations that were all given to the Ministry of Finance. Phra Loung Ta Mahabua had advised not to waste the money, *(Phra Klung)* and to manage it for better use of the nation in that critical time, (Yoshide 1999:15).

According to Prangtip (2000:70), after the money was collected and handed over to the ministry, Phra Loung Tamahabua made an inquiry on how it was serving
the country, but he was not satisfied by the answers from the government. He started his political intervention by referring to the ministry as ever hungry ghouls seeking to eat people's guts, and politicians are idiots who think of nothing but cheating on the country. Ministry of finance, Tarrin was seen as the main thief of the money. That is way; followers of Phra Loung Tabua collected more than 50,000 signatures in a drive to impeach Tarrin. According to McDaniel (2006:110), many believe that enemies of the Democratic Party, of which Tarrin is a well-known member, fanned the flames of controversy to bolster their own party, i.e., the Thai Rak Thai Party. Despite the possible trickery and alleged corruption to the ministry of Finance, Phra Loungta Mahabua has been widely criticized for being involved in the world of political corruption. Then, Phra LoungTa Mahabua supported Thai Rak Thai Party, and its leader Thaksin Chinawatra, but Phra LoungTabua was also disappointed.

Another crisis was HIV/AIDS, from 1984 onwards, during the economic boom government tried to hide the truth. It was Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun (1992), who had been establishing a comprehensive HIV/AIDS policy and programme. He has held a number of other government appointments and acts of trustee as chairperson and board director, at local and international levels to combat HIV/AIDS. Including Buddhist Sangha from Chulalongkorn Buddhist University and Mahamakut Buddhist University were cooperated with him and other subsequent government to combat the issue. Details about the issue will discuss in the subsequent section. The next topic concerns about the Sangha’s role in health care issues.

Buddhist Sanghas’ role in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Health Care in Wat Phra baht Nambhu

In Thailand, AIDS was first officially detected in 1984, but it wasn’t declared to the public, because the governments was worried that it would affect tourism, and cause a public panic as well. This conception has changed gradually from avoidance to acceptance, and started the national campaign against HIV/AIDS in 1989. The then government had assigned the Ministry of Public Health to take official measures to combat the disease. In 1991, “100% condom strategy” were introduced for the brothels,” after the campaign was launched. The campaign was to
prevent sex clients from purchasing sexual services, if they used condom, (Baltimore Sun 2002, p.2).

On 13th July 2004, in an opening speech of the Thai Minister of Public Health, Ms. Sudarat in regards with combating HIV/AIDS states, “Religion is comparable to the spiritual and mental pillar of humankind as reflected in our culture and way of lives, largely at the community level. With its significant role, the religious institution has a great opportunity to invest in human life by allocating its resources early enough to conduct effective large – scale strategic intervention” (Inter – Faith Networking on AIDS 2004: 2). Her statement has serious implications for Thai Buddhism, and its role in combating the disease. Because, the traditional Thai – Buddhist worldview is fundamentally of one Nation, but many Religions, and the Sangha as a Buddhist institution has the responsibilities to provide moral awareness to society, irrespective of any religious groups. One shouldn’t be surprise that Buddhist monks were among the first responders to combat the growing HIV/AIDS problem in Thailand. One such was Dr. Alongkot Dikkapanyo, who founded Thailand’s first hospice for HIV/AIDS patients in the temple of Wat Phra Baht Nam Phu since 1992 (ชั้นพระพุทธmerge2553/1992) till now. Currently, there are other three associated temples with hospice type care for the patients in Thailand (Tomoko Kubotani and David Engstrom 2005).

As the monk, who believes in Buddhist ethics and guideline, many have been teaching to the villagers, about how to avoid risks, and help to set up support groups. They also organize handicrafts industries for those HIV/AIDS affected people, and also donate alms to take care of AIDS’ orphans. Because local people are accustomed to the monks’ advice the trouble situation, and people have become a conduit for identifying many secret HIV affected people, who, once identified, can be referred to support groups for the public assistance programs. Thus, Phra observes, “HIV-friendly” temples encourage the affected people to participate in community activities (Phra Alongkot 1992).

Moreover, Buddhist temples have also been playing in many aspects to combat HIV/AIDS. For instance, with the support of UNICEF, the Sangha Metta Project (compassionate monks) was established in 1998 to engage monks to control and educate infected persons about HIV/AIDS (UNICEF 2003). Members of this project are mostly the monks from Mahamakut Buddhist University in Chaing Mai northern Thailand. The Sangha Metta Project, through the monks travel all over the country,
and giving seminars on HIV/AIDS prevention by the monks and the community leaders. In 2001, the Sangha Metta Project had educated 1,500 monks and nuns to employ them in HIV/AIDS related activities (UNICEF 2003). Such progressive attitude and service of the monks to combat the disease could save a huge amount of national budgets.

So far, many struggles to solve the disease, it's unable to control from further spread, in this regards, Mechai, ambassador of UNAIDS in Thailand addresses that at the end of 2001, there were more than 1 million HIV positive persons in Thailand. So, there is a need to involve government, religious organizations, NGOs and the community leaders to make fully aware of it, and develop with effective approaches for the prevention (UNAIDS, Mechai, 2003). John (2001:665) also points, the impact of AIDS epidemic in Thailand is serious, both socially and economically, affected persons are unable of earning, this would affects the family income, so that it leads related social problems. As cited above, in the last decade, HIV/AIDS has become a significant crisis in Thailand. To tackle this crisis, Thailand needs a rapid and effective policy changes. As UNICEF mentions, community based responses and people's participation are to strengthen and develop a strong civil society is needed as a strategy to prevent and solve the AIDS problem (UNICEF 2003). As mentioned above, the Sangha Metta Project, which involves monks in HIV/AIDS prevent, is a unique example initiated by the monks themselves. Conceptualizing HIV/AIDS problem into the Buddha's teaching, Thai monks conclude that a core aspect and causes the disease is ignorance about the condition among both the sufferers and the general public.

Besides Sangha Metta, many other Buddhist Sanghas are also conducted many activities to combat HIV/AIDS, like seminars, training programmes and workshops for monks, novices and lay people. For the youth, camps on HIV/AIDS, narcotics awareness, and prevention – care, etc have been organized. The project members also give moral supports, which is based on Buddhist teaching and counseling (UNICEF 2006). The project has built up several temples for different activities, for instance, daily/weekly meditation, care and orientation for orphaned boys, etc. It also coordinates many activities with nuns to care for girls and women affected by HIV/AIDS, and assisted their materials needs as well, (Buddha Dhamma Association 1996).
Monks' active participation in the issue has strengthened to develop community potential, and encourage at the greater grass roots participation in solving the problem. The monks and temple have not been forgotten, and it is not unusual now to see groups of students using their leisure hours to visit the temple and discuss their problems with the monks. A mix of Dhamma teaching and HIV/AIDS awareness for these young people in “Dhamma camps” by Sangha Metta’s well-trained monks give right moral conducts.

Thus, Thailand is the classic example of a mature and successful country in response to HIV/AIDS problem in the region. Even UNICEF observes as such, Thailand continues to provide valuable lessons and models for other East Asia and Pacific countries, (UNICEF: 2003). Thus, the Sangha Metta Project has proven an effective catalyst for participation by Buddhist clergy and communities in combating with HIV/AIDS. And, the role of monks and nuns in leading people to accept and care for HIV positive people, which has been continued, is vitally important in creating the supportive and enabling communities that are the key to reducing the spread of HIV, and mitigating its impact.

As mention earlier, Wat Phra Baht Nam Phu initially starts to provide a place for HIV/AIDS affected persons, and then the work has been taken up on large scale by the Sangha Metta, for those who don’t have families or don’t care for them. Then, as a consequent, people from all over Thailand came there, if they find themselves as HIV positive, rather than caring for themselves or depending on family. Moreover, self-care or home-based care are also usual. And, the work of the hospices are highly publicized, such problem has arisen where the HIV/AIDS affected persons are found as “worse scenarios” of sick and dying with severe symptoms. Because, due to the large number of patients, quality of all round treatment and care are challenging, another problem is hospices need high expenditure, approximately Baht 3 million per month, which necessitates constant and time consuming and fund raising, (UNICEF 2003: 4-5). The next section deals various aspects of Thaksin’s era politics.
Democracy as Authoritarianism Thaksin Era: 2001-2004

As cited earlier, Thaksin had joined Palang Dhama Party, where Chamlong Srimuang, had bought him into the politics in 1994. Later Thaksin dissented from Chamlong, and founded his own party, called the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) on 14 July 1998. At the beginning, the TRT simply played power politics and centralized its power around Thaksin Shinwatra with minimal influence in Thai politics. But, it rose to power in 2001, under the manifesto of a confident economy in Thailand, and to assist the rural populace. Meanwhile, the constitutional change of 1997 had also granted more power to the elected authority, which benefits to Thaksin to maintain a stable government. Somchai observes Thaksin’s electoral success as such, within three years span of his political party, it became the most successful in Thailand, (Somchai 2008:106).

Pasuk and Baker analyze about the reason of Thaksin’s entered to politics in 1994. They believe that he had tried to gain more government licenses in telecoms and highway development sectors. But, his businesses came under threat in 1995 – 1997, because rivals with better political access undercut his monopolies; because the government agreed to liberalize the telecom and other service sectors by 2006; and the financial crisis further undermined the market. So, he launched his new party and started a bid for the premiership in 1998, arguably because he needed political power for commercial survival, (Phongpaichit, Pasuk and Chris Baker 2001: 8).

As concern with the issue of “authoritarianism as democracy” during the Thaksin era, this section will analyze. The new Constitution of October 1997 was formed to check with the frequent military coups, and money politics that long plagued the country’s politics of representation (Pongsudhirak 2003:227a). But, the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, who ushered his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party into power on a landslide victory in the January 2001 election, has arguably turned Thai democracy on its own hand. Thaksin and his TRT party has monopolized the whole political process, marginalized the opposition, co – opted and coerced the media. They extended the power to control firmly over the military and the police, and shunned the dissenting voices of civil society group. The vaunted democratic institutions have become politicized and penetrated by the very vested interest.

Another factor is that, Thaksin further monopolized the 1997 settlement twinned enhanced executive power with institutions that were to scrutinize the exercise of executive power. It implies something that has harmonious relationship
with various international organizations then pushing ‘good governance.’ Reflecting a hegemonic project of a liberal restructuring of the state, the 1997 Constitution won acclaim from civil society groups, in part because it encapsulated a desire by farsighted elites to create a form of rule that functioned in the ‘public interest.’ It understood as the promotion of a regulatory state overseeing a liberal market society. This particular project was never fully embraced by sections of the military, bureaucracy and capitalist class (Connors 2008:147).

Michael observes, the political behavior of Thaksin’s government is like the brutal military ruled of 1991 – 1992. His pre-election promises are temporary diverted, and ruled the country in an authoritative manner. Michael argues three main factors. Michael argues that, first is the prime minister’s ability to hold his TRT Party together. Second is the notoriously fickle Thai public’s assessment of his capacity to deliver improved economic conditions. Third the lengths to which Thaksin will go to remain in power as modern dictatorship (Michael 2001:90-99). Phonpaichit comments that, as soon as Thaksin came to power in 2001, he continued the expansionist policy based on the budget deficit planned by the previous government. However, continuation of this policy was constrained by the already high level of public debt (57.6 percent of GDP in 2001). Hence the level of the deficit was reduced with a balanced budget planned for 2005 (Phonpaichit 2003: 4-6a). Meanwhile the Thaksin government intensified the stimulus through two innovations. First, some of the social policies were designed to increase potential consumer spending by reducing households’ necessary expenditure on such items as health and debt servicing. Such measures included a 30 baht-per-visit health scheme and the three-year debt relief for farmers. So, these policies have made him to stay successfully in the first 4 years term in office.

On the other side, Thaksin dominated all media, Phonpaichit and Chris observes, the significance of the ban on the journals, “the Review” and “the Economist,” is that it has focused the international media’s attention on a trend which they largely ignored until it ensnared them too. The truth is both simpler and more complex. Thaksin’s aggression against the media starts from the simple matter of conflict of interest. It is then welcomed and strengthened by some of the most conservative elements in Thai society and politics, (Phonpaichit Pasuk and Chris Baker 2002b). They further observe that the tendency now is to blame this lapse into authoritarianism on Thaksin alone, with top – down CEO (Chief Executive
Organization) style ruled. He is the knight on a white horse now revealed as a troll mounted on a toad. He has latched onto the trend, wafted north from Singapore through Mahathir’s Malaysia, of transforming democracy into authoritarianism. At the end of 2003, Thaksin said:

“Democracy is a good and beautiful thing, but it’s not the ultimate goal as far as administering the country is concerned. Democracy is just a tool, not our goal. The goal is to give people a good lifestyle, happiness and national progress” (Phonpaichit 2004: 5c).

Phongpaichit argues that Thaksin as the leader of big business projects to seize the state in order to protect big business against both external and internal threats, and in order to achieve a “great leap forward” into advanced capitalism. Thaksin and his allies want to manage the economy more actively by using state tools to mobilize resources and deepen capitalism. They want to manage the society to suppress alternative agendas which might obstruct this “great leap forward,” particularly agendas which prioritize rights, democracy, or equity above growth (Phonpaichi 2004: 1-8d). When a man on a white horse comes along and says, “I am doing away with all the ensnared is democratic bundle, but I will give you the cash you want,” thus, he becomes hugely popular in the country, and such phenomenon of “authoritarian neo – liberal populism” is appearing in Thailand and elsewhere (Ibid,). Phongpaichit sees that rights are subservient to profits in a neo – liberal system. The following sections deals about Thaksin and the Thai Muslim problem in southern Thailand.

Thaksin Era and the Thai Muslim of Southern Thailand

This section is examining about the relationship and policy of Thaksin towards the Thai Muslim of Southern Thailand. Since 2003, the Thaksin government had faced various problems. In the middle 1990s, a prominent Muslim, Wan Muhammed Nor Matha of Thai Rak Thai Party, has emerged on the National Politics, as the first Muslim president of the National Assembly and as the Ministry of Interior. Then, a Muslim political faction called ‘Wahdah’ previously within the New Aspiration Party that have strong Southern bases, also paved the way for Muslims to gain key positions in the government. Besides, Muslim separatist groups have also started to identify themselves as a religious movement as they called themselves Mujahideen, and demanded for political independence (Harish 2006: 56-57).
As Kittि points, the insurgency among the Malay Muslim majority in the south intensified in early 2004, not long after Thailand was declared ‘a non-NATO ally’ by the United States. The prime minister did not help matters, bluntly criticizing insurgency as the work of thugs without ideology while discounting any possibility of separatist or religious elements (Kitti 2007:892). According to Mahakanjana, violence has escalated since 2001, and has changed in character; soft and civilian targets have been more frequent. In addition, the police have also been killed regularly since 2002.

Two weeks after the three Malay Muslims were sentenced to death by a Thai court, schools and other state institutions have been targets. Buddhist temples and monks emerged as targets since the beginning of October 2002 (Mahakanjana 2006:15: Bonura 2-17. So, it can be observes that there were lapsed of state’s policies to solve the concern issue.

Regard the causality, Supalak and Don reported, a tally of the incidents and the victims between January 2004 and November 2005 clearly indicates that the religious section and people, both sites are significant targets of today’s insurgents. The religious targets accounted as 8 in Pattani, 13 in Yala and 10 in Narathiwat, figures that are remarkably similar to those concerning attacks on police and security forces (Supalak Ganjanakhundee, and Don Pathann Report The Nation Multimedia on 5,2005a). Since the troubles began, four monks have been hacked to death and one has survived with a machete attack. The first such attack was on January 22, 2004 and the latest at a temple on October 16, when suspected militants slit the throat of a 76 years old monk and killed two teenagers before torching the temple, (Nation Multimedia Group Report 9th January 2005b).

Buddhists are continuously dying in increase numbers. For the first 6 months of 2005, 111 Buddhists were killed, this rose to 141 for the first 6 months of 2006. However, for the Muslims oppositions, the death toll was 208 – 183 (Strait Time Report 13, January 2005). All the incidence discusses above led to zenith due to the government’s irresponsibility to tackle the issue. As McCagro examines, the major incidents in 2004 greatly exacerbated the problem: the storming of the Klu-Ze mosque on 28 April, in which 32 men died in Southern Thailand’s most revered holy site; and the Tak Bai incident of 25 October; in which 78 men apparently suffocated, which being transported in army trucks. Thaksin’s mishandling of the South led him to clash with Prem, the Privy Council and the palace, who urged him to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the conflict (McCagro 2005:499). In another incident, two Thai marines were stabbed to death by unknown assailants
after being taken hostage by villagers, who were outraged by the gangland-style shooting of several local Muslims earlier in the day.

At this time, the Thaksin government renewed the emergency decree governing the three southernmost provinces for another three months, virtually designating them as a war zone. The pattern of insurgent attacks, met by harsh government responses, was discernible. It was viewed as an unconventional, limited war between the southern insurgency and the Thakin government (Pongsudhirak 2006:293-294b). There were several key incidents have discussed above, this results the Thaksin government difficult to manage the southern problem. However, it was over the south that the growing rift between the network of the monarchy and Thaksin became evident. As early as October 2004, prominent Pattani Islamic school owner and leading royal ally Nideh Waba called for a royal appointed government to oust Thaksin, and also demand to taken up the broader as anti-Thaksin movement, (McCagro 2005:451b).

On this issue, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told to the Thai People’s radio program on May 1st, 2004, read as;

"People in the three southernmost provinces are poor. The pace of development in the area is slower than neighbouring Malaysia, causing villagers to cross the border for jobs. Some families have many children. Some allow their children to study only in Islamic teaching schools, depriving them of the opportunity to learn vocational subjects or other fields. Children are unable to find jobs after completing schools, leaving them in chronic poverty." (Moawad UNESCO 2005:11).

Thus, Thaksin thought that the problem in southern Thailand relates with underdevelopment and poverty. But since after the martial law in 2004, the situation had changed from bad to worse, the Thai state were stationed military monks in the wat (temple) for defense. In this regards, Jerryson states that in an evening, one monk sat at a table outside his monk’s quarters with him and relayed what the monk had heard about military monks; a wat in Narathiwat had a few monks. When insurgents attacked, the monks moved to stay in the city. The wat became abandoned. Muslims went to the wat to destroy the Buddha images, buildings, pavilions and the monk’s quarters. The Queen ordered soldiers to become monks and go to stay in the abandoned wat, to guard the wat and its religious objects. In this respect, Jerryson agrees that there has to be military monks, (Jerryson: 2009:43-45)

Regarding the stationing of military monks, they are commissioning in the three southernmost provinces. The majority of military monks are sent to
Narathiwat, the second largest group to Yala and the fewest to Pattani. These proportions match the level of violence and instability in these three provinces. In 2006 and the early half of 2007, there were not many military monks in the southernmost provinces and no confirmed networking among them. Trained soldiers in southern Thailand are selected before they graduate to become military monks, and used them as active and vigilant protectors of the wat and their monks, (Jerryson: 2009:47: 50).

Referring from the fieldwork to the Buddhist temples in southern Thailand, Jerryson observes that many military men in the area bear arms, and perform security functions to protect their fellow monks and the temples where they reside. In the locations Jerryson studied, the distinctions between soldiers and monks have broken down, along with the differences between Thai Buddhism and state security. Far from functioning as a tolerant, peace-loving religion, Buddhism has become an arm of state power. Through the militarization of Buddhism in the south, the Thai state may be helping to bring into being the collective nightmare of a religious war. It can be concluded that the main impact of the militarization of Buddhism is the degradation of Buddhist values. Protection of civilians both Buddhist and Muslim are the duty of the state with proper security measures, but not militarization of religion. The subsequent section will discuss about Thaksin second era in politics.

**Thaksin’s Second Period: 2005 – 2006**

Thaksin Shinawatra was re-elected as the Thai Prime Minister on February 6, 2005. The “Thaksinisation” of Thailand’s politics has received a tremendous boost following the election. The stamp of “Thaksinisation,” with a mix of populist policies, a certain willingness to think the unthinkable and a high measure of self-esteem that his critics see as the arrogance of power, which is the defining feature of Thailand’s new 500 members “House of Representatives” (Nelson 2006:4-5; Orathai 2006). The critic like Ammar Siamwalla opines, shortly after TRT has won the general election, “it has turned out to be a national referendum on whether we should accept Thaksin or not accept him”( Quoted in Nelson 2008:16). How well Thaksin utilizes his immense new power will determine whether he can indeed become Thailand’s “man of destiny” in the early part of the 21st century. The
daunting challenge of harnessing the massive mandate will out weigh the opportunities for governance, (Suryanarayana 2005).

Tejapira comments that a day longer under Thaksin was like a day closer to the abyss. Another scholar like Ungpakorn mentions that Thaksin regime was an ‘elected capitalist absolutism’ that had committed grievous crimes, namely: the extra-judicial killing of over 2000 people during the “War on Drugs;” the deaths of several thousand more due to the mishandling of the crisis in the Malay Muslim region of southern Thailand, and Thaksin’s manipulation of the media and the supposedly independent regulatory, (Ungpakorn 2006:4-5)

Thus in trying to assess democracy’s quality during this period, responsiveness can on some dimensions and be regarded as high, he at the same time eroded democracy’s quality. His conflicts of interest diminished the rule of law. His suppression of critical media outlets weakened political freedoms. And his campaigns against alleged drug traffickers and southern insurgents grossly violated human rights. However, Thaksin made even his contempt for formal procedures and liberties integral to his responsiveness and persona list appeal. Early in his tenure, he outlandishly depicted himself as a ‘Genghis Khan type of manager,’ The Nation 8 January 2001, quoted. (McCargo and Ukrist 2005: 109) With regard to Thaksin’s popularity, it is suggested that it would be lasting, despite his corruption. Thaksin was nonetheless the first Thai politician genuinely to take an interest to the rural poor, (Bunbongkarn 2007:1).

In conventional analyses of democracy in Thailand, besides frequent military coups, the above data also shows to indicate a very high level of support for democracy, support for civil liberties, and a high level of satisfaction with the democratically elected government. However, there exist military aristocratic ideologies, which are fundamentally odds with the democratic movement or its continued consolidation. There is very little evidence that poor people, given the choice to reject democracy. Some interests also note that the military government from the 1958 – 1992 is similar to the alleged “emergency” of Thaksin, (and the suppression of various political and civil rights). Although, against the suppression of basic political and civil rights the Thai electorates,’ which is one of the poorest in the world, showed itself to be no less keen on protesting against the denial of basic liberties and rights than on complaining about economic and money politics. The
subsequent section will discuss about the role Buddhist Sangha in the current political arena of Thailand.

**Role of the Buddhist Sangha in Political Arena Today**

As mentioned on the previous chapter from 1997 to 2001, this section concern the subsequent period, on how Buddhist Sangha has been playing in politics. To some extent, these seem to be relatively clear, and in other senses, arguable and controversial. Religion has its own contribution to make to politics and, ultimately, it is the only contribution to politics that really matters. It has failed both politically and as religion it falls either into the extreme of being debased by politics or of rejecting any kind of political involvement as a kind of fearful taboo. The fear of creating dissension among fellow Buddhists is understandable, but if Buddhists cannot handle conflict in a positive and creative way, it would be harder to the other, (Sivalaksa 1995:114-117). In traditional Thai society, the parties in conflict will seek reconciliation from the religious leaders or the senior and respectful member of the village. It is not common that both parties talk directly. With the help from the religious leaders and the senior, the process of reconciliation is influenced by Buddhist teachings (Ibid.) The first and most senior Buddhist Monk from the northeast we are mentioned here, he is Phra Dhama Visthamongkol (Louang Ta Maha Bua).

Although, he had been a strong supporter of Thaksin Shinawatra, (Thaksin the 1st term 2001) he later became one of Thaksin's most vocal critics. Luangta Maha Bua does not shy away from performing an important political role. During the severe 1997 Thai financial crisis, he successfully mobilized Thais in the kingdom and abroad to alleviate the economic hardship by donating gold and US dollars to the Bank of Thailand. He also helped Thaksin to fight for his political life when the prime minister, then in his first term in office, had to prove that he did not try to conceal his billions from public scrutiny.

It can be noted, Thaksin's second term 2005, where Thaksin had assured to monk Somdet Phra Putthacharn to be the “Supreme Patriarch” (top of the Sangha), because the “Supreme Patriarch” was suffering from a chronic illness that had long prevented him from active duty. But according to Thai constitution, only the King can confer this title with consent from the “Council of Elders,” Thus, he has violated

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the constitution, and seem as a parallel power to the King. Somdet Phra Putthacharn was also the next in line to succeed the ailing Supreme Patriarch, (Mettanando Bhikkhu, The Nation, 9th November 2006). Taking this weakness, many rivals rose up against controversial Thaksin to replace him.

On 27th September 2005, the anti – Thaksin newspaper, Manager Daily published a sermon by Luang Ta Maha Bua that was extremely critical of the Prime Minister, and which became further controversial because it came from a monk (who is above criticism in Buddhist Thailand). On 14th March 2006, Phra Luang Ta Maha Bua has asked Thaksin to resign. In a sermon that the monk called “most vehement since the temple was set up,” the monk said it was time for Thaksin to abandon the “rotten system he is presiding over.” He described the government as “wicked, corrupt, power-hungry and greedy,” (Phra Dhamvisuthimongkol 2006)

Their efforts are being countered with fierce resistance. Followers of Somdet Phra Putthacharn took action and protested in front of Government House, denouncing the opposition as illegitimate. Both groups seem adamant and have vowed to fight to retain their power (Ibid.)

As Mettanando analyzes, Phra LoungTa Maha Bua’s followers, they announced plans to handle a petition, with the 150,000 signatures they have gathered, to the Senate to impeach Deputy Prime Minister Visanu Kruegarm for endorsing the decision of the Sangha. Such a division religious atmosphere within Thailand, where 95 % of the country’s 63 million people are Buddhists, has been made worse by other events that have drawn attention to the disputes plaguing Buddhism (Mettanando 2004: 22, Bangkok post). Macan – Marker analyzes that Thailand’s Buddhists are currently divided into two strands within the Theravada school, the “Maha nikaya and Dhammayuttanikaya”, which come under the Sangha Supreme council, the nine – member’s body of senior clerics that is under fire. Thus, condition the religion becomes degenerate.

After this crisis, senior monks have described Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as being eccentric and too keen on power, and began to question whether he would stay in the power or not. They spoke at a seminar, topic entitled “The Role of Monks in Politics – Monks Banned from Making Political Comments” held by the “Campaign for Popular Democracy and Campaign for Media Reform.” Phra Sripariyatimolee, deputy rector for foreign affairs of the Maha Chulalongkorn Ratchawithayalai Buddhist University, said democracy needed a moral code,
Monks preached morality to politicians in the hope they would improve their conduct. He said, "Without morality, there could be no political reform. Monitoring agencies will be meaningless if people feel no shame about committing a sin." He was apparently referred to Mr Thaksin's advice to monks to steer clear of politics. Here, Phra Sripariyatimoli said Mr Thaksin was quick to react to everything. But monks preaching have caused him no damage. Many projects were carried out without going through parliamentary procedures through monks for the welfare of the nation, (Marwaan, Macan and Markar, IPS 27: 2006).

The loud criticisms of the Thai Buddhist order currently being voiced contribute to a defensive, siege mentality among the Sangha leadership. Well known historian Keyes has argued that the Sangha is in dire need of extensive structural reform. He has called for a return to the traditional status of temples as educational centres for the community, run with the active participation of local people. In other words, he argues that Buddhism in Thailand can only be revitalized by severing the intimate bonds between Sangha and state created during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, when Buddhism was bureaucratized and thoroughly subordinated to the nation-building project of the state (Keyes 1989:127-129).

However, no recent Thai government has shown any enthusiasm for legislative reform of the Sangha through repeal of the 1962 Sangha Act. Any such reform would trigger a backlash from conservative forces, which would denounced changes as politically motivated attempts to undermine one of the nation's highest institutions. The next section deals with an assessment of Sangha during modernization and democracy movement in Thailand.

Sanghas' Role and Assessment during modernization and democracy movement

The rural landscapes in Thailand are reflecting the reflexive relationship between their environment and their social history. Compared to the booming urban economy, the rural landscapes, especially in the North and Northeast, are reflecting relative poverty as a consequence of decades of impoverishment. This is due to the fact that the dynamics of agricultural transformation developed in the trading centres before most of it became concentrated in Bangkok. It has sketched the historical evolution of development and some of its environmental consequences in a cluster
of rural villages in a marginal corner of northeastern Thailand. The basic image created by the study is of a pendulum swinging backwards and forwards along a continuum between sustainability and unsustainability (Parnwell 2005:17; Helen Rose and Suwattana 1995:267-269).

As broadly understood, economic development included the development of social capital and infrastructure during the first few phases. The gap between urban areas and rural villages, and lower and upper classes were widened. The environment was destroyed. In the second phase, the satisfaction of basic human needs was emphasized. Their aim was to implement the participatory and environmentally friendly or sustainable development. During the 1990s, diverse goals were set, including education, health care, the emphasis on local-level economy, resident participation in development projects, affiliations between NGOs and development agencies, mutual oversight, respect for human rights (against gender or racial discrimination), development education and international understanding (Krongkaew 1995:34-36).

Thus, many villagers in both communities and elsewhere in Isan occasionally use the term development and progress interchangeably. Their local understandings of development and progress are partly drawn from local community culture, which has largely been influenced by popular Theravada Buddhism, local traditions, and structures of village social relations. Their local views of development are also shaped by state development ideologies, their experiences with the market economy and out migration to urban areas, village school education, and the media. In other words, the local interpretations of development show villagers' creativity to appropriate the meanings from both old and new sources of cultural change synthesize and re-create them. While environmentalist monks do not form a united, coherent movement, the collective implication of their work illustrates the concept of liberation ecology described by Prawes (1995). Their emergence within a particular historical, political, economic, and environmental context enables them to reassess Buddhism to fit that context and engage in debates over modernity and one of its primary institutions: development. They demonstrate a willingness to confront the traditional mutual support of the Sangha hierarchy and the state a relationship that was itself a product of modernization.

The impact of their individual projects may be impossible to assess, but the
potential of their activism to challenge Thai Buddhists to rethink their religion, their society, and their place in both the political and the natural world cannot be denied. In Thailand, people are struggling to find a viable way of life as "traditional" and "modern" forces collide, entwine, blend, and keep changing. There are many non-modern elements in this culture. For one, the political system is still based on personal contacts and relationships.

The formal, important democratic system is a veneer, often a fraud. The foundations of traditional societies - ways of life, values, and Buddhism are being pulled out from the people ((Phongpaichit et al 1996:33). Jackson argues that Buddhism has a political importance as a system of legitimizing practices and discourses explains the intensification of state control that was exercised over the Sangha in this century through a series of efforts to restructure the monkhood in the image of the secular political order (Jackson 1997:85).

Buddhism and Thai Socio-Political life

The above narratives succinctly reveal that Buddhism has profound influence in social and political life of Thailand. Sangha is inevitably drawn into political arena. Buddhism, like other religions has political implications. For instance, as mentioned above, Sanghas have been used by the government to serve its own needs and ends. To an extent, this seems to be clear, and in other senses, arguable and controversial. But, it has failed both politically and as religion, if it falls either into the extreme of being debased by politics or rejecting any kind of political involvement as a kind of fearful taboo. The fear of creating dissension among fellow Buddhists is understandable. But if Buddhists cannot handle their internal conflicts in positive and creative way, then others are hardly able to manage it. In traditional Thai society, the parties in conflict will seek reconciliation from the religious leaders or the senior or respectful members of the village. It is not common that both parties talk directly. With the help from the religious leaders and the seniors, the process of reconciliation is continued through Buddhist teachings. Politicians frequently approach monks for support. They endeavor to associate themselves with Buddhist monks and religious movements in order to secure and maximize their legitimacy, which then enables them to form a government, carry out their political plans and consolidate their social control.
The links between monks like Loung Phao Khoon and some prominent politicians are crucial in Thai social and political realm. For instance, former Prime Minister Choavalit (1996-97) used to visit Phra vittayakhoon. However, Loung Phao Khoon’s perceived support for some politicians, and those politicians’ interest in seeking supernatural support for their careers, have been stridently criticized by rationalist monks, academics and other politicians. More seriously, Thaksin has also established close relations with the monks. For instance, during an anti-drug campaign in 2003, one popular monk (Luang Pho Koon) drew a comparison between Thaksin and Sarit, because both had killed so many people in the anti-drug campaign, which clearly ignored the Thai law.

Thaksin has once had disagreements over the political role of Buddhist monks in Thai society. He scolded four monks for the condemned of his government’s policies during sermons delivered in the state-run “Radio Thailand.” But many critics have responded harshly to the premier’s outburst for not aware of Thai culture, and in the Thai tradition usually Buddhist priests commenting on social and political issues. Nowadays, despite the esteem and prestige of the Sangha, it has not been able to exercise influences over the political authority. Rather, the Thai Sangha has been loyal and subservient to political authority and its politics, and in return Sangha gets patronage and protection.

With regards to Buddhist Sangha, this picture is an-ill-disciplined, singularly failing to renew itself and reinvigorate Thai Buddhism. Sangha is also ill-equipped to flourish in a more open political order, with a broader civil society. Much of the community role previously assumed by monks was now assumed by a range of governmental and non-governmental organizations, while a vociferous mass media scrutinized the affairs of temples much more closely than before.

Thus, the role of the Sangha in government policies for national development and integration has been granted some official recognition; the government openly encourages monks to participate in secular affairs, claiming that these are their responsibilities. After a thorough understanding of the above narratives about the role of Monks in Thai socio-political life, their personal involvements in politics such as to campaign for law enforcement or policy implementation are labeled as non-traditional. And, it is also their moral responsibility and fundamental duty to participate in any aspects of national affairs; moreover they are also the citizen.