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THAILAND

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL STATE IN THE 1970S

VOLUME ONE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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EXPLANATORY NOTES ON TRANSLATION

The system of romanization recommended by the Royal Institute of Thailand is used with two exceptions; u is substituted for eu and o for au.

DEDICATION

For Frank Reynolds

PART I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

From September 1978 to June 1980 I studied the kathin ceremony in Thailand, an ancient Buddhist ritual that dates back to the beginning of the Theravada tradition.¹ In Thailand its performance dates back at least to the thirteenth-century kingdom of Sukhothai.

The kathin is part of the agricultural ritual cycle in Thailand and other Theravada Buddhist polities (cf. Tambiah 1970). Performed for a one-month period only, between the full moons of October and November, the ceremony marks the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the rice harvest--that moment in the calendrical cycle when asceticism yields its just rewards of prosperity and social harmony. During the ceremony Buddhist laity offer robes and other gifts to Buddhist monks as a reward for their strict observance of the Lenten retreat.

The original research topic was a study of political modernization as it concerned the relationship between the rebellious Lao populations of northeast Thailand and the central Thai government in Bangkok. The kathin was selected as a focal point of study for four reasons. First, kathin ceremonies leading from Bangkok to the northeast provinces became popular in the 1960s.² Second, kathin is one means of redistributing

¹For a discussion of the complexities of the kathin and the difficulties involved in studying it, see Heinz Bechert's "Some Remarks on the Kathina Rite" (1968).

²Personal communication, Charles F. Keyes.

wealth from the capital to rural areas (Tambiah 1976:456-460); and many of the ceremonies were reportedly led by people returning to their natal villages. Third, kathin of recent years have been organized to raise funds for schools and hospitals.³ Fourth, the power elite from Bangkok organize kathin ceremonies to advance their business and political interests (Tambiah 1976:392-394).

One research objective was to examine a thesis advanced by Reynolds and Clifford for Theravada Buddhist societies (1980): that pure, "selfless action" of the type demonstrated in merit-making ceremonies like the kathin creates and transforms personal and communal identity, uniting men in 'circles of dhamma' or 'dhamma realms.' This thesis complements another advanced by Marriott and Inden (1972, 1982; cf. Inden 1976:10) for South Asian society: that the exchange of "coded [biogenetic] substances" creates and transforms personal and communal identity. Put differently, the dominant idiom of purity, power and lineage relations in Theravada Buddhist societies is that of pure action. In South Asian society it is that of coded substances. This general thesis was to be examined in the context of interregional kathin ceremonies linking men in Bangkok with the Lao-Thai populations of the Northeast. The latter are called khon isan or 'Isan people.'

Isan

Isan, the northeast region of Thailand, comprises one-third of the nation's area and contains one-third of its population. The region is situated on the Korat Plateau, which tilts towards the Mekhong rather than the Menam River. Thus its inhabitants share language, script and customs with the Laotian populations of Laos and not with the central

³Personal communication from a former monk of the royally-favored Thammayut religious order.

Thai populations of the Menam River Valley. After permanent territorial boundaries were established in the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1893, there were more Lao in the kingdom of Siam⁴ than there were in the kingdom of Laos, a situation which has persisted to the present.

Rice is the main agricultural crop on the Korat Plateau as elsewhere in Thailand, but the Northeast is one of the driest and poorest regions of the country. Its people have the lowest per capita income and the lowest daily minimum wage (80 cents in 1975) (Girling 1981:89, 195).

The central Thai government has long viewed the Lao-Thai people as a political threat. At the turn of the century holy men and men claiming to be the Metteya (the next Buddha) led uprisings that challenged the sovereignty of the Thai king in Bangkok. By the 1950s, central Thai government leaders had begun regularly to accuse Isan leaders of being communists.

The Research Odyssey

Field work was unnerving, to say the least. My first inkling of the paradoxical nature of kathin came on the flight from San Francisco to Bangkok when a Thai student laughed as I explained my research topic. "Nobody is interested in kathin," he said. "We've always had kathin. That's like studying hamburgers and hotdogs in America!" His opinion was echoed soon after by a political science professor at a Thai university. "Kathin is not important," he said, speaking from an academic perspective. "It's a boring research topic."

⁴Siam is the name given to the kingdoms of the Menam Valley by traders in the seventeenth century. The people of the Menam Valley referred to their kingdom as The Land of the Free [muang thai] and themselves as 'Thai people' [khon thai]. 'Siam' was changed to 'Thailand' in 1939.

These were not atypical of the responses I received when I described my research topic. Most people said they were 'not interested' [may soncai] in the kathin and claimed to know little or nothing of the monks' side of the ceremony.

Instead of taking the first plane home, however, I waited a month for the kathin season to begin. Suddenly, all the people who were not interested in kathin added a rider to the statement: 'except for the one sponsored by my close friend,' or 'except for the one at the temple of Luang Puu Waen' (a famous meditation monk residing in the northern capital of Chiangmai).

Come the full moon of September, the capital erupted into a frenzy of merit-making activity. Newspapers carried stories of the king's kathin at royal temples and of kathin ceremonies performed by powerful bureaucrats and generals in rural areas. Prime Minister Kriangsak had a casual "at home" kathin at a temple near his house. Shopkeepers banded together to offer kathin upcountry in the Northeast.

It was difficult if not impossible to find ceremonies that were organized to help build schools and hospitals. In fact, people were often offended when I asked how kathin monies were spent or if they were used to support civic projects. 'This is the story of faith!' they exclaimed. 'It has nothing to do with money.' Clearly, there was no calculation of a worldly nature involved in the organization of kathin ceremonies. A steely-eyed palace official said the king chose royal temples to receive his yearly kathin gift like anyone else, 'According to faith,'⁵ and terminated the interview soon after.

⁵Because of the importance of code-switching to the thesis, single quotes are used to indicate informants' statements made primarily in Thai and double quotes to indicate statements made primarily in English. Similarly, single quotes are used to indicate Thai concepts (e.g., 'democracy') and double quotes, Western concepts (e.g., "democracy").

The research odyssey led from the royal temples of Bangkok to remote temples upcountry, from government offices to the Grand Palace to the headquarters of a major bank. I followed a trail of "invisible men" who created invisible government ritual policies. All but the highest-ranking informants said there had been no change in the ritual structure. 'We've always had kathin. Kathin is Thai custom.'

In fact, changes in the ritual structure were like the appearance of the kathin robes. As one government official put it, it was as if the robes 'fell from the sky.' The kathin was a cosmic event, generated by the purity of Buddhist monks. The appearance of the kathin gifts was thamma-chat, a 'natural' phenomenon, literally, an event 'born of dhamma,' as I shall demonstrate, a folk ideology of events that explains much of modern capitalist development..

The dissertation tells the story of the kathin ceremony, how it changed through the centuries and how it transformed the lives of Isan people. It describes how changes in the ritual system helped bring about major changes in Isan society, doing so in such a way that radical transitions seemed 'natural' and not 'forced' [fun], the work of the gods rather than of men.

Buddhism and Capitalism

As the research progressed, it became apparent that the relationship between the central Thai government and the people of Isan changed directly in response to shifts in the relationship between Thailand and the United States. This was especially true during and after the Vietnam War. The United States was and is concerned with two issues:

Translations from Thai and English written sources are placed in double quotes. Thai and Pali words are enclosed in brackets, their English equivalences in parentheses.

developing the Thai economy and opening up new markets for American goods, Pepsi Cola and the like; and suppressing communist movements that threaten U.S. interests in Southeast Asia (cf. Butwell 1979:29-30). Capitalist development in Thailand in the last twenty years, particularly in Isan, has occurred largely under the aegis of the United States. Much of it was planned by U.S. or U.S.-trained advisors and/or funded by U.S. aid money. During the course of my research it also became apparent that the Buddhist king was playing a major role in promoting capitalist activities in rural areas.

The research focus thus changed from a study of Buddhist ritual and national integration to a study of the relationship between Buddhist ritual, kingship and capitalist development insofar as it concerned the Northeast. It changed, too, from a study of kathin ceremonies at ordinary temples (called wat ratsadorn or 'people's temples') to a study of kathin at royal temples [wat Luang] performed by the king or his personal representatives. The royal kathin is regarded as the perfect 'model' [tua yang] of kathin ceremonies throughout the nation. The right to offer the king's kathin robes at royal temples is khong phrarachathan, 'the royal gift.' It is bestowed on a select few of the nation's citizens.

Thesis: Capitalist Development to the 1970s

The major thesis is the following: Buddhism, Buddhist kingship, and Buddhist ritual played a central role in advancing Western capitalist ideologies and practices in Thailand. This thesis is contrary to that posited by Weber and accepted by many Western scholars, that Buddhism with its "other-worldly" orientation inhibits the formation of a true capitalist spirit and thus impedes the development of capitalism.

The thesis is developed in relation to the following reconstruction of recent Thai history: From 1951 to 1957 the ruling military triumvirate prevented the Buddhist king from playing a prominent role in public affairs and thus from shaping the course of Thailand's economic growth. From 1957 to 1968 the king and powerful military leaders became cooperating, self-conscious protagonists in introducing capitalist practices and ideologies. From 1968 to 1975 the king played the dominant, transcending role in advancing new capitalist practices and ideologies. By the late 1970s the monarchy had reached its apotheosis and a major commercial bank had moved to the fore in promoting capitalist development, preempting the prerogatives previously reserved for kings.

This understanding of the process of historical development raises several questions. Why was the monarchy abruptly reintegrated into the power structure in the 1960s, after nearly thirty years of decline and near extinction? Why did this reintegration occur when Thailand entered its most intensive stage of capitalist development, one that definitively transformed relations of production in the Northeast? What is the nature of a 'royal' prerogative that a commercial bank could assume it? For these questions to be answered, the entire process must be examined in a wider historical context.

Antinomy and the History of the Thai Monarchy

Antinomy is contradiction at the level of inference. I use the term here to refer to activities from which contradictory and mutually-negating inferences can be drawn. This structural-semiotic condition, a result of Thailand's confrontation with the West, gave rise to a plethora of "damned if you do, damned if you don't" historical

situations. Since at least the nineteenth century, Thai-Buddhist kings and their political successors have faced an endless variety of situations in which their performance of traditional legitimating activities delegitimizes them in the eyes of their Western audiences and their adoption of Western ideologies and modes of behavior delegitimizes them in the eyes of their indigenous audiences.

South and Southeast Asian cultural systems share a common cosmological framework, terminology, and emphasis on asceticism whereas Western and Thai-Buddhist cultural systems do not. The antinomy theory was developed from the observation that the cosmology and symbolic systems of Western and Theravada Buddhist societies are so disharmonic as to be mutually negating. For a Thai-Buddhist king or Thai political leaders to advance or otherwise embody Western ideals or adopt Western speech styles is, in most instances, to automatically transgress indigenous ideals. The reverse situation also holds true: in many cases, for Thai elite to advocate or embody indigenous ideals in ruling the modern polity or in their interactions with Westerners is to automatically delegitimize themselves with that audience.

Born of the colonial experience and decades of East-West dialogues and confrontations, the antinomy problem comprises a major structural principle of modern Thai history. It has had many manifestations over the course of modern Thai history: recurring conflicts over the king's harem, his performance of lavish state ceremonies, and the sources and nature of the royal income. It is manifest as the casting of aspersions on the veracity of kings and modern political leaders. One of the most virulent antinomy issues, however, the one which is of most consistent concern to this dissertation, concerns problems that touch on the relationship between the king's blood and the king's merit, his

"impeccable lineage" and his ability to rule the state. The problem is the following.

Blood and Merit

The Thai royal tradition that developed from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century was an amalgam of Buddhist and Hindu beliefs about the divine and sacred qualities of the king. This tradition incorporated two potentially contradictory ideologies of purity and power: the Hindu, based on the idea that the king's 'sacrality' [khwan saksit] was a function of his "pure substance" (i.e., his pure blood or biogenetic substance) and the Buddhist, based on the idea that the king's sacrality was primarily a function of his pure religious practice (selfless action). In the Hindu tradition, the king's superior wisdom and insight, his powerful propensity towards world renunciation, were seen literally as inhering in his pure blood; pure blood was both a symbol of purity and the physical "stuff" of purity--high rank, merit, ability, and pure practice were conjoined features in a cultural matrix. In the Buddhist tradition, the king's ability and wisdom were represented as arising solely from his renunciatory activities--in much the same way that this process occurs for Buddhist monks (who, as the Buddha made clear, may come from all strata of society); the king's pure blood was deemphasized, subsumed within talk of royal genealogies. The concept of royal genealogy remained ambiguous.

Until the late nineteenth century, these two companionably contradictory ideologies comprised the fundamental legitimating principles of the Thai kingship. They gave meaning to the idea of the king's duties and his abilities to perform them. The following is a rough approximation of the traditional Thai-Buddhist formula for

kingship: The king's pure blood is the literal source of his powerful inclination towards dhamma or world renunciation. His conspicuous acts of world renunciation (righteous conduct, ascetic and ritual activities) in turn give rise to superior religious wisdom [pañña] and insight [yan] which enable him to 'see dhamma' [hen tham]⁶ an unmanifest or immanent phenomenon (Reynolds 1972), and interpret it for his subjects. These qualities enabled him to order human society in harmony with nature, in Heine-Geldern's (1956:1) well-known formulation, to order society as a "microcosm" or the greater "macrocosmic" order. ('Being riap roi [proper] means that you live in harmony with nature,' said one informant enthusiastically.)

The above concept of the king's interpretive duties articulates with the Buddhist doctrine of anicca or impermanence. The doctrine of anicca states that the cosmos and human society are in a constant state of flux. Men's actions (i.e., their proper codes of conduct) must change accordingly if human society is to remain in harmony with the cosmos and the dhamma is to remain manifest.

The king's pure blood (i.e., his impeccable lineage) and his transcendent merit were also assumed to be the source of his ability to protect and defend the Buddhist Sangha. The Buddhist Sangha is a congregation of world renouncers who are potentially superior to Buddhist laymen, no matter how noble these laymen might be.

The king's performance and purification of ritual was and is central to the ruling process for two reasons. First, royal ritual performances are acts of purification that enhance the king's mental purity and therefore heighten his powers of interpretation. Second, Buddhist rituals were and remain the most potent media of communication in Thai

⁶The Buddha's teaching's and the universal laws they describe.

society. They are a "language of images" (chapter 18) through which new values and standards of conduct are conveyed to the general populace. In accordance with indigenous concepts of meaning, the king transforms new principles of order into social practice by incorporating them into the royal ritual repertoire. He thus transforms the invisible 'essence' of dhamma [nam-tham] into a visible presence, giving it a 'substance' [wathu-tham] and 'shape' or form [rup-tham], and thereby 'teaching his subjects through the senses.' New values are thus linked to the timeless principles of dhamma. Change, rather than appearing disruptive, appears as a new form of religious purification, as a return to the pure past, to 'the way things have always been.'

The contradictions between ideologies of blood and merit, or "substance-" versus "practice-oriented" ideologies of power, did not become genuinely problematic until the nineteenth century, when democratic ideologies and Western ideologies of kingship were imposed on Thai Buddhist kings. By these new standards, the ideal Dhammaraja was a "constitutional monarch," "the father of democracy." Democratic ideologies implied and stated that men legitimately gained positions of power only through hard work and proven ability, not because of high birth. Or, they implied a fundamental incompatibility between high birth and merit, or blood lineage and ability. In addition, such ideologies entailed new concepts of utility, "practical" as opposed to "cosmic." "Practical utility" refers to the skill with which men transform their immediate physical environment in order to satisfy their material desires. "Cosmic utility" refers to men's ascetic skills. According to ancient Theravada doctrines, the ascetic skills of righteous Buddhist kings and Buddhist monks transform the cosmos, 'naturally' rather than by direct force. They cause the 'sun and the

moon' to go right in their courses, the gods to send rain, and ordinary men to observe morality. Order in the material world thus arises indirectly, as a function of pure practice.

Democratic ideologies of kingship were also formulated at a time when the polity was being bombarded by Western capitalist ideologies of the Horatio Alger type, when a Western culture of capitalism was introduced as pretext of domination, to displace the ruling elite. Capitalist ideologies were part of a cultural matrix which linked hard work, practical ability, and veracity or honesty. The linkage of veracity and honesty with labour had serious consequences for the religion and the Buddhist monarchy. Western missionaries, traders and diplomats were united in the opinion that hard work, drive and ability--not high birth--were the measures of "honest men." Enlightened and rational rulers (i.e., those willing to make trade concessions) were those who demonstrated an appreciation of democratic cum capitalist values in their administration of the state. The most vociferous of the king's Western critics were also united in the opinion that his performance of ritual was a "waste of time and money." It impeded the proper administration of the state (and the advancement of Western interests).

The king was caught in a classic antinomy bind. If he did not support democratic reforms he was a "despot"; if he did, he was undercutting the monarchy and his own claims to legitimacy. To eliminate "useless" rituals from the royal repertoire was to commit soteriological suicide and to advocate that his subjects do the same. Not to do so was to risk colonization by the French or the British--or to miss out on the benefits that they had to offer (receipt of which

became increasingly necessary for princes was to triumph over their rivals for the throne.⁷

An ideological polarization between blood and merit or rank and ability emerged and deepened as the decades wore on. Beginning approximately in the 1850s, the king's impeccable lineage became identified not with superior merit and ability, but with its opposite: with despotism, ignorance, and oppression. This polarization of the values of blood and merit played on preexisting strands of Buddhist royal traditions that concerned the consequences of rule by "evil kings"--except that previous royal traditions were based on the opposition of good to evil kings, not on the belief that all kings were evil or that the institution of the Buddhist kingship was inherently inimical to moral order.

The kings of the Cakkri dynasty responded initially to this dilemma by identifying ('naming') the beliefs and practices that Westerners considered "despotic" as "Hindu" (or "Khmer") "accretions" in an otherwise pure Buddhist polity and then by 'purifying' them from the ritual repertoire (or removing them from Western sight). By the turn of the twentieth century, Cakkri kings were emphasizing the idea that the righteous Buddhist king's sovereignty rested almost entirely on his superior merit and ability [bun/prasopakan], on his superior practical attributes, rather than on his pure lineage. Such new ideologies of kingship left ambiguous the question whether royal abilities were practical or cosmic-cerebral in nature (cf. Chula 1960:231-232; Vella 1978:62), whether a king's powerful 'inclination' towards practicality, like his powerful inclination towards dhamma, was a function of the purity of his blood (cf. chapters 1, 17). Twentieth-century kings

⁷See Riggs (1966) and Likhit (1975:3) for alternative statements of this dilemma.

eschewed the legitimating strategies of their predecessors, whose claims to the throne were based on genealogical claims, on claims to be the sons or grandsons, 'lost' or otherwise, of past kings. Claims to religious purity were no longer negotiated primarily and explicitly in the idiom of royal genealogies.

In his defense of the concept of culture against varieties of "practical reason," Marshall Sahlins argues that each culture conforms to material constraints "according to a definite symbolic scheme which is never the only one possible. Hence it is culture which constitutes utility" (1976:vii). In the Thai-Buddhist case, two mutually-negating ideals of utility were imposed simultaneously, and the king was supposed to embody both.

In the 1920s waves of soldiers and economic experts began returning from study in the West with the expectation that they would help rule the modern polity. Given their obvious expertise in practical matters as defined in Western terms, and Cakkri kings' obvious lack of the same, it began to seem as if royal blood and merit and ability were indeed opposed phenomena. Cakkri kings and their noble courtiers may have had pure blood, but they clearly lacked the merit and ability--i.e., knowledge of Western economic theory--that was increasingly being portrayed as the type of knowledge necessary to rule a modern capitalist polity. The ideology of the king as a man of superior practical experience and as "the father of democracy" had backfired; the knowledge and practical experience of these "new men" of humble origins clearly surpassed that of the monarch.

The period from 1932 to 1957 represents the antithesis of previous royal traditions. This period is distinguished by the elite's near total rejection of the idea that a ruler's abilities were in any way

connected to the purity of his bloodline. The results were catastrophic. It was only when men of non-royal blood tried to rule the polity that the principle of pure bloodline was revealed as the operant ideology of rule.

In 1932 a military coup replaced the so-called "absolute monarchy" with a "constitutional monarchy." The antinomy problem reversed itself for the "new men" who ruled the polity through World War II. They had merit and ability (and, in theory at least, supported democratic practices) but they lacked pure blood. Democratic ideologies to the contrary, the majority of the nation's citizens assumed that pure blood was the literal source of a ruler's power and wisdom. It was the source of the transcendent religious 'insight' [yan] and 'wisdom' [pañña] necessary for rulers to accurately interpret the cosmos and rule the polity accordingly.

At this point the ritual system assumed a new historical importance. The "new men" had to make merit at resplendent temples to "catch up" with the monarchy in the area of virtue and to enhance their perceptual/interpretive abilities. How else could they gain the moral, ritual, and linguistic authority of kings? In particular, they had to be ritually pure if they were to introduce new folk economic theories--to account for the chaos in which the kingdom found itself during the Great Depression.

There was an obstacle to the grand merit-making plans of the new rulers of the kingdom, however. First, the conspicuous performance of Buddhist rituals contravened their own ideologies of efficiency in the management of the state. Second, royal temples were lineage temples: For commoners to make merit at temples containing the relics of kings was easily represented as a form of greed [lobha], men 'grasping' at

honours that were not theirs by birth. In the absence of a king it was not clear who had title to these temples.

From 1932 to 1948, Thailand's so-called "constitutional period,"⁸ the kingdom had no ruling monarch and thus no soteriological center. Military strongmen, politicians, and powerful Buddhist monks engaged in endless 'races for virtue,' struggling to assume the royal ritual prerogatives and thus the revelatory powers of kings.

The antinomy problem was particularly virulent for these men. Like the Cakkri kings before them, they were criticized simultaneously by mutually-negating standards of purity and veracity. When they promoted "democratic" practices, adopted Western speech styles (argument and debate; cf. Vernant [1982:49-50]), or advanced capitalist ideologies their behavior was automatically identified as signs of moral and cosmic decline, yet they lacked the royal blood that would have enabled them to successfully dominate and transform the ritual system and hence to perform activities that could help overcome these contradictions. u When they tried to purify the state without recourse to a royal authority or to traditional sources of legitimacy and purification (ritual), or, worse yet, when they tried to make changes in a way that interrupted the rhythms of the ritual calendar, the changes were automatically perceived as heralding calamity rather than prosperity. Their perpetrators were perceived both as destroying the sacred order by usurping the prerogatives of kings (i.e., taking things that were not rightfully theirs) and destroying democratic traditions.

⁸A long line of mostly military leaders ruled under a series of constitutions.

In 1950 a genuine king returned and found that he would have to fight for the prerogatives that, in the past, would have been his by office and by birthright. A three-way race for virtue developed between the king, a military strongman, and a powerful Isan monk. The king began trading hereditary ritual for economic prerogatives with disenfranchised Chinese merchants in order to build up the royal treasury. This resulted in a legitimation deadlock and brings us to the point where the thesis proper begins.

In 1956 the United States began to take an active interest in developing the Thai polity. The monarchy was reintegrated into the power structure, and a new historical synthesis was achieved. The king entered into a partnership with the nation's new military strongman, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Traditional royal ritual prerogatives were divided relatively equally between the "monarchy" and the "government": The government supported the king's claims to sacrality and the king used the interpretive powers and naming prerogatives that were his by birth to represent new capitalist ideologies and practices as forms of moral purification. In his speeches, rituals, and cycle of royal activities, the king represented radical change as tradition, as 'the way things have always been.' This, plus the king's pro-capitalist transformation of the ritual calendar (chapter 16) and his creation of new 'development'-oriented royal activities, smoothed the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes of production, especially in remote rural areas. In the eyes of the government, these areas (Isan foremost among them) contained the last of the nation's unconverted--men unconverted both to new and more proper modes of religious practice and to new and more proper modes of conduct in the marketplace.

In the 1960s the government had almost totally transformed the royal ritual structure in such a way as to allow a new class of entrepreneurs (bureaucrats, generals, and powerful Chinese merchants) to penetrate rural markets in the guise of great world renouncers. These men demonstrated their extraordinary virtue by performing kathin ceremonies 'in the name of the king' at prestigious royal temples in rural capitals.

The 1960s was a period of economic expansion. Inflation set in as the decade drew to a close, however, and Sarit's successors began fighting openly over the spoils of the marketplace. The king, who had, at Sarit's behest remained 'above politics' while ritually active, was left as the nation's most 'unblemished' layman. In this situation, which exhibits a certain historical irony, the military's assumption of the more unpleasant of the king's duties (tax-collection and the use of force to maintain order, for example) left the twentieth-century Buddhist monarch more divine than ever. The military was momentarily eclipsed in the universe of merit and credibility.

The monarchy reached its apotheosis in the mid-1970s but the ascent of merchants on the social-celestial ladder of virtue coincided with another historical movement. By the mid-1970s the king had exchanged ritual for economic prerogatives to the point where a new, independent "merchant nobility" was created. This group consisted mostly of Chinese merchants who had grown 'close' to the monarch ('king and religion') through generous contributions to the royal charities. After twenty years a massive transfer of merit had occurred--from the monarch to the government and to this new merchant elite.

The twentieth-century version of the Buddhist monarchy was limited by two factors. The king had no harem, the traditional means through which

monarchs enhanced their "commercial possibilities," and he had no means of generating income that was acceptable by both Thai and Western standards of purity. In the mid-1970s, the king's wealth remained a major antinomy issue,⁹ just as it was before the fall of the monarchy in 1932.

A new ruling partnership began to form in the 1970s. It consisted of the new merchant nobility, who were able to assume the king's duties of dana, of resplendent gift-giving to the Sangha, and a military-bureaucracy, which executed the king's duties of artha and danda, the regulation of economic affairs and the exercise of force in the creation of order.

By the late 1970s the new business-bureaucratic elite had 'purified' themselves to the point where they controlled the ritual system and thus the production of new sacred objects (and persons)--independent, if need be, of the approval of a monarch. This new elite began to control the distribution of prestige and honour, the qualities necessary to command the interpretive and naming prerogatives of kings.

A new version of the concept of pure lineage emerged in the mid-1970s, a concept of pure spiritual lineage. Wealthy capitalists and men of disparate backgrounds could unite in a single moral community, in a 'line of merit at the head of the nation,' by offering resplendent gifts to the king and the Buddhist Sangha. The ancient concept of pure lineage, based on the idea of the sharing of pure blood (i.e., biogenetic substances) was thus gradually deemphasized in favor of another, the concept of a pure lineage of capitalists who were united by

⁹Neither tribute nor heavily-disguised market activity was acceptable to Westerners as a suitable means of filling the royal treasuries; if the king's subjects associated him directly with increasingly controversial capitalist activity he was no longer a legitimate Dhammaraja.

the sharing of pure practice. Or, the Buddhist ideology of spiritual lineage began to predominate over Hindu-Buddhist ideologies of lineage which conflated ideologies of pure blood and spiritual purity.

The antinomy issue accounts for the gumsa/gumlao cycles of Thai society, the alternating patterns of military and democratic rule. Ever since the nineteenth century it has been relatively easy for opponents to criticize leaders by dual and contradictory standards: for attempting to legitimate themselves in the "despotic" manner of past kings, for failing to uphold sacred and hierarchical religious traditions, and for failing to support democratic practice. Similarly, they could be criticized simultaneously for running the economy 'in the old way' and for failing to take care of (distribute economic benefits to) their subordinates. In the former instance they were 'corrupt' and in the latter they lacked barami or virtue: they were ungenerous. Depending on which stage of the antinomy cycle the nation is in, opponents of a regime, be it civilian or military, have only to invoke Western or indigenous ideals of purity to delegitimize whomever is in power. It is relatively easy for men to gain power and almost impossible to hold it for long: thus Thailand's long history of military coups and Western perceptions of its "instability."

I suggest that the efforts of Thai leaders to mediate the contradictory value systems of East and West comprise Thailand's "distinct mode of becoming" (devenir). As this dissertation will demonstrate, the kathin and other aspects of the ritual system were continually transformed as a response to antinomy problems. Kathin ceremonies of all sorts became integral to the dialogue between East and West and between Buddhist and Western values, their transformation one response to the tensions and contradictions entailed by recent

capitalist development. In turn, they have become a positive force in generating those tensions and contradictions.

Buddhism and Capitalism: A Cultural Analysis

This dissertation is a general statement about--and exploration of--the relation between Buddhism and capitalism in Thailand. It explores this relationship by using cultural methods of analysis: by analyzing symbols and their meanings, discourse structures, cosmological paradigms, and rituals as media of communication.

One of its central ideas is that merit [bun] and ritual action [pithikan] are central rather than peripheral to modern capitalist expansion and must be studied as such, an idea that runs counter to Rigg's (1966:108-109) thesis that ritual and kingship have become modernized and secularized since the nineteenth century, retained as part of Thai tradition but lacking the sacred overtones of the past. As I shall demonstrate, in many respects, the modern kingship is more sacred than ever.

One reason why ritual and religious practice are crucial to the development of modern capitalism is that they are the basis of an ancient epistemological tradition that enables a ruling elite to dominate men's perceptions of the world and their perceptions of change in the world. This type of epistemological domination takes a variety of forms. Ritual purity is the source men's ability to pronounce authoritatively on the true 'meaning of things.' It is the source of the elite's ability to prescribe the dhamma (appropriate codes of conduct) for the nation's citizens in response to constantly changing social cum cosmic conditions, i.e., market conditions. It is the medium through which men gain the right (and, presumably, the ability) to name and

rename social practice. The exercise of this right enables them to draw attention to new values and practices, or to deflect attention away from unpleasant realities--to disguise the dynamics of change.

I argue that ritual is not central to modern capitalist development because it is a literal mechanism for the redistribution of wealth, although this is true in some cases.¹⁰ Rather, I argue that ritual is a central mechanism for the redistribution of prestige and honour, kiat, bun and barami, the primary means by which men systematically accumulate different types of symbolic (as opposed to monetary) capital, the accumulation of which is prerequisite to the accumulation of monetary capital in remote rural areas.

Following Bourdieu (1977:5-7, 171-172), I use the term "symbolic capital" to refer to the store of favors that is accumulated through ritual prestations (e.g., to the Buddhist Sangha) and to the authority that is gained in this process: authority that enables men to impose their interpretations on experience (1977:40). The favors gained in the ritual process, linguistic included, are left unspoken, to be returned at some unspecified date in the future.

Merit-making results in the accumulation of other, interrelated types of symbolic capital as well, including "cultural" and "linguistic" capital. By cultural capital I refer to men's abilities to assign meanings to symbols--and 'names' to men, places, activities, and values. (In Theravada Buddhist polities, the naming of auspicious sights, objects, activities, and values entails the assignation of proper

¹⁰In others, however, particularly those concerning the modern power elite, the opposite holds true: ritual sponsors often downplay the size of their kathin contributions in order to deflect attention away from the size of their personal fortunes, or to disavow an unseemly interest in (or 'attachment' to) the natural resources of a particular village or temple (chapter 20).

emotional attitudes towards those sights, practices, values, etc. It not only designates what men should know about their world, but how they should feel about it as well.) In addition, gift-giving to the Sangha is a major source of linguistic capital. The kathin is a redistributive mechanism in that it not only endows select ritual sponsors with the ability to name and interpret words and things, but because it redistributes speech norms amongst the populace. It is a fundamental mechanism for determining who may speak authoritatively about change and who must remain silent, mute witness to change. These linguistic distinctions are encoded in the spatial organization of the ritual (chapter 20). In separating participants from observers, the ritual distinguishes men who are 'entangled' in worldly affairs and thus unable to accurately foresee the consequences of their actions from men who are 'above' and detached from social process, and who can therefore interpret it in a detached and accurate manner.

One of the most fundamental principles of modern kingship is that of the visual potency of the king and his activities, a concept of power that is common to both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions (cf. Babb 1982). Or, it can be characterized as a key heterodox aspect of the Theravada Buddhist tradition transformed by the Theravada emphasis on pure practice, concepts of person, and related concepts of communicating or teaching 'through the senses.' As my data indicate (chapters 10 and 11), 'seeing the king' is a type of religious experience for his subjects, one that is akin to that of viewing the sacred traces of the Buddha (cf. Mus 1935). It is not just the sight of the king (as a deity) that inclines his subjects towards the practice of dhamma, however; the sight of his pure practice accomplishes the same goal, in much the same way that the sight of pure Buddhist monks is believed to

inspire men to the practice of dhamma. Perhaps the dominant idiom of righteous power in modern Thai society is that of the 'pure model,' tua yang. This term refers to objects, activities, and men which serve as visual, righteous 'body examples' of dhamma to others.

This cultural dimension of the monarchy contravenes popular Western scholarly interpretations of recent changes in that institution. It challenges the popular interpretation that, by coming into close proximity to his people (allowing them to catch a glimpse of him), the king is demonstrating that he, indeed, "is a man and not a god" (cf. Riggs 1966:108-109), an interpretation that the king promotes for his Western audience.

By Buddhism I refer to Buddhist rituals, Buddhist kingship, and to the corpus of ideas about men, society, and the cosmos that are found in Theravada texts, myths, and rituals and which inform the Thai cultural system. Three different types of relations between Buddhism and capitalism can be tentatively isolated. There is what might be called a "practical affinity"--e.g., between the structure of Thai temple and ritual networks in the modern "radial" polity and the universal capitalist imperative to penetrate new markets. There are certain natural, ideological affinities, especially those which concern ancient Buddhist traditions of knowledge--what Weber refers to as a "narrow tradition of knowledge." This tradition asserts that truth is that which is arrived at only through prescribed methods of religious endeavor, by religious virtuosi (cf. Weber 1963:170). The implications of this tradition are far-reaching and crucial with respect to the expansion of the modern capitalist economy. It is through control of the ritual system, the Buddhist Sangha, and the Buddhist kingship that men gain the power to pronounce authoritatively on that which is

univerally 'true,' proper, and soteriologically meaningful in modern Thai society. By gaining control of the religious media they gain control of the production of meaning and veracity. They gain the right and the ability to make authoritative pronouncements on permanent and universal truths, the realization of which will, in theory, give rise to order in society and the cosmos. By gaining control of a "master" set of rituals and sacred meanings, they automatically gain control over subordinate domains of meaning and activities. They gain the resources necessary to assign meanings and values to lesser domains of activity, and, more important, the ability to designate which are master and subordinate domains of activity. Similarly, the long-term effect of the transformation of the ritual system was to transfer the symbolic capital associated with religious purity [barami] from the Buddhist king and the Sangha to the merchant nobility (technocrats) while still maintaining the exclusivity of the interpretive prerogatives that are identified with extreme religious devotion (chapters 14 and 18). Finally, there is a negative affinity: Buddhism thrives as a result of the alienation experienced by men from all classes as the economy modernizes (Conclusion).

Thailand and the United States

Any study of contemporary Thai society must account for the U.S. influence on that polity and the mutual denial of that influence. Thailand's relationship with the United States is complex, heavily disguised, and, in many instances, actively denied by the leaders of both countries,¹¹

¹¹The U.S. influence is sometimes referred to as the invisible 'third hand' [mu thi sam] that guides the economy and the nation's political affairs.

As any researcher who has ever encountered tight-lipped American "field men" in remote rural areas, been accused of being a C.I.A. agent, or heard American rock music blaring at temple fairs well knows, the American presence is alive and well in Thailand. In many cases, it is difficult if not impossible to determine the extent of American influence in Thailand. Thailand is a nation of secrets: of secret bombings and air bases during the Vietnam War, of secret military pacts and aid agreements, of secret business transactions and secret ownership of businesses and joint venture corporations. This is precisely the point; the American presence has taken on powerful cosmological, religious, and even mythic overtones. The American influence on the Thai economy and polity has become a symbol of uncertainty, of men's inability to know truth. Like the Watergate debacle in America, much of what was "suspected" about secret American military involvement in Thailand and in other nations of Southeast Asia is now a matter of public record; anyone who believed that no such clandestine connections existed can now be labeled "naive." For the anthropologist to fail to account for the U.S. presence and the systematic denial of that presence is to incorporate the ideologies of the governments of both countries into the analytic model.

While it is not the main focus of the dissertation, I suggest ways in which the clandestine nature of the U.S. presence articulates with traditional beliefs about the cosmos and the laws of kamma. In particular, the dissertation describes the dynamics of ritual change as a response to modern discourse imperatives: Thai leaders' ability to maintain public positions of power is, in large part, a function of their ability to separate hostile (Thai and Western) audiences, contradictory messages, and communication styles. Among other things,

this separation is necessary to reinforce the denial that 'outside' (American) influences are at work on the polity--and to maintain the identification of outside 'foreign' and malevolent influences on the polity with 'communism' rather than with capitalism. The dissertation describes how Buddhist rituals work to resolve antinomy issues--how they address problems that have arisen as a direct result of U.S. involvement in the planning of the Thai economy. Many of the general anxieties that are felt by individuals in recent years concern the nature and extent of the U.S. influence (chapters 11 and 20).

The Chinese

No discussion of capitalist development in Thailand would be complete without a discussion of the role of Chinese merchants, for centuries the nation's leading traders. Under the sakdina system of rank that prevailed until 1932, the Chinese were formally disenfranchised members of the Theravada Buddhist soteriological state--later 'nation.' In centuries past they received trade prerogatives from the king but rarely ritual honours or rights to control land. There was elite assimilation at the top of the social order, through intermarriage with members of the royal family, and intermarriage at the bottom. The distinction between 'Thai' and 'Chinese' people has been retained, however, along with voting laws that discriminate against the latter.

The dissertation extends the work of Charnwit (1979) by demonstrating how Chinese immigrants become integrated in Thai society by fulfilling of Buddhist prophecies (or by producing dynastic texts which portray themselves as fulfilling Buddhist prophecies) or by conforming to Theravada models of pure action (chapter 4). Most important, by describing the significance and use of royal naming prerogatives (and

their recent transfer from one class to another), it suggests how such prerogatives are used to designate 'Chinese' versus 'Thai' people, the proper occupations of these putatively "separate" ethnic groups, and their 'duties' or proper codes of conduct under a succession of kings and governments (chapters 5-8).

The dissertation extends Skinner's (1957, 1958) work on the Chinese leadership in Thailand by demonstrating how the ritual structures of the 1960s operate as integrative mechanisms. They allow a new merchant nobility to assume key interpretive prerogatives and leadership positions that are traditionally open only to Thai-Buddhists and to manipulate the categories of 'Chinese' and 'Thai' and 'Buddhist' in accordance with their own interests and in response to changes in the economy. I describe the ritual structures through which increasing numbers of elite and middle-class 'Chinese people' have become enfranchised as Thai citizens as the economy expands. I suggest how the evolution of the concept of lineage has worked to enfranchise the owners of large to medium-sized businesses and to create bonds between new interest groups.

Kathin: Studies of Thai History and Politics

My thesis and data challenge the assumptions of classical "political" studies of Thailand, those by Wilson (1962), Riggs (1966) and more recently by Girling (1981). These works begin by acknowledging the importance of Buddhist kingship, cosmology, etc. on the social system, make an analytic distinction between political, economic and religious data, and then exclude the latter from the bulk of their analyses. As the dissertation will demonstrate (chapters 13 and 14), this approach closes off crucial avenues of investigation. For example, it deflects

attention away from the insights to be derived by the realization that the mobility of Buddhist monks is a perfect foil for the mobility of capital. Buddhist meditation monks move into the forests (i.e., undeveloped portions of rural areas) to purify themselves. They are followed closely by a pious merchant laity anxious to venerate them (cf. Weber 1958:332).

My data indicate that the penetration of capital in rural areas is occurring along the "radial" lines described by Tambiah in World Conqueror and World Renouncer (1976), although not necessarily in the way Tambiah envisions. The penetration of capital to the countryside involves an initial retracing and then extension of the monastic lines that lead from Bangkok to regional capitals, and from there to remote districts of Northeastern provinces--and to new markets. High-ranking Buddhist monks have become the inadvertent "silent partners" of many of the new business enterprises of the Northeast. These constantly expanding monastic lineages and their attendant ritual structures connect ambitious Bangkok businessmen with rural monks in such a way as to maintain the anonymity of ritual participants. These new long-distance ritual structures instantiate indigenous ideologies of detachment and sacred events, thereby allowing ritual participants to misrecognize the calculation involved in their ritual exchanges (chapter 16). As noted above, the ritual system generates more than merit; it creates prestige and credibility and it can be constantly transformed ('purified') so as to express the ideologies of the new merchant elite--and to constantly evade the contradictions that these new ideologies entail (chapters 11 and 18).

I extend previous studies of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and other polities of Southeast Asia by exploring the epistemological dimensions

of Buddhist ritual, kingship, and pilgrimage traditions (chapters 4, 5, and 12). Kathin performances are organized according to highly-structured hierarchical patterns of communication. These communication patterns presuppose major distinctions between the knowledge and perceptual capacities of ritual participants (chapter 17). The separation of knowledge and interests that is implied and maintained by this structure imbues the kathin with an aura of spontaneity--and therefore, again, of sacrality.

These epistemological features of the discourse system have important implications for anthropological studies of ritual: in that the "invisibility" of the pre-ritual preparations constitutes its major felicity factor. Most anthropological studies of ritual include descriptions of pre-ritual preparations as a matter of course, and then focus on the actual "performance" as the main object of study.

I analyze the evolution of the Thai-Buddhist kingship by focusing on persistent mythological structures that are found in both Buddhist and Hindu epic tales (chapters 3 and 17). I suggest that this is one way of explaining both the limitations of the contemporary monarchy and the constraints of modern capitalist development.

The dissertation was done in the spirit of Michael Taussig's The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America (1980), and builds on Tambiah's (1976) study of the Thai polity, World Conqueror and World Renouncer. Tambiah's main concern is the relationship between religion and polity; mine is the relationship between religion, kingship, and economy. Tambiah is concerned with the historical "transformations and continuities" in the Thai polity and religious system. I highlight a specific structural feature of Thai history, that of antinomy, and argue that this principle of contradiction accounts for the exact nature of

many of these "transformations and continuities." In addition, I suggest that antinomy issues shape the anthropologist's experience in the field. They determine what informants will say to an American, in what language, and perhaps deny at a later date.

This work borrows somewhat from the ritual theory that Sherry Ortner advances in Sherpas through Their Rituals (1978:2-3). Ortner examines rituals as "problem-solving" media in Sherpa society. Problems are resolved to the degree to which they and their solutions are convincingly portrayed in and transformed by cultural performances that express the fundamentals of the society's world view. The problems she focuses on are specific to the sexes or to age groups, however, a focus which fails to account for external and extranational pressures that shape ritual processes and become integral to the problems of groups and individuals. I approach the kathin as a problem-solving device that temporarily "solves" or resolves the problems of individuals and interest groups in Thai society--antinomy problems. I examine changes in the kathin first in the context of Thailand's relations with Western polities and fluctuation in the world market, and then in relation to the problems of individuals and interest groups (chapters 11 and 20), the 'Chinese' included.

The dissertation constructs a structural, symbolic account of Thai history that is similar to that of Marshall Sahlins' (1982, 1985) history of the Hawaiian Islands. In contrast to Sahlins' work, which emphasizes how the initial interactions between Hawaiians and the British revolved around totally different but harmonious interpretations of the same event (e.g., Captain Cook's arrival in the Hawaiian islands)--i.e., "Janus" rituals or historical events--my work emphasizes the structured nature of the disharmonies that prevail between

Thai-Buddhist and Western cultural systems and interpretive frameworks. I show how the mutually-negating qualities of these cultural systems and frameworks themselves comprise a principle of historical development.

The dissertation draws from and extends Thak's (1979) work on the Sarit era and Girling's otherwise comprehensive analysis of the modern polity by demonstrating the "religious" factors that comprise the invisible dynamics of modern capitalist development. It reveals the existence and execution of an invisible government ritual policy that was created to spearhead capitalist development in rural areas (chapter 10), and explains why it remained invisible (chapter 17).

The dissertation draws from and extends Hanks' (1962) classic essay, "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order," in part by specifying the hierarchical patterns of communication that operate within cliques or 'circles' of patrons and clients and structure the performance of Buddhist ceremonies. This model of communication, which is derived from the analysis of Buddhist cosmology, provides a basis of comparison with anthropological works whose main theoretical focus is "structure and event" theory (cf. Pouillon 1966, 1977; Friedrich 1978; Sahlins 1981, 1985). I demonstrate how hierarchical communication patterns structure "events" and communication about events in Thai society. They structure interactions between government officials and the Lao people of northeastern Thailand and account as well for the "sudden" discovery of Isan saints by Bangkok power elite in the last twenty years (cf. Tambiah 1984; chapter 15). Operating in conjunction with cycles of the world economy, these hierarcical interpretive structures regulate the timing of "challenges" of rural people to the morality of capitalist practices.

The dissertation draws from Reynolds' (1971), Duméil's (1971), and Vernant's (1982) studies of kingship in particular, as from well as

those of Heesterman (1978), Inden (1976, 1978), and Hocart (1969). It confirms Hilary Putnam's (1975) sociolinguistic theory about language change with regard to Thai-Theravada and probably most Theravada societies: a "linguistic division of labor" lies at the heart of the Buddhist king's power over his subjects (chapter 3). It complements Wales (1931) Siamese State Ceremonies by providing contemporary accounts of the royal kathin ceremony and adds to existing anthropological studies of the kathin, most if not all of which are confined to the village context (e.g., Kaufman 1960; Nash 1966; Spiro 1970; Tambiah 1970). The historical narrative details the steps through which the kathin was transformed from an inter-village to an interregional phenomenon (cf. Kaufman 1960:185-186) and describes a medial category of semi-royal, semi-official "state" ceremony, the kathin phrarachathan, created by the most recent wave of ruling elite, Thailand's "new technocrats." It allows urban capitalists to 'latch on' to the virtue of the king and penetrate rural areas simultaneously. The dissertation also describes a similarly "semi-official" type of provincial kathin ceremony, the 'unity kathin.' 'Unity kathin' performed by provincial officials achieve the same goals as the kathin phrarachathan only on a smaller scale and in rural areas instead of in provincial capitals. It describes some repercussions of this new category of ritual insofar as it affects to capitalist development in the most remote areas of the Northeast (chapter 13, 14, 19, 20).

The dissertation adds to a body of historical and anthropological literature on the Isan people (Keyes 1967, 1971, 1973; Kirsch 1967; Tambiah 1970; Bunnag 1977). It attempts to describe the persistent structural features of a 'Thai-Buddhist' history that incorporates the perspective of the Isan peoples. The analysis draws from insights

developed by historians of religion (Mus 1935; Reynolds 1971, 1972 ; Reynolds and Clifford 1980) in the study of Theravada Buddhism and applies them to a broad set of contemporary issues. It draws from and extends the literature on Thai legal traditions (Lingat 1950; Engel 1975; Wyatt 1982) and on the history of the Thai Sangha (C. Reynolds 1973; Tambiah 1976; Wyatt 1969), and complements O'Connor's (1978) study of Thai urban (and royal) temples.

The concluding section on the modern kingship examines the royal temple system as a "language of images" (Mitchell 1980), detailing how some of the elements of this system have taken on the transferring properties of metaphor (Ricoeur 1977, 1978; Isbell 1985) in order to overcome the incompatibilities between Buddhism and Western capitalism. It borrows from the field of literary criticism, from Genette's (1982) work on categories of intertextuality, in order to construct an analytic language of monastic rivalry, temple-building and other text-building activities that rely primarily on visual rather than verbal modes of communication. It provides clues as to the types of linguistic elaboration that have attended this most recent capitalist revolution in Thailand, and data for comparison of this process as it has occurred in other societies and historical epochs (cf. Sarkisyanz 1965; Sewell 1980).

The last section suggests a new area of inquiry, namely that concerning the role of commercial banks in the transformation of Thai-Buddhism and the Thai-Buddhist cultural system. Finally, it addresses the issues raised in the anthropological literature on the relationship of Buddhism to capitalism. I will discuss this literature in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

BUDDHISM AND THE WESTERN CULTURE OF CAPITALISM: ANTINOMIES

Introduction

What are the cultural dynamics of modern capitalist development in Thailand?¹ What are the cultural mechanisms through which the Thai

¹I define capitalism or "Western capitalism" in descriptive and historical terms to avoid imputing the teleology of Marxist analyses to changes in Thai society (cf. Turton 1978). Thailand exhibits many of the socio-cultural characteristics of capitalism as identified by Weber (1946, 1958), largely as a result of British and American influence. The society has moved towards a system in which capital, labor and the exchange of goods is calculated in terms of money; labor is "free," bought and sold in the market; there is an increasing spatial separation of work from residence, and of work from familial duties. In the last century Thai society has been increasingly organized around the "interest struggles of men in the market," particularly in the international market (cf. Weber 1946:331). Thai leaders have made serious efforts to promote continuous, not occasional, capitalist enterprise on the part of the nation's citizens. They have introduced a succession of ideologies in which human worth is increasingly calculated in terms of wages and productivity (i.e., efficiency in the work place) rather than religious purity. Put more accurately, the Thai leadership has made systematic efforts to equate efficiency in the marketplace with religious purity, portray manual labor as an inherently virtuous activity the accumulation and consumption of manufactured goods as a desirable end in itself. In the last century land, like labor, has become a commodity (cf. Tomosugi 1980) and the nation's elite, including the king, have devoted tremendous energy towards defining the 'meaning' and moral significance of private property, in particular, land ownership. In the last twenty years in particular, the nation's infrastructure has been built up to promote access to rural markets and to encourage import substitution. Crops have been diversified to adapt to demands of the world market system and new industries have been developed in consultation with American economic advisors from both the public and private sectors. Finally, the "master to slave" [nai-phrai] relations of previous centuries are being replaced by the impersonal ones of creditor to debtor: In the last decade, commercial banking has spread throughout the country. Bankers are fostering new social relations with the deliberate intent to encourage Thai farmers to break out of personalized debt relations with Chinese merchants and become "customers" (and debt-holders) to commercial banks.

economy is integrated with and made dependent on the world market system?² How does one study a society whose leaders' ability to maintain power is a function of their ability to forge close alliances with American corporations and officials, open up new markets in rural areas, and demonstrate great religious purity simultaneously? How does one reconcile the insights of anthropologists about the importance of hierarchy and Buddhist ritual in Theravada Buddhist societies with non-anthropological formulations of the broad issues of "economic" change? One way is to examine the relationship between the epistemological and linguistic dimensions of Buddhism and the imperatives of capitalist expansion, and the antinomies between Buddhism and the Western culture of capitalism.

I will begin to explore these issues by examining how Max Weber arrives at his conclusions about the negative relationship between Buddhism and capitalist development. Working from a critique of Weber, I will construct a Thai-Buddhist ethnography of speaking and rank, then demonstrate some natural affinities and historical relations between Buddhism and capitalist expansion in Thailand.

²Ingram (1971) presents facts and figures about Thai imports and exports and the Thai bureaucracy in the period from 1850 to 1970. Tomosugi (1980) provides a structural analysis of the Thai economy, examining indigenous equivalents to concepts of "private property" and land ownership. Girling (1981) describes change in Thailand as part of a study of the Thai "political economy." Essays in Turton (1978) describe change from a Marxist perspective (i.e., in which religion is viewed as "superstructure" or "superstition"), focusing mostly on the events in the 1970s. Thak (1979) provides an excellent description of change during the Sarit era (1957-1963), and provides new data on the king's role in political process. Both Thak and Girling cite Tambiah (1976) and acknowledge that many of the changes that occurred in the Thai Sangha in the Sarit era were made with the deliberate intent to promote development in the countryside. Neither author examines data on the Sangha in great detail, however.

Max Weber

The work of Max Weber, perhaps more than that of any other scholar, has been instrumental in determining what issues are raised in the study of economic change in Southeast Asian polities. Weber's objective was to analyze the role of religion in the formation of a society's economic ethic: Could Buddhism have generated a full-scale capitalist system such as occurred in the West?

In two famous comparative essays, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions" (1946:267-301) and "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" (1946:323-359), his conclusion seems to be that Buddhism, especially when contrasted with Puritanism, has an "other-worldly" ethic that does not seem to be of a type to generate "practical impulses for action" in the world that could lead to full-scale capitalist development as occurred in the West. Weber characterizes Buddhist asceticism as a "minimization of action" in the world, and the Buddhist ethos as one in which men prove themselves against rather than through action in the world (1946:268, 323-324) (a feature of the ethos of some Protestant sects). Buddhism therefore seems totally opposed to the "spirit of capitalism" that developed in seventeenth-century Europe and which infuses the works of Benjamin Franklin, for example, wherein a man's moral worth is equated with the excellence of his business sense (Weber 1958:47-58).

Weber's conclusions in these comparative, "typologizing" essays (1946:268, 323-324) have been addressed by almost every major anthropologist to study Southeast Asia,³ many of whom ask the same questions that American development experts ask: How does Buddhist

³Pfanner and Ingersoll (1962:345); Obeysekere and Ingersoll 1962); Nash (1965); Spiro (1966); Tambiah (1973); Kirsch (1975); Keyes (1983).

merit-making activity relate to the productive use of wealth? What effect has the Buddhist Sangha on the productive use of labor? These questions bear a striking resemblance to those asked by European explorers and diplomats from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries: How can the economies of Theravada polities be properly "developed" if their rulers devote their energies to the performance of sacred rituals rather than to practical matters of state; if the Buddhist laity "waste" their money by giving it to Buddhist temples, or "stop work" and ordain as Buddhist monks?

A preliminary (and Western) reading of Buddhist doctrine seems to confirm Weber's speculations about the inherently negative relationship between Buddhism and the spirit of capitalism. As I shall demonstrate, to approach the study of religion and economy in modern Theravada polities especially in the manner of Weber "neo-Weberians" is unproductive at best and misleading at worst.

Weber Revisited

Tambiah and Reynolds have identified some of the most problematic aspects of Weber's work on early Buddhism in which he identifies Buddhist "asceticism" with an "other-worldly" orientation (1946:267-301, 323-359). First, Weber drew inferences about daily conduct in traditional society from ideal constructions of classical canonical literature rather than from actual social practice (Tambiah 1973:11) and second, like many Westerners, he tended to identify Buddhist ideals almost exclusively with the monastic ideal--with the spectre of men abandoning their daily labors to take up the yellow robes of the monk--rather than with the lay religious ideal. Third, as Reynolds (1971, 1972) points out, Weber overlooked strands of the canonical

tradition that portray economic activity in a positive light (those concerning kingship) and yet a fourth problem stems from Weber's concern with typologies: He describes social systems in terms of the motivations of individual actors or types of actors (prophets, redeemers, mystics, ascetics, etc.) rather than as structural totalities. Together these analytic foci led him to overlook the lay-monastic relationship, the mainspring of the soteriological dynamic in Theravada polities. Before asking if Buddhism provides an impetus to capitalist activity we must locate the actual soteriological dynamics of those polities.

The Two Wheels of Dhamma

As Frank Reynolds (1972) has demonstrated in a seminal essay, Theravada polities such as Sri Lanka and Thailand are traditionally structured as complementary lay and monastic domains of activity called the 'two wheels of dhamma,' the the 'domain of the king' and of worldly affairs [rajanachak] and the 'domain of religion' and of spiritual affairs [sasanachak]. Together they are called the 'two wheels [chak] of the law' of Buddhism. The rajanacak designates a domain of worldly knowledge and practice, the sasanachak, one of resplendent world order.

The relationship between the two domains is a dynamic one, activated by lay acts of dana [than] or almsgiving in merit-making ceremonies like the kathin (Reynolds and Clifford 1980:60). In the Theravada schema, the selfless giving of the Buddhist laity and the ascetic labors of Buddhist monks are not ways of escaping or minimizing action in the world; rather they are complementary ways of maintaining order in it. Selfless action is practical action (1980:59-60), and this-worldly and supra-worldly activities are inherently complementary, because monastic

and economic activity are seen as having a mutually beneficial effect on each other. Success in one domain guarantees success in the other, and vigorous market activity is potentially an expression, albeit indirect, of religious duty. The Buddhist laity must make money and generate wealth. How else would monks be free to study and then teach the dhamma? In the following sections I will examine the social and cultural implications of these statements.

Wealth and Merit

Merit-making is believed to confer natural benefits on men called 'the four blessings' of merit (happiness, strength, long life and 'good complexion' or good health), all of which are believed both to promote and index success in mundane affairs. In addition, merit-making is believed to generate a specific social state called 'unity' [khwa samakhi], a temporary cessation of the chaos that is fundamental to human society. 'Unity' of this type, generated in ceremonies like the kathin, is viewed as a prerequisite for the peaceful pursuit of any type of worldly activity that does not violate the five precepts of the Buddhist householder (chapter 9 ff.).⁴ Finally, merit-making purifies the minds of ritual participants, and purity of mind increases men's ability to behave with propriety and gentleness in their everyday labors.

Wealth is one key to salvation for the Buddhist layman in that the possession of cash can potentially alter men's kammic potential by 'opening opportunities' [poet okat] for men to make merit. Participation in merit-making ceremonies provides men with the opportunity to 'see dhamma' [hen tham], which endows them with greater

⁴These are precepts against lying, stealing, the taking of life, intoxication and sexual misconduct.

mental acuity: the memory lingers and is subsequently transformed into pure and harmonious social action. Merit-making alters men's kammic potential and positively influences the outcome of all subsequent social interactions. In a word, business may be good for religion, but religion is also good for business.

A thriving Sangha is believed to enhance this-worldly pursuits in additional ways which hinge on beliefs about the visual-moral or sensual properties of pure Buddhist monks and the visual dynamic that is believed to link Buddhist monks (and kings) with the Buddhist laity (chapter 11). Pure monks are believed to exercise a beneficial influence on all segments of society. Specifically, the sight of such monks is believed to "strike" at the senses of the Buddhist laity and generated moral-mental transformations in their 'hearts and minds' [cit lae cai], the seat of volition [cetana]. Thai monks are referred to as models or, literally, 'body-examples' [tua yang] of propriety [khwan riap roi] and of dhamma. "Visual texts" whose mere presence inspires the most uncivilized of men towards minimally righteous behavior, their presence enhances the life circumstances of all men who are reborn together in the same 'life' or region [chat] (the word for the Thai 'nation' [chat thai]).

Finally, as evidenced in Buddhist mythology, wealth is a paradox: striving after wealth epitomizes unhealthy attachment to worldly things or upadana while its "natural" (or peaceful) possession is considered to be a sign of great virtue, a natural benefit of merit. Weber points out that the pursuit of wealth in Buddhist societies is not a sign of virtue in and of itself, but as Buddhist cosmology and mythology make clear, its possession, in particular, its instantaneous possession, i.e., the rapidity with which it accrues to men-of demonstrably detached natures,

often is. Similarly, the rapidity of its loss is used as a testament to the truth of the laws of kamma or retribution: the fruits of one's bad deeds may manifest themselves dramatically at any moment.

When viewed thus in the context of the lay-monastic relationship rather than in terms of the monastic ethic alone, Theravada Buddhism does not preclude a positive valuation the pursuit on wealth, nor does it rule out a positive connection between the pursuit of wealth and the pursuit of salvation. On the contrary, a flourishing Sangha is a physical manifestation of the virtue of the Buddhist laity and is ideologically portrayed as a causal dynamic of individual and communal prosperity.⁵ As in some Protestant sects, purity and wealth may index each other but given the "indeterminacy of kamma," the Buddhist layman, like the Calvinist, can never be sure to what extent.

Buddhist Cosmology: The Nature/Culture Relationship

Perhaps the major weakness of Weber's analysis is that he overlooks aspects of Buddhist cosmology that govern the representation of wealth. Religious activities are seen as having "practical" benefits in Theravada societies precisely because of assumed cosmological connections between morality and environment. Unlike in Western cultural systems (Schneider 1968), natural and moral orders are portrayed as being linked (Reynolds and Clifford 1980). The

⁵Buddhism might even be said to have a strong "Calvinist streak." The "indeterminacy" of kamma, the law of retribution, of moral cause and effect, is believed to work itself out over many lifetimes. The Buddhist layman is never sure when the 'fruits' of an action, positive or negative, will 'appear' [prakot] in his own life. Being born in a high social position, having wealth or luck, is a hopeful sign that one, truly, has done good deeds in the past. This is analogous to the Calvinist belief about predestination. One cannot know for sure if one is a member of the elect. Being born into and maintaining a good life circumstance, probity in the conduct of one's everyday life, is a hopeful sign that this may be the case.

Pali-derived Thai word for 'nature' is thamma-chat or 'dhamma-born,' a word which refers to things 'arising naturally from dhamma.' Culture is wattana-tham or 'the material aspects of dhamma.'

According to Buddhist cosmology, "natural" or atmospheric process is both subject to and a manifestation of the laws of kamma and dhamma. Accordingly, it is also seen as being subject to and a manifestation of the moral-magical 'influence' [ithiphon] of religious virtuosi.

(Translated literally, ithiphon means the 'magical fruits' of virtue.)

Thus what to Weber and other Westerners seems a "minimization" of action in the world seems the opposite from the Buddhist perspective; wealth, including felicitous atmospheric phenomena, is a natural outcome of renunciatory practice.

The Multiplier Principle

Moral influence works on a cosmic "multiplier principle," according to which the power of virtuous monks and kings and the effects of their ritual activities radiate outwards in proportion to their degree of inner purity or purity of mind. This principle is expressed in the following well-known passage from The Book of the Gradual Sayings where the Buddha to his followers:

But monks, when rajahs are righteous, the ministers of rajahs also are righteous. When ministers are righteous, brahmins and householders also are righteous. Thus townsfolk and villagers are righteous. This being so, moon and sun go right in their courses. This being so, constellations and stars do likewise; days and night, months and fortnights, seasons and years go on their courses regularly; winds blow regularly and in due season. Thus the devas are not annoyed and the sky-deva bestows sufficient rain. Rains falling seasonably, the crops ripen in due season. Monks, when crops ripen in due season, men who live on crops are long-lived, well-favoured, strong and free from sickness. (Woodward 1933:85)

This cosmological schema, which operates on a principle of "indirect causality," not only shapes discourse about wealth and ethics in

Theravada societies, it is also the basis of antinomies between Buddhist and Western cultural systems, a point I shall address presently.

Wealth and Merit: The Celestial Connection

Theravada ethics regarding wealth revolve around two related concepts of the "celestial economy" and "celestial property," both of which derive from the principle of indirect causality. The popular image of the celestial economy governed by the activities of splendid kings and Buddhist monks, gods and demons, is based on the idea that resplendence in the cosmos, plentiful rainfall, thriving rice crops, social harmony, etc., is a direct result of the virtuous activities of great kings and great monks. It, too, works on a multiplier principle: cosmic splendor arises or is 'born' in proportion to the degree of purity of the king and Buddhist monks.

Buddhist concepts of "private property" or, more accurately, of "legitimate" property ownership, similarly derive from the ideology of "celestial property," that which 'falls from the sky' or appears 'naturally' (cf. chapter 8) in response to men's perfection of the ten Buddhist virtues [barami].

This concept is most dramatically expressed in the mythic figure of the great Cakkavatti King, the Universal or Wheel-Rolling Monarch. According to the fourteenth-century cosmology, the Three World According to King Ruang (chapter 3), the great Cakkavatti king is resting quietly in his palace one day when the Wheel of the Law, the Dhammacak, rises magically from the ocean floor in response to his perfection of the ten kingly virtues and hovers outside his window. Moving in a clockwise direction, following in the celestial trail of the Gemmed Wheel, the Cakkavatti King conquers the four continents of the universe. His

triumphant return to the royal palace is marked by the spontaneous appearance of additional celestial property: the "gemmed" wife, son, treasury, treasurer, elephant, horse, etc. (chapter 11) (symbolized for the earthly Buddhist king in the glittering royal regalia and the spatial values of royal ceremonies).

The Buddhist King

As Reynolds points out in his critique of Weber, Buddhist monks are not the only beings whose behavior embodies religious ideals. The behavior of Buddhist kings also embodies religious ideals, and the connection between merit and wealth is most positively expressed in those strands of the canonical literature that concern the sacral kingship.

The Buddhist king, the Dhammaraja or Righteous Ruler, presides over the two wheels of dhamma. His duty is to regulate lay and monastic affairs and maintain the proper balance between them. He does this while pursuing his own salvation: by perfecting the ten Buddhist virtues or barami,⁶ the same as those perfected by the bodhisatta in his lives before rebirth as the Buddha and by the king of the Trai Phum before becoming a Cakkavatti or universal monarch. Of these virtues, dana or almsgiving in the form of material support for the Sangha, is foremost.

Traditionally (chapter 18) at least, the Buddhist king is the wealthiest layman in Buddhist polity. By observing the proper code of conduct of kings and by perfecting the virtue of dana he renounces the most wealth to the Sangha and therefore does the most of any Buddhist

⁶Barami is used in Buddhist texts to refer both to particular virtues and to moral perfection. The virtues include renunciation, almsgiving, diligence in the search for knowledge, etc.

layman to enhance the monks' quest for truth and knowledge. In so doing, he stands as the layman's model for the righteous acquisition and distribution of wealth.

The king's authority derives from his pure lineage, his great wealth, and his great merit, all of which are seen as being mutually indexing. His royal lineage, like his great renunciatory actions, establishes him in a long line of kings who 'might have been' future Buddhas and raises the possibility that he, too, is a bodhisatta or Future Buddha (chapter 3). His pure blood is believed to endow him with natural purity of mind and his pure practice, which further enhances that purity of mind, endows him with extraordinary wisdom which far surpasses that of his subjects. It is this quality of wisdom, pañña, that enables him to make authoritative pronouncements concerning the proper activities or codes of conduct of Buddhist monks and Buddhist laity (chapters 3, 15-17).

The wealth of the ordinary Buddhist king, like that of the great Cakkavatti king, is believed to 'flow' naturally to him in response to his great virtue, an ideology that is portrayed visually in Thai royal activities past and present (chapter 11). Royal rituals dramatize situations in which the king's subjects, hearing of his great virtue, come 'naturally' to venerate him, to pay homage and tribute, and to cooperate in royal ventures.

The Buddhist king is believed to share the attractive visual-sensory qualities of the Buddha and of pure Buddhist monks. Like the sight of the Hindu gods (cf. Babb 1982), the sight of a righteous Buddhist king is believed to inspire men to emulate his exemplary behavior: ergo the constant dictum to Thai civil servants and citizens to 'make their bodies into body-examples' [tham tua pen tua yang] as an example to the people (chapter 12). These attractive visual qualities enable the king

to command his subjects' voluntary compliance with his wishes, a point I shall address presently.

The royal ethic of wealth and merit is but an exaggerated version of the layman's ethic, and thus the Buddhist king stands as an exemplar of the proper distribution of wealth in the kingdom. He acts as a powerful model of detachment for his lay subjects when he offers splendid gifts to the Sangha. He stands, too, as a model for the proper distribution of wealth in worldly domains: his many charitable activities indicate that wealth does not 'stick' [tit] to the royal hands but rather is 'circulated' [munwian] throughout the kingdom in an endless stream of royal generosity (chapter 16). Such activities are indices of the king's perfection of the virtue of boricak or renunciation and 'announce' his superior progress on the path of purification (chapter 3). Part of the celestial economy, they deflect attention from the sources of his wealth.

The temporal Thai king plays specific roles in delineating and promoting an order of 'economic' activities in his kingdom. In administering the 'royal trade,' for example, the king implicitly designates which activities are proper and beneficial to the society at large (e.g., specific types of production) and which are harmful (e.g., trade with foreigners). He indicates which economic activities, 'duties' [na thi] or codes of conduct (Inden 1976), are appropriate for which categories of citizens. 'Thai' farmers do not trade; 'Chinese' merchants do not own land (chapter 5). The king also designs an "economic" ethic for his kingdom by constantly interpreting market activities in relation to an overarching soteriological ethic: by ranking social activities and the men who perform them in terms of their relative efficacy in advancing men 'on the path of purification.' He

does this through the distribution of ranks, titles, and ritual privileges to those who pursue different occupations--agriculture or trade or banking, for example. He does this through royal patronage of "worthy" social activities, and most importantly, through his exercise of royal naming prerogatives. The totality of royal activities thus stands as a general statement about the hierarchy of worthwhile activities in Buddhist societies (cf. chapters 16, 19, 20).

The king is the anomalous figure in this two-wheeled paradigm in that he is at once the wealthiest, the most powerful, and yet the most renunciatory layman in Buddhist society, a paradox which precisely encapsulates Theravada ideologies and ethics of wealth (see below).

Ritual, Wealth, and the Release of Knowledge

From the vantage point of this study, one of the most important aspects of merit making, of dana, is that it has general and specific associations with 'truth' [dhamma] and the release of knowledge.

Theravada societies are characterized by what Weber refers to as a "narrow" tradition of knowledge (1946:209). By this he means that the key to salvation is acquired only through religious as opposed to secular knowledge and that the search for religious knowledge is properly limited to an elite minority, to members of a religious literati (including the king). Theravada societies are organized around a single fundamental assumption and epistemological model: that the dhamma is primarily a hidden or immanent phenomenon that must be carefully 'searched for' or 'illuminated' in a process called suwaeng tham or 'lighting the dhamma' which is open to a very few exceptional individuals in society--monks and kings, to men of pure minds.

The two-wheeled structure is thus above all an epistemological structure in that it is predicated on the belief that the Buddhist laity are too 'entangled' in desires and worldly attachments to successfully 'illuminate' dhamma on their own. Buddhist laity are believed incapable of cultivating the penetrating insight and wisdom necessary to search for hidden truths themselves, and thus they need Buddhist monks--or Buddhist kings--to do it for them. Merit making entails the release of knowledge in a general sense that it helps support the quest of Buddhist monks. Monks search for dhamma through meditation and textual study, and release it to the Buddhist laity through their teachings and exemplary behavior. The Buddhist laity absorb knowledge of dhamma from the ritual performance in a more specific and less enduring sense in that the ceremony offers them the opportunity to renounce their wealth, 'see dhamma,' and enhance their mental purity--but only momentarily.

Yet another feature of the Buddhist epistemological tradition is that knowledge of dhamma is believed to be the key to knowledge of propriety in all domains of social life an assumption that also operates as a linguistic paradigm of domination. The ability to interpret the 'true meaning' of a limited religious vocabulary (concerning an almost unlimited repertoire of religious activities) imbues men with the right to interpret the 'true meaning' or moral significance of activities in all lesser domains of activity. These powers "transfer" from sasanachak to rajanacak.

Finally, 'knowledge of dhamma' is identified in general with the credibility or veracity of speakers, as are conspicuous acts of ritual generosity. As I shall demonstrate, these facts have crucial ramifications for the imperatives of capitalist expansion.

Discourse about Wealth and Merit

The two-wheeled structure of Theravada society and Buddhist beliefs about the nature of the cosmos entail practical constraints with regard to discourse about wealth and merit and the portrayal of the connection between the two. These dialogic conventions and assumptions are grounded in the doctrinal emphasis on the truth of anicca or the impermanence of all things, and in the corresponding cosmological vision of the kappa or world order and its cyclical decline and regeneration (Reynolds 1982). The following, a rough summary of those constraints, explains to some degree why it is difficult if not impossible to discuss Theravada ethics concerning wealth in Western terms.

1. Wealth itself is morally neutral. Whether one has it or not, or what one has done to obtain it, is less of an issue than what one does with it and the circumstances of its appearance. Or, ethics pertaining to wealth are articulated more in terms of consumption (whether a man is 'stingy' or generous) rather than production.
2. 'Mind is all' in Theravada beliefs about the cosmos because, according to theories of kamma, the 'intention' [cetana] with which one performs an act is the primary determinant of its kammic outcome, of its physical 'fruits' [phon] or physical-social consequences. Thus the morality of a particular practice, business or otherwise, is interpreted less as an inherent quality of that practice than it is a function of the intention and religious practice of the entrepreneur.
3. The morality of particular practices is evaluated in relative rather than absolute terms, in relation to readings about what 'cosmic time' it is. The morality of a particular practice (or mode of production) is articulated in terms of that activity's

appropriateness to a particular moral-cosmic era. Business practices, like Buddhist texts and rituals, must be constantly purified if they are to generate order under shifting cosmic and social conditions.

4. As Dumézil says of Hindu theories of kingship, wealth is but "a mere raw material, itself neutral, upon which only good usage can confer moral value" (1971:34). Similarly, in Theravada ideology legitimate wealth is not that which is 'owned' or clung to but rather that which is 'circulated' [munwian] in support of virtuous activities.
5. The Buddhist king proper sets the example regarding "ownership" or "good usage" of wealth.
6. Like the "rich" Hindu king, the rich Buddhist king "is marked definitively by the pious use he makes of his riches . . . he is characterized not as one who is wealthy per se, but as the distributor of abundant alms" (Dumézil 1971:34).

Finally, I raise two additional points concerning linguistic usages pertaining to wealth. First, once wealth is channeled into the Sangha, into merit-making activities, is it no longer spoken of as wealth or money [ngoen] it becomes 'merit' [bun]. Cash, once circulated through the temple, is called boricak, 'renunciation' or 'donation' (i.e., sacrifice). To speak of it in any other way--to speculate on how monks 'spend' ritual donations, for example--is to automatically delegitimize the speaker. A pious Buddhist king who answered questions about the productive "use" of wealth by Buddhist monks would display an unseemly interest in Sangha affairs and would not be a pious king. Second, "talk" about the morality or propriety of an event, practice, or person in society is governed by rules of hierarchy that are based on an "opacity principle" or rank (see below).

Merit ceremonies create and recreate the Thai social order as a celestial order. In the following section I will discuss concepts of person, communication, and hierarchy that shape interactions in Thai society and are the basis of the practical efficacy of relic, ritual, and "glossing" wars that are at issue in modern capitalist development.

The Celestial Hierarchy: Hot- and Cool-Hearted Men

Thai society is represented in terms of a moral-celestial hierarchy, with renunciatory 'cool-hearted' beings at the top and attached 'hot-hearted' beings at the bottom. Men of merit at the top of the hierarchy have controlled their desires and are detached from the flow of day-to-day existence. They have 'cool' and 'peaceful hearts' [cai yen, cai sangop] and their sensory organs or 'five doors' of perception--eyes, ears, nose, skin, tongue--are 'closed,' non-reactive to the stimuli around them. Their hearts and minds are pure [borisut] and they have the penetrating insight or wisdom that is necessary to perceive the causal roots of events.

Men of virtue are physically attractive. They have the quality called influence [ithiphon] which enables them to naturally command the obedience of others, literally, to 'command-and-be believed' [chua-fang]. Because they have credibility, they do not have to use force for men to obey them (chapter 15). They fear nothing; they have 'strong hearts.'

In contrast, men of little merit are said to have 'hot hearts' [cai ron]. Their five doors of perception are 'open' to immediate sensory stimuli and they are highly reactive to these stimuli. Such creatures 'cling' to sensory stimuli and are easily led or influenced by others. Lacking wisdom, they are easily enticed by 'deceptive words' and by

apparently virtuous or attractive phenomenon. They are easily tricked by men who have an apparently pure exterior but an impure interior, i.e., evil minds or intentions. They have little courage and they are afraid of demons, tigers and other wild beasts. The sight of these men at work inspires no one to emulate their example (cf. Maha Boowa 1976).

Merit, Silence and Talk

The most enlightened men are considered the most powerful and the most silent in the kingdom--and therein lies the heart of the credibility problem as an antinomy issue. In Buddhist societies, the mere 'sight' of religious virtuosi is believed to create moral transformations in men of lesser purity and their mere presence creates resplendent order in the cosmos. The desire to emulate their pure example is said to 'rise up' or 'be born' [koet khun] in the hearts of ordinary men, producing 'voluntary-hearts' [khwam samak-cai], willing compliance with their wishes.

Religious virtuosi have extraordinary powers of communication. In stories of the Buddha and Buddhist saints, mastery of every type of communicative medium is a defining feature of virtuosity; the mastery of specific types of communicative (e.g., silent communication with them angels) indexes the attainment of specific stages along the path of purification. The acquisition of such powers comprises the narrative structure of the biography of the famous Isan meditation monk, Acaan Man (Maha Boowa 1976a-b). Buddhist saints can talk with angels or tigers (silent talk) or demons [yaksha]. They speak 'but a single word' and their audience immediately understands dhamma and experiences emotional coolness. They can communicate with every being in the cosmos, at the precise level of understanding of those beings.

The king and high-ranking Buddhist monks speak Pali, 'the language of truth' and the language of Buddhist texts. High-ranking men speak court or 'royal language' [rachasap] and polite language whereas ordinary men speak ordinary language and nothing else.

The wishes or 'volition' of men of merit is believed to be so powerful that their mere thoughts are potent weapons. They can transfer their merit to others as an act of volition (chapter 3) and read the hearts and minds of lesser beings, thereby being able to predict the kammic outcome of their actions. This principle of power is encoded in rituals like the kathin. After the ceremony, their leaders or 'owners' pour water from a vessel onto the ground to transfer merit to the ancestors. This is done by 'making a wish' [prarathana].

In contrast, ordinary men are the least powerful and the most talkative. 'Talk' is a type of kamma 'committed with the mouth' [wica-kam]. The talk of lesser men, called 'gossip' and 'rumour' (chapter 19), generates chaos and hot-hearted reactions from others. Ordinary men cannot speak with angels, and they run from (and are eaten by) tigers. They are rendered speechless at the sight of great beings. They do not know Pali; they do not have first-hand access to the 'truth' of the Buddha's teachings and therefore need others to interpret it for them. They likewise are in need of men of merit to interpret the moral significance of government programs and new practices; they cannot interpret them 'fully' and therefore correctly on their own.

Interpretive Paradigms

The following are some premises that inform major interpretive paradigms in Thai-Buddhist society and which provide clues as to the nature of the powers of religious virtuosi--the nature of domination and authority:

1. The dhamma is an invisible or immanent reality that is revealed (illuminated) only through constant searching and mental purification.
2. Dhamma is known to men on a graduated basis, according to their level of purity.
3. 'Intention' or 'volition' [cetana] is the most important determinative of the kammic outcome of an event, the hidden mainspring of kammic process.

The Cosmos

The following are features of Buddhist cosmology that inform the interpretive paradigm:

1. The universe is characterized by impermanence [anicca] rather than by permanence.
2. The true meaning of things--texts, practices, or words--changes over time; it does not remain constant.
3. Words are a part of kammic process, of samsara. They create kamma (act and retribution) and rarely explicate it.
4. Words have a manifest material dimension [wathu] and an invisible kammic dimension of cause and consequence. Part of the tangle of social existence, talk is nimitr-kam or a 'sign of kamma' that perpetuates action and reaction and turns the wheel of suffering.
5. Words and acts have moral-semiotic "depth" in that they have apparent and immanent or invisible meanings. Their 'true meanings' can be ascertained only by a process of mental deconstruction, by breaking them down into their constitute elements (Buddhaghosa 1976), including their kammic causes and consequences [phon].

6. The 'true meaning' of an event concerns (1) its place in a kammic chain of act and consequence, and (2) its significance as an example of the laws of dhamma or the Four Noble Truths.
7. The meaning of words and events varies according to nearness or distance from the time of the Buddha's presence on earth. Their meaning is clear when the Buddha is present and 'spoiled' [sia] or lost [hai] when he is absent.

These points, in turn, are informed by further premises about the nature of the cosmos as a contrast between visible and invisible worlds.

The Visible and Invisible Worlds

In Thai society, words, men, rituals, social interactions, and events are believed to have visible and invisible dimensions. Words have physical-sensory components and invisible-moral [kammic] components. Men have a visible 'face' [na] and an invisible 'heart-mind' [cit-cai], the seat of volition. Society consists of a visible moral hierarchy of titles and ranks, 'names' and 'face' and an invisible moral hierarchy or order of 'true morality,' barami or virtue. Similarly, social events are assumed to have a visible 'face' or physical dimension, a tangible shape or form [rup] and a 'name' or intangible essence which may also consist of their moral-causal roots and consequences [nam] (chapter 3).

The true or invisible hierarchy of virtue is believed to be perceived by men on a graduated basis according to their degree of religious purity. The 'true meaning' of events is likewise perceived on a graduated basis, as is knowledge of the genuine intentions of men in performing merit-making ceremonies and other public acts.

Rules of Interpretation

The following are predominant features of a Thai-Buddhist semiotic ideology, a summary of indigenous beliefs about the nature of signs.

Signs [nimitr] like events, have visible and invisible qualities, a rup or visible shape plus wathu or material qualities, and a hidden nama or moral essence. Given the Buddhist doctrine of anicca or impermanence, the relation between signs, words and their 'true' meanings is believed to be constantly changing. Thus the ritual or practice that was 'proper' under a past regime becomes 'improper' or morally inefficacious under the present. The following are related rules of interpretation.

1. The Time Rule: Men of extraordinary virtue can perceive the causal roots of an event instantly while lesser beings must 'wait and see' their kammic fruits or physical outcomes before making moral judgements. Likewise, ordinary men cannot judge the purity of heart of Thai leaders in promoting social policies (whether they were done in selfish or the national interest) until such time as the physical outcomes of those policies have become manifest.
2. The Opacity Rule: The intentions or thoughts of great world renouncers are "opaque" or unknowable to men of little merit. Conversely, men of merit are believed able to see into the otherwise hidden hearts and minds of lesser beings. As one informant said, "It's like standing on a mountain top. One who is high can see all."
3. The Depth Rule: Signs of all sorts--words, acts, and events--can be read in greater or lesser "depth" by men according to their degree of inner purity. There is a variable "referential

distance" between signifier and signified that is great for impure beings and small for pure beings.

4. The Reaction Rule: Individuals are entangled with signs and the process of signification to variable degrees. Religious virtuosi analyze and do not react to signs, they read or morally decode them. Impure beings react to signs and/or historical events; they are 'entangled' with them and are therefore unable to decode them effectively, to analyze them with penetrating wisdom.
5. The Time and Density Rule: The relationship between signified and signifier, an event and its meaning, varies over time, depending on whether it is near or far from the time of the Buddha's presence on earth. The meaning of things is relatively 'clear for all to see' in the time of the Buddha but becoming increasingly 'lost,' truth inaccessible, as the end of the kalpa or world order draws near.
6. The Inversion Rule: When truly evil men lead the kingdom a semiotic inversion occurs. The apparent or physical 'face' of events becomes not only "dense" or difficult to read in terms of its underlying moral significance but the relation between tangible and intangible, visible and invisible factors, becomes inverted. Materiality of all sorts ('face,' ritual, signs) masks or disguises an opposite reality; apparently virtuous activities become disguises for the evil intentions of men and the social order must be inverted to reverse this situation (chapter 16).
7. Meaning is Defined in Terms of Pure Practice: The 'true meaning' of things is articulated as proper codes for conduct. Thus when Thai informants begin a statement with the construction 'This means [an ni mai khwam wa]' they often conclude with a statement

of their proper 'duty' [na thi] or code of conduct in a particular situation: 'This means that we do such-and-such' (cf. chapter 17).

Only men of great wisdom are believed able to determine the 'true' or 'full' meaning of events. Given the ideology of kamma, according to which 'mind is all'--the major determinant of kammic outcome--this entails a reading of the 'true' or complete intentions of men. A pure Buddhist king is believed able to read the 'hearts and minds' of men to a greater degree than ordinary men, and Buddhist saints, 'mind readers,' to an extraordinary degree. The king's great mental purity also endows him with the wisdom necessary to make authoritative pronouncements on the proper duties or codes of conduct of the nation's citizens, and the absence of a king-interpretor spells chaos.

Some Parameters of Change

From the above discussion, we can conclude that Buddhism and capitalist development are not necessarily opposed, at least in the ways Weber's work seems to suggest, and that Weber's approach to the problem is not particularly helpful. Tambiah notes that the merchant class has always provided strong support for Buddhism. In modern Thailand,

business houses of all kinds from massage parlours to export-import firms seek the blessings of monks for success, and figure as the most lavish providers of kathin presentations. Corporations are more important donors than private persons. (1973:10)

Tambiah argues that Buddhism is not hostile to capitalism or economic activity per se, but to economic activity as a universal activity: Buddhist society loses its dynamic as a soteriological state (one which enhances its inhabitants' chances for salvation) if wealth, once gained, is not renounced to further monks' study of the dhamma. Tambiah

qualifies this statement, however, by noting that the merchant class has traditionally been accorded a low status in Theravada societies. Shades of the Hindu caste system, the vocation of the monk is valued over that of that of the warrior, and the vocations of both are valued over those of the merchant and agriculturalist. The private accumulation of property and wealth, especially through trade and manufacture, has always been devalued in Buddhist societies as signifying excessive self-interest, greed and exploitation (1973:19), but, as he also points out, this provides a further impetus for merchants to acquire wealth to renounce to the Sangha. Tambiah concludes that it is unlikely that laissez-faire capitalism, the accumulation of goods by individuals for their own benefit, can become a universally acceptable activity in societies such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, that "economic activity is more likely to be considered the handmaid of political authority, which in turn will be considered legitimate provided it serves the collectivity in a 'karma-free' detached way" (1973:16).

Tambiah acknowledges the importance of the Buddhist king in promoting economic change. He argues that there has been a weakening of the association between Buddhism and kingship in Ceylon, which he attributes to the British influence and the colonial experience. Thailand, in contrast, shows a continuing strong association between Buddhism and the Thai king as well as a heightening of the "old tendency" that characterizes early Buddhism in India, the support of the Sangha by urban merchant class. He thus observes that the contemporary Thai Sangha receives support from almost every segment of society: agricultural, professional, administrative, and urban commercial.

I extend Tambiah's thesis by arguing that the Thai-Buddhist king has not only maintained a strong identification between himself and

religion, but that he has played an active if not dominant role in the promotion of capitalism in recent years (particularly in the period between 1968 and 1975) precisely because of his strong identification with religion and of the ways in which he has exercised royal ritual and linguistic prerogatives.

To sum up the above points, then, according to Theravada ideologies, the acquisition of wealth occurs because of the proliferation of ascetic practice, not despite it; vigorous market activity is a necessary and valued part of the soteriological dynamic of Theravada societies. And, contra Weber's typologizing essays at least, wealth is positively valued in relation to the renunciatory ethic.

Any analysis of Buddhist ethics regarding wealth, business, or market activities must above all account for these facts and the complexities of the lay-monastic relationship. From Tambiah's and Reynolds' criticisms of Weber we perceive some structural parameters of change in Theravada societies: The monarchy confers sacrality on social practice and individual codes of conduct; wealth, if not properly circulated (ideally under the "direction" of a righteous Buddhist king), may have no connection to virtue; capitalist development must be portrayed in connection with the growth of the Sangha if it is to be portrayed in a positive ethical light; an essential division of labor--sacred from profane--must be maintained as the economy changes if those changes are to be portrayed as the purification of the polity; new values of any sort will be couched in a renunciatory idiom. These emendations of Weber's work suggest that, at the very least, one must study patterns of change in the lay-monastic relationship and the evolution of the Buddhist kingship as a baseline for studying "economic" change in Theravada societies.

There are additional and specific historical points that must be addressed if one is to examine the relationships between religion and economy in Thai-Buddhist society. Unlike the situation to which Weber refers in early India, where merchants [setthi] were indigenous, members of the Thai merchant class are primarily non-indigenous, Chinese immigrants. There is also a well-established twist to the study of "ethnic" Chinese in Thailand which relates to the analysis of so-called 'economic' activities: that there has been steady assimilation and intermarriage between Thai and Chinese in Thailand from the top to the bottom of the Thai social order. And further, it is the prerogative of Buddhist kings or men of exceptional religious purity to 'name' or designate "ethnic" and occupational categories. Thus in studying the relationship between economy and religion in Thailand one is studying "ethnic" relations: the reciprocal impact of waves of Chinese immigrants on a religious tradition whose roots are South Asian. Most important, one is studying the history of the constantly shifting representation of 'Thai' versus 'Chinese' people, of 'economic' versus 'religious' activities, setakit versus sasanakit, and, above all, the history of ritual, of control over the media of symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1977).

Buddhist rituals are the source of men's control of naming and interpretive prerogatives. They are as well the primary media through which such linguistic judgements are conveyed and made real to the general populace. I suggest, then, that control of ritual and linguistic prerogatives is the distinguishing feature of Buddhist kingship, and that the epistemological dimensions of religion are among the most important of modern capitalist development.

Thus before one can ask Weberian-like questions about the assumed soteriological efficacy of specific practices, occupations, groups or individuals in Theravada Buddhist kingdoms, one must confront yet an additional linguistic issue: who has the 'right to speak' [sitthi phut] about morality? Like naming prerogatives, socially accepted 'rights to speak' are 'built' and exercised through merit-making activity, through control of the religious system. These rights are coincident with the amount of barami or virtue that men are seen as having 'built,' 'lost,' or 'borrowed' from kings (chapter 9).

Before addressing these issues in greater detail, let us return to a critique of Weber in order to establish a most crucial issue of modern capitalist development in Thailand: how the Western "culture of capitalism" has been used as a pretext of domination in Southeast Asian polities, and how this has affected Thai-Theravada religion and economy.

Weber: The West and the Rest

If Buddhism is not antithetical to the spirit of capitalism per se, then wherein lies the problem that Weber and, following him, a host of contemporary scholars, are trying to address? We can begin to answer this question by examining the analytic inequities that characterize his work on Western and Asian societies.

Compared to that in The Spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic, Weber's exploration of the relation between religion and economy in India is boring, undynamic, and actively misleading. Despite his avowed interest in the cultural systems, values, and histories of non-Western societies--disinterest in which he associates with Marxist analyses--he seems to display little or no sensitivity to the actual cultural or historical dynamics of Asian societies, particularly in his

typologizing essays. He certainly displays little sense of humour or irony about the relationship between South Asian religion and economic ethics as he does in his work on Protestant sects. In The Spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic, for example, Weber marvels at how an ideology of greed could possibly have become linked to an ideology of religious salvation. In his essays on religion in India, he asks why this ideological linkage has not occurred.

In his work on the religion of India, Weber locates "superstition" (i.e., ". . . of the masses") in religious ideology and alludes to a causal relationship between asceticism and the "waste" of labor and capital. (This latter is the implicit basis of his identification of Hinduism and Buddhism with anti-capitalist values, of the creation of his "other-worldly" typology). In contrast, Weber does not ask if Protestant sects "wasted" resources--human and pecuniary--either in support of religious activities or in their single-minded pursuit of profits. Since he locates "superstition" in religious rather than secular ideologies, he fails to question the irrational and mystic aspects of Western capitalist ideology: beliefs about the magical efficacy of "work" (as if work produced benefits that were independent of world market conditions); the magical "efficacy" of the free market; or the magical efficacy of savings (as if savings automatically guaranteed future prosperity). These analytic shortcomings become ironic to the extreme when we note that the mystical aspects of Western capitalist ideology are being absorbed Thai Buddhist rituals as just that: as new cultural themes (cf. Rosaldo 1980) that portray the cosmic efficacy of work (chapter 11), "practical reason," now identified as a magical property of royal blood (chapters 16-18), and savings (chapters 19-20).

Finally, in selecting ancient rather than modern India for analysis, in asking "whether" Asian religions "could have" given rise to capitalist development, Weber writes "as if" Western societies were not then actively implicated in the economic fates of Asian polities and "as if" he is examining a pristine Buddhism, unadulterated by Western influence. In constructing his typologies, which are by nature comparative and of necessity ahistorical, he sidesteps the most crucial questions of modern capitalist development in those polities: What was their response to the colonial experience?

Why does Buddhism seem more opposed to the spirit of capitalism in his typologizing essays and less so in his more historical essays? I suggest that, not surprisingly, Weber's typologizing work reflects the dominant ideologies of his time, a Euro-centric view of the world which rested on the assumption that the major difference between "the West and the rest" (cf. Fabian 1983) lay in other societies' lack of "civilization" as identified by the absence of recognizable capitalist values and easily identifiable varieties of "economic rationality" or practical reason. Thus in India, where Westerners were confronted by a sophisticated scholarly and religious tradition that belied popular stereotypes about the intellectual inferiority of brown-skinned natives, Indians' putative "lack of civilization" was identified by the linkage of religion (i.e., other-worldly asceticism) and the inhibition of capitalist instincts. With Buddhism, lack of "civilization" was identified by the linkage of the Buddhist Sangha with the "waste" of time, capital, and labor, and through judgements that Buddhist asceticism was inimical to values of efficiency and hard work (chapter 5). These tendencies are implicit and exaggerated in the construction of Weber's typologizing essays, more muted in his historical essays.

Contemporary scholars who retain these discriminative and shopworn analytic foci implicitly perpetuate this same Euro-centric viewpoint, modified to suit the aims of modern Western imperialism, and perpetuate central myths of Western capitalism. Most issues about merit-making and "waste" are ill-defined at best and at worst misguided. Even Crawford, that most critical British envoy to Siam in the nineteenth century, grudgingly admitted that the Siamese economy was both thriving and efficient in the early nineteenth century, even under the domination of a depraved "Oriental despot" and even with a large population of non-laboring "lazy" Buddhist monks (chapter 5). Instead of choosing an isolated past for analysis as does Weber, anthropologists choose an isolated present, and, in their unhistorical positing of questions about the relationship between Buddhism and economic change (that focus on issues of work, waste, efficiency and savings), likewise rely on the companion analytic myth of a pristine Buddhism, unaltered by pressures from the West. Thus when we examine the history of anthropological literature on Buddhism and capitalism in Southeast Asia, we see a resurgence that coincides with peak U.S. interest in Southeast Asia in the 1960s (when Thai elite increased their efforts to introduce themes of work and efficiency in religion [chapter 16 ff.]), and decline in the 1970s, coinciding with a decline in direct US involvement (the American economic presence was well established and the new infrastructure and ideology were firmly in place). Such ahistorical theorizing (purportedly in the tradition of Weber), ignores the fact that Theravada polities are now highly Westernized, if nothing else, in terms of a powerful negative reaction to Western influence.

I argue that Weber was correct in his observations about the negative relationship between Buddhism and a capitalist ethic, but not for the

reasons he supposed. Buddhism is not opposed to capitalist development per se but to the Western culture of capitalism. Buddhism and Western cultural systems are disharmonic to the extreme and their cultural differences have been highlighted through a century of dialogue under unequal conditions of power.

My argument is that there are fundamental differences and disharmonies between the cultural systems of Theravada and Western capitalist societies and that for decades, Westerners (buttressed by Western scholarship) have used these differences as a pretext for domination. This process of cultural domination became integral to Thai historical experience and eventually a Westernized Thai elite internalized these pretexts in their own struggles for power, radically changing religion, economy, and the dynamics of legitimation in the process.

I further argue that specific types of disharmonies, located in the systematic differences between Western and Buddhist cosmology, have shaped the course of development in colonial and post-colonial eras: There are fundamental differences in ways in which value is produced and represented in Western and Buddhist societies, and these incompatibilities are at the root of what I call antinomy issues or problems. Antinomy issues comprise the specific cultural dynamics of change in Thai society. They have guided the course of modern capitalist development in Thailand, both shaping and constraining patterns of change.

I also argue that Buddhist ritual and the Buddhist kingship acquired new functions during and after the colonial period, to mediate antinomies in order to maintain the political autonomy of the Thai state and status as a soteriological state. This process of mediation has

likewise had drastic consequences in the reshaping of religion and the economy in the Thai polity (Conclusion). How can we describe the systematic nature of these antinomies?

Cultural Differences

Marshal Sahlins notes that in Western capitalist societies the economy is a "dominant site of symbolic production" (1976:205ff.), the source of the production of value. What is ideal, orderly, or proper in Western societies can be discussed in an economic idiom, in the idiom of market behavior. Virtue can be measured by the energy or propriety with which Individuals pursue their business activities and by what they consume. "Hard work" is equated with moral probity, a central theme of American political ideology.

As Reynolds and Clifford have argued, the ideal order in Theravada Buddhist societies is not articulated in terms of a physical "unit" or in terms of the political rights of single Individuals (anatta or the doctrine of 'non-self' being, after all, a dominant theme in Theravada societies). Rather, social relationships are represented in an idiom of pure or ideal action. Social action, "materiality," arises as a consequence of the desires and attachments of men. Rather than being the end or essence of social life (à la Feuerbach), social action is seen as the material, visible, and therefore potentially illusory 'surface' of a hidden, underlying soteriological process governed by the laws of kamma and dhamma. Social events, an entangling of the moral and emotional attachments of men, are but instances of kammic and dhammic law at work.

In Theravada Buddhist societies religion is the dominant site of symbolic production or the production of value and hence the dominant

idiom of order is that of religious purity. Thus what could be articulated in American society as an "ethnic" difference among men, in South Asian society as a difference in the "coded substances" contained and exchanged by them, would be articulated in Thai society as differences in merit or soteriological differences [bun, barami]: as differences in the degree to which men are able to detach themselves from worldly affairs.

Thus talk about the purity of social practices in Thai society is couched in an idiom and discourse style that is almost identical to talk about the purity of ritual practices (chapter 16) and is similar to the discourse style found in many Buddhist texts. Subordinates ask (beg) superiors to 'clarify' (interpret) the morality of particular practices. The superior responds with an answer that is a gift of merit, a moral gift, than or dana. This "gift giving" pattern is found in dialogues between the Buddha and his disciples, kings and their subjects, and even modern Thai prime ministers and labor leaders (with regard to the ascertainment of the 'true' working conditions at factories in Bangkok, for example). Social and ritual orders are at once analogues and conjoined cosmic-social entities. When rituals are incorrectly performed, their 'true meaning' lost, society is said to be 'spoiling' [sia] and the decline of society similarly indexes the decline of the ritual order.

Buddhist and Western cultural systems are informed by two distinct concepts of utility, what, for analytic purposes, can be termed "practical" versus "ascetic" utility. "Practical utility" refers to men's abilities to transform their physical environment. It is based on cosmological schemas which presuppose the separation of moral and cosmic orders and operates on principles of "direct causality." This concept

is the basis of much Western metaphorical production concerning virtue; it informs both Marxist and capitalist ideologies which assess the good in terms of men's abilities to master their immediate environment. Thus in Western societies virtue can be articulated in terms of work or conduct in the marketplace (i.e., "honest labor"), and even missionaries can "work" to save men's souls.

In contrast, Buddhist cultural systems are informed by a concept of "ascetic utility" (the Buddha has only to touch his bathing cloth and the rains fall [Wells 1960]). "Ascetic utility" operates on a principle of indirect causality and presupposes the conjunction of moral and cosmic orders. In the Theravada system, legitimate wealth is not explicitly connected to (or articulated in terms of) "hard work." On the contrary, legitimate wealth is that which is totally dissociated from hard work, that which appears 'naturally' or effortlessly in response to the superior merit and virtue [bun and barami] of Buddhist laymen (cf. chapter 8).

Following Dumont (1980), we can locate additional broad differences between Western and Buddhist concepts of moral order in those societies' respective emphasis on hierarchy versus equality. In Thai society, for example, those social practices and rituals that are said to be 'pure' [borisut] and 'correct' [riap roi] are those in which persons and activities are said to be 'in order' [yu nai lamdap]. This term encompasses a proper order of speaking; a proper temporal and procedural order of ritual performances; and a proper order of perception of social events and cosmic process, for which the kran kathin is a model.⁷ The

⁷In a kathin ceremony the material object (robe) is first 'announced' [prakat] by a single monk. A second monk 'sees' or perceives the object and recalls (remembers) the Buddha's rule on its dedication. A third monk (or one of the two, depending on whether the ceremony is Thammayut or Mahanikai), compares the rule (that the Buddha decreed that monks who

above points provide insight into the systematic nature of antinomy problems.

The Antinomy Issues

The following are major antinomy issues as seen from a Western perspective. They are easily recognizable as dominant themes of historical discourse (and of Western scholarship).

1. The performance of ritual is a "waste" of the state's and the individual's time and money;
2. The ruler's constant purification or change of social practice demonstrates his lack of virtue, his "unreliability," "irrationality," and "untrustworthiness" as an ally.
3. Hierarchical systems are inherently unjust. Justice arises through democratic process, through debate in the public meeting place and through elections (cf. Vernant 1971).
4. Renunciation of the world and meditation prevents men from being able to understand the world and correctly interpret social events. They lack "practical experience."
5. World-renunciation connotes "laziness," "unwillingness to work," and therefore a lack of virtue whereas "hard work" connotes honesty and veracity.

had 'completely' observed [remembered, cam] the Lenten season could receive new robes during this time period) with the 'conditions' he sees before him. The Buddha decreed that a single robe should be given to the monk who was 'best' among the congregation, listing the criteria. A fourth monk 'observes' that a monk in their midst exhibits these qualities [the material condition fits the rule] and 'names' that monk. He proposes that the congregation agree or 'see together' [hen duai] that the kathin robe should be dedicated to him. The congregation responds 'in a single voice' [nai siang diackan], saying sathu or 'We agree,' signifying their 'unity,' and the robe has become the 'property' of that monk (Phra Rachamongkhonmuni [Thet]: 1978).

6. The silence of the religious virtuoso is non-communication, non-action (cf. Said 1979:38).

According to this "practical" schema, the monk's pursuit of his vocation does little to help society, while merchants' and farmers' pursuit of their vocations does much.

The following is a summary of antinomy issues from the Thai-Buddhist perspective:

1. Order is maintained through the constant purification and performance of ritual; destruction of the ritual order connotes chaos;
2. A ruler's 'clinging' to specific ideologies or practices automatically connotes a lack of virtue and knowledge.
3. Striving after material rewards as an end in itself is upadana, excessive attachment to worldly things. Upadana connotes moral blindness, lack of 'credibility' (inability to remain detached and therefore to know 'truly' of what one speaks), veracity (knowledge of dhamma), and, above all, the inability to interpret social events and prescribe proper social practices. For a leader to advise his subjects to strive unrelentingly after material gain as an end in itself is to advocate soteriological suicide;
4. "Free speech," democracy, and all forms of public debate and criticism signal chaos, the decline of morality. They are forms of attachment, upadana, that automatically connote lack of veracity;
5. A democratic society (a kingless society) is an inherently unjust society. The Thai word for justice is yutthitham, 'closing on matters of dhamma.' Without a divine king, a great world

renouncer (and cosmic interpreter), to pronounce on matters of dhamma, justice cannot prevail and men have no way of knowing the law.

6. Excess "action in the world" prevents men from understanding the nature and hidden structure of social events and effectively communicating about moral order.
7. Work (physical labor) connotes low status, bad kamma, bad deeds done in the past, and a lack of knowledge. By definition, it prevents men from remaining detached from mundane activities and therefore from contemplating their causes and consequences. Such men are incapable of making effective social policy.

What is confusing about the cultural analysis of modern Thai society is that both sets of ideals are simultaneously upheld and rejected by Thai leaders.

Issues in the Study of Change

I suggest, then, that the issues most often raised by modern anthropologists about the relationship between Buddhism and capitalist development are largely spurious, reflections of Western capitalist societies' conceptions of differences between themselves and Buddhist polities whose resources and markets they covet. The putative differences between Western capitalism and Southeast Asian economies that are raised in these works are informative, however, in that they pinpoint mystical-ideological aspects of Western capitalist ideology, the four most prominent of which concern waste, work, the magical efficacy of the free market, and the magical properties of saving. The incorporation of these mystical aspects of capitalist ideology in the Thai cultural system then set the stage for a systematic

"disenchantment" with capitalist values: with men waiting, for example, for the this-worldly salvation that never quite arrives (Bourdieu 1977) when they save their money. These disenchantments are then interpreted as signs of cosmic decline (chapters 8 ff.) and evidence of the need for a new government.

Economic change in Thailand exhibits none of the natural evolution and extension of small-scale to large-scale market activity as occurred in Western Europe. Rather, it is based on the evolution of a system of corporate capitalism and commercial banking whose origins are most often extranational and extracultural. Thus a major imperative of Thai capitalist development concerns the elite's ability to mediate antinomies (stave off Western domination and maintain Western support). They satisfied this imperative in part by creating and/or emphasizing "Janus rituals" that appeared to embody the ideals of both Western and Thai society (chapters 5-8).

Questions about the relation of Buddhism to capitalism can thus be reformulated in the following ways. Given the dominance of Western societies over Thailand in the last century, the question is not whether Thai Buddhism could have given rise to full-scale capitalist development as occurred in the West. Intensive capitalist development has occurred there, along lines determined originally by the British and the French and later by the Americans and the Japanese. It has been greatly accelerated in the last two decades; Thailand has been the most successful of all Buddhist polities of mainland Southeast Asia in altering production to suit demands of the world market.⁸ The question is then how development occurred under American tutelage given the

⁸Personal communication, Richard Nations, correspondent for The Far Eastern Economic Review.

disharmony between American and Thai-Buddhist value systems; how we are to understand the complex cultural dynamics that have constrained and enabled change; and which cultural features account for the peculiar flexibility of the Thai economy. This leads us back to questions about the powers of Buddhist kings and other men of merit. If, as is true in Theravada societies, wealth is "morally neutral" and only "good usage" determines its moral status, who decides what constitutes moral usage? Kings, monks, and men of merit. Where does the Thai temple system fit into this schema? To answer these questions, let us return once again to a critique of Weber.

The Ritual System: Wealth and Merit in Thai Society

A major problem with Weberian and neo-Weberian analyses of religion and economy in Asian and/or Theravada polities is that they presuppose an a priori distinction between economic, politic, and religious domains of activity and therefore apply inappropriate research paradigms to the study of change. In so doing, they not only ignore more relevant indigenous constructs, they actively disguise crucial connections between ritual and economy, and thus ignore subtle epistemological and linguistic dimensions of power.

Weberian and neo-Weberian analyses beg the question of the relation between Buddhism and capitalism for two reasons. First, they work from analytic frameworks that focus only on "economic issues," on the flow of cash or the exchange of goods, on behavior in the marketplace, not on the flow of prestige or honour. Second, given this predisposition, they focus on the flow of cash or goods either to the marketplace or to the temple, a tendency that automatically imputes a negative relation between market activity and ritual activity (cash that flows to the

temple is cash kept out of the marketplace). Unfortunately, for the anthropologist as for the Buddhist layman, as soon as 'cash' enters the temple door, it disappears from analytic sight. Thus Weber (1946:332) and Spiro (1966:1186-1189) readily acknowledge that the Buddhist temple is the focal point of a "rational economy" in Weber's sense of "traditional rationalism" in that merit-making is systematic, traditional behavior done with a particular goal in mind, that of obtaining religious salvation. They conclude, however, that there is little or no connection between this type of "traditional rationalism" and that found in a Calvinist ethic--"rationalism" that promotes full-scale capitalist development and the development of a true capitalist spirit (Weber 1946:293-294).

To perceive the temple as the focal point of a "rational economy" and the kathin (cf. Tambiah 1976:456-460) as a "redistributive mechanism" in a literal sense is to miss the point. Buddhist rituals have a variety of complex functions that are related to the control of knowledge and power. They are Thai society's most important, and, by religious convention, and least spoken of, mechanisms for the creation and distribution of prestige, primary mechanisms through which wealth and merit become conjoined. They are effective as structures of domination precisely because they are unspoken of, what Bourdieu would refer to their "doxic" qualities.

Rituals comprise the subtle means of domination--of men's thoughts, use of language, and social practices. Ritual performances are primary mechanisms for determining how men conceive of and articulate the relationship between this-worldly pursuits and religious salvation. (One assumption of Weber's comparative essays seems to be that this relationship is static and unhistorical.)

When analyzed as a "total social fact," in conjunction with "economic" or "political" data, the kathin ceremony can be seen as an activity that creates and transforms relations among men on an inter-regional and national level. It creates and recreates moral communities as religious hierarchies, and in the process, "manufactures" positive connections between wealth and merit: rich men become pious men. As I shall argue in later chapters (19 and 20), changes in the ritual structure generate new social-perceptual and communicative arrangements among men in rural areas, determining who may speak up about development, and who must remain silent. As per the above discussions of rank, the ritual system redistributes perceptual/interpretive roles among the populace, assigning men a proper epistemological and communicative place in the interpretive order and within historical events (chapter 17-19).

These features of the ritual and religious system relate to positive and/or offensive imperatives of Thai capitalist development concerning mobility, credibility, language and power.

The Positive Requirements of Capitalist Expansion

As noted above, modern Thai capitalists must be able to mediate antinomies between Buddhist and Western cultural systems. They must be mobile, able to penetrate rural areas, and possess the attractive qualities necessary to build new 'circles' of acquaintances (business cliques) among strangers in rural areas. They must be able to gain the trust of strangers along with voluntary compliance with their wishes.⁹

⁹They also must be able to command force, which was used in the first stages of development in the Northeast in the 1960s.

As the above discussion of the kran kathin and Buddhist concepts of rank indicate, religious purity and ritual activities are implicitly associated with freedom of movement and freedom of speech, a central feature of Buddhist ideologies of rank. "What are the benefits of virtue?" asks Buddhaghosa in the fifth century meditation text, The Path of Purification (1976). "For the householder, there are five," he answers. Among other things, one who is virtuous

. . . comes into large fortune as a consequence of diligence
 . . . a fair name is spread abroad . . . whenever one enters
 an assembly, whether of khattiyas or brahmans or householders
 or ascetics, he does so without fear or hesitation . . . (he)
 dies unconfused . . . (and) on the break up of the body, after
 death, reappears in a happy destiny, in the heavenly world
 (1976:9)

As Buddhaghosa's words indicate, Buddhist rituals offer positive conditions for mobility, the creation of opportunities to create new social relations and build "trust" among strangers. And, as any commercial banker in the United States or Thailand will readily acknowledge, new business--and large market shares--are built upon trust, and second, rituals such as the kathin create and recreate moral communities as moral hierarchies. In practice this means that the men who organize them, called their 'lords' or 'owners' (chapter 11), 'open opportunities' to 'announce merit' [bok bun] to their ritual audience. They can design their ceremonies in ways that advance their personal interests, and publicize their business enterprises as being morally positive. In addition, these ritual owners boost themselves to the top of the moral hierarchy and gain the 'right to speak' [sithi phut] in public. Most important, given the nature of the speech norms and prohibitions that are attached to merit-making activities and especially to royal merit-making activities, they are able to command the silence

of outsiders, those at the lower or terrestrial end of the cosmic totem pole.

Ritual 'owners' can and do use the linguistic privileges of merit of create new ideologies that represent economic change as being natural and moral in nature; to deny that changes are even related to 'economics' [setakit] or to disguise or deflect attention away from the unpleasant realities that attend modern corporate capitalist development (chapter 11). They gain rights to shape the rituals they 'own' and thus the opportunities to reconstruct ancient ideals in ways that suit their particular interests.

The kathin is an effective mechanism for the distribution of prestige because it is a dissociative device. As the informants' statements in chapter 1 indicate, the speech norms that apply to ritual performances (and are encoded within them) are based on a categorical distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly ventures. Cash becomes merit once it becomes a ritual gift. Men of merit can name and rename social practice as conditions warrant without public criticism of men of lesser moral stature.

I argue throughout the dissertation that the control of knowledge, credibility, and interpretive devices occur through control and transformation of Buddhist kingship, ritual, Sangha, and sacred relics. Thus contra Weber and post-Weberian theorists of change in Southeast Asian politics, the major requirements of a Westernized, modern capitalist development are satisfied through the retention of traditions of religion and hierarchy. Buddhist rituals are at once a primary mechanism for mediating antinomies, i.e., for satisfying the negative requirements of modern capitalist development under an alien, non-Buddhist power, and the means through which men control knowledge

and power, shape and articulate new and alien ideologies. The finer, epistemological requirements of successful capitalist expansion are satisfied through ritual transformations; the relationships of religion, kingship, and ritual to the economy are constantly shifting in relation to the specific requirements of particular phases of capitalist expansion.

The study of silence is of particular importance in the study of Thai religion and economy. By silence I refer to two social phenomena: the sacred silence of religious virtuosi, considered the most potent form of communication; and the redistribution of speech norms amongst the populace so that some men are condemned to silence because of their loss of ritual purity and dominance of local ritual systems.

Glossing Wars

As a final point, I suggest that above all, the events of colonial and post-colonial eras created a crisis of meaning in the Thai state. Since recent capitalist development in particular occurred along lines specified by Americans, it has entailed the introduction of new and alien ideologies. An imperative of modern Thai capitalism is to introduce, repress, and/or distort these ideologies at will, to interpret new practices as being in harmony with the dhamma. How are the idioms and principles of the 'two-wheeled' soteriological state to be reconciled with those of the Western "modern nation-state"? How are constructs based on the image of the 'two wheels' of dhamma to be reconciled with ideologies that postulate the pure separation of economic, religious, and political domains as a condition for order?

This raises a point about one of the peculiarities of social change in the contemporary Thai polity. When examined closely, Thai political

(public) rhetoric does not address the issue of how capitalist, socialist, or democratic programs should be implemented. Rather, it addresses questions about the 'true meaning' or behavioral content of these terms, i.e., the designation of a proper code of conduct. What is the 'true meaning' of democracy? What is the 'true meaning' of socialism? What is the 'true meaning' of development? (chapter 16).

This rhetorical structure derives from ancient royal and monastic traditions by which Buddhist monks, under the patronage of pious kings, devote entire lifetimes to the question, 'What is dhamma?!' or more accurately, 'What is the true meaning of dhamma?!'. Buddhist kings dedicate their careers to 'searching for methods' [pai ha withi] of social practice that are appropriate to the cosmic era 'of the present' (cf. chapter 16).

These "glossing wars" are at the heart of modern capitalist development. They are struggles for credibility and religious purity, disputes over who has sufficient merit to correctly interpret the 'meaning of things,' to scrutinize the codes of conduct of the nation's citizens, and prescribe new and more 'proper' ones accordingly. They concern men's rights to assign new names to old practices and old names to new practices and to disguise the realities of change. They are interpretive wars--struggles over the traditional practice by which monks and kings 'analyze' [wikhrq] what cosmic "time" it is and then designate which practices are appropriate to that cosmic time. They are struggles over the interpretation of the kammic structure of events, and over rights to propose new and effective socio-religious remedies to correct the ills of society--i.e., to create "social" and/or "economic" policy. Ambitious men must be able to represent their policies and practices as being 'straight with dhamma' [trong kap thamma] and those

of their opponents as conducive to moral decline. To do so they must triumph in struggles for control of prestigious rituals and relics.

In centuries past, kings and high-ranking monks controlled religion, relics and the interpretive process in Buddhist kingdoms. The king's innate qualities, his pure blood, enabled him to divide and 'name' the parts of his kingdoms according to its proper physio-moral characteristics [laksana], to name visible-material social phenomena in a manner that correctly assessed their 'true' or underlying moral qualities and consequences (cf. Chandler 1983). Most important, the king's pure blood and superior wisdom enabled him to determine which men were pure of intention and which were not (chapter 16). His powers of interpretation and abilities to represent them to the populace derived from his hereditary control of the royal temple and ritual networks.

When the king fell from power in 1932, the nation was ruled by men of non-royal blood and predictable chaos ensued. These men desperately needed to control Buddhist rituals in order to boost themselves up in the socio-celestial hierarchy and assume the interpretive prerogatives of kings. The modern power elite's struggles to make merit and control ritual are central rather than peripheral to capitalist development in Thailand because without merit, they could not introduce new (capitalist) principles of social practice (change relations of production) in the kingdom, and 'spread' or communicate these new principles to rural populations.

I suggest, then, that the idiom or "distinctive terms" of modern capitalist development in Thailand are those of the 'two bodies' of the Buddha: of his 'teaching body' [dharma-kaya] and his 'relic body' [rupa-kaya] (Reynolds 1975), which is to say that major "economic issues" are played out in the social dramas of Buddhist monks who interpret which social practice are in harmony with the dhamma.

The relic body is manifest as the nation's temples or reliquaries and its pilgrimage sites which contain the most potent objects of veneration and purification in the land. Races for virtue among power elite in the twentieth century, like those among kings and princes in previous centuries, were battles to: collect and control sacred relics; build or restore [burana, venerate] temples and monuments; control the teachings and activities of Buddhist monks; and venerate meditation monks, eventually to collect and distribute their relics. Rituals and religious objects comprise a powerful language of images, expressions of the most fundamental premises of Thai social life; altered, they alter the fundamental features of the Thai-Buddhist world view (chapter 18).

Such 'races for virtue' comprise the invisible dimensions of capitalist development, the struggles of elite to change basic structures of exchange. They are invisible to natives because powerful social norms prohibit the discussion (or thought of) merit in conjunction with the immediate pursuit of profit; to Western scholars, somewhat ironically, because of the conviction that "religion" is naturally separate as a subject of scholarly inquiry from "economics" and "politics." Their invisibility is what makes them efficacious in transforming the economy.

The Kathin Ceremony

The kathin ceremony recapitulates the most important and persistent assumptions about rank, knowledge, wealth, and communication in Theravada societies. As a "model of" and a "model for" society and the cosmos, the ritual can be transformed so as to accommodate new, and perhaps unpleasant, social realities, and to construct a new social reality by denying its genuine dynamics.

The kathin is the supreme expression of the lay-monastic relationship and the interconnection between the 'two wheels of dhamma' in that it draws together entire lay and monastic communities with each 'side' fulfilling their religious duty in ways appropriate to their station. The monks have properly renounced the world and confined themselves to the temple, to the study of the dhamma, during the rains season; the laity offer them material rewards for their strict observance of the rains retreat.

The kathin both articulates and recreates a hierarchical order within lay and monastic communities and stands as an expression of Buddhist concepts of hierarchy. During the kathin season, for example, the Buddhist laity are implicitly ranked by the size of their ritual donations. The most generous of the Buddhist laity, the king stands at the top of this lay hierarchy. The king's kathin gifts in turn designate a hierarchy of Buddhist temples. Royal patronage, in particular the king's personal offering of the kathin robes, publicly designates the most pure, and the most renunciatory, monks (and temples) in the kingdom. Royal patronage implicitly designates a proper order of religious practice within the kingdom: that embodied in the practice of those monks who receive royal kathin and the ceremony has powerful political ramification.

The ceremony designates a hierarchical order within the community of monks. Monks count their seniority in the Sangha by the number of Lenten seasons they have 'fully' observed.¹⁰ The monks' vote to dedicate the kathin robe is a public statement of rank within the temple, indicating which monk stands at the top of the monastic order and

¹⁰This point was at issue in the political dramas of the 1960s that involved the rebel Isan monk Phimonlatham (chapters 8 and 12).

therefore which monastic practice is the most exemplary. In Thailand, the kathin robe is usually given to the abbot (chapter 19), which also has far-reaching political ramifications.

The timing of kathin in relation to the agricultural cycle is an expression of the cosmological principle of non-efficient or indirect causality. The kathin is performed just after the Lenten season, the period when the rain falls and the rice grows, and just before the harvest.¹¹ During the ceremony, the renunciatory activities of Buddhist monks are symbolically linked to the harvest, to economic prosperity (Tambiah 1970:160).

The ritual encodes the principles of legitimate wealth in Theravada societies--the idea of the "celestial economy" and of "celestial property." The robes are sometimes said to 'float' naturally from the sky [loi fa] in response to the virtue of renunciatory Buddhist monks who have properly observed the rules of the Lenten retreat (chapter 15). Like the celestial property of the great Cakkavatti king, the kathin robes appear in response to the monks' perfection of the Buddhist virtues, i.e., as a function of cosmic rather than human agency. Consequently the efficacy of the ritual depends in large part on the extent to which all human agency is disguised in its preparation (chapter 17). This same principle holds true for the "legitimate" wealth of the Buddhist king and other Buddhist laymen: the more invisible the process of the acquisition of wealth, the more legitimate its possessor (cf. chapters 11 and 18). The kran kathin in particular is a quintessential expression of the most general Buddhist concept of rank: of the idea that special benefits--freedom of movement, speech,

¹¹Tambiah examines the relation of the ritual and agricultural cycles in great detail (1970:154-156).

and behavior--'fall naturally' to men in accordance with their renunciatory activities (cf. chapter 15). The kathin is also a quintessential expression of one the most important concepts of Buddhist rank, the linguistic: the idea of men perceiving and speaking 'in order' of religious purity (see above).

In the first part of the ceremony, the Buddhist laity offer gifts to the Buddhist Sangha. This is called the thot¹² kathin or the 'laying down of robes.' After the monks have received the official kathin robe, they 'vote' on who is 'best among them' according to the standards laid down by the Buddha. This monk is then designated by his fellow monks as the official recipient of the robe. The thot kathin is followed by a second, private¹³ monastic ceremony called the kran kathin whereby the monk-recipient of the official kathin gift confers the 'benefits of kathin' on those members of the congregation who have fully observed the Lenten season. These benefits include the lessening of restrictions on speech, dress, travel and personal behavior.

Finally, the ceremony expresses yet another of the predominant cultural themes of Theravada societies: the idea that there is a general, nonspecific connection between the renunciation of wealth and the release of knowledge.

The most important kathin are royal kathin which take place at royal temples throughout the kingdom. As I shall demonstrate, this network comprises the central religious infrastructure of modern capitalist

¹²Thot kathin means literally to 'lay down' the robes on a wooden frame. The frame was used in ancient times to measure the robe according to the specifications laid down in the vinaya, the rules of the monastic order.

¹³The kran kathin is one of five ceremonies called sanghakaam or formal 'Sangha-activity' which alter the status of the entire monastic order.

development. Not surprisingly, royal kathin ceremonies and the royal temples where they take place have become the focal point of the elite's struggles for merit.

Conclusion

The dissertation is divided into seven parts. Part II describes the creation and decline of the Thai royal tradition and the history of the antinomy problem. It presents a thesis concerning the Buddhist kingship: the persistence of the 'Hindu' belief that the king's wisdom is literally a function of the purity of his blood (biogenetic substance). Part III covers the period from 1932 to 1957 and describes the antithesis of previous royal traditions; commoners ruled the kingdom, racing for virtue among themselves and explicitly rejecting ideologies linking the king's prowess with the purity of his lineage. Part IV describes the period from 1957 to 1968; the synthesis of previous historical movements and the reintegration of the monarchy into the power structure. It details exactly how the ritual system was restructured to promote the development of capitalism and the penetration of Isan markets.

Part V discusses the kingship at its apogee, how the present king Bhumibol helped unseat the ruling elite of the 1960s by exercising hereditary interpretive prerogatives, thereby taking the lead in promoting capitalist development. It discusses the destiny of the present king and of his dynasty, its relationship to the rise of bureaucratic and corporate Buddhism and/or the rise of modern Buddhist capitalism.

Part VI demonstrates how a major bank began to assume the royal prerogatives and its ritual strategies to gain the largest market share

in the Northeast. It also describes how the bank's publicity department has begun to exercise the interpretive and ritual prerogatives of kings. Part VII concludes the thesis with an account of criticisms of the ritual process that have surfaced in recent years, and an analysis and their significance for the future of the polity as a viable soteriological state.

PART II

THE CREATION AND DECLINE OF A ROYAL TRADITION

CHAPTER 3

BUDDHIST KINGSHIP: THE SUBTLE FEATURES

Introduction

What are the attributes of the divine or sacred Buddhist king? What does a divine king do that ordinary mortals cannot? What are royal prerogatives such that a commercial bank could begin to assume them?

In this chapter I will discuss themes of kingship from Hindu and Buddhist mythology which provide clues about the nature of the sacrality and divinity of Thai kings and royal prerogatives. The discussion reveals major sources of both antinomy problems with the West and natural affinities between Buddhism and capitalist development. By divinity I refer to those qualities of the Buddhist king which make him 'like an angel' [khwaṃ pen sommuthitēp], by sacrality, those qualities that are encompassed within the Thai term khwaṃ saksit. Saksit refers to power-filled objects, persons, and activities, the sight of which is believed to exercise a powerful spiritual influence on those who behold them. Themes from Hindu epic tales and Brahmanic texts reveal persistent and often unarticulated features of Thai royal traditions: What is explicit in ancient Hindu traditions is often implicit in the modern Thai tradition.

The Hindu Mythic Tradition

George Dumézil's discussion of the myth of Yayati in The Destiny of a King (1971) reveals fundamental symbolic correlates of Hindu and Buddhist royal traditions and interconnections between knowledge and

hierarchy, travel, lineage, and civility that are the basis of Thai social, economic, and political life. Dumézil calls King Yayati, a hero of the Indian epic tale, the Mahabarata, a "first" or "universal king." He is a "civilizer, the benefactor of his people" and his reign "recalls the golden age" (1971:55). He is 'king,' raja, meaning royalty or lord and his kingdom is rajya or the 'royal territory.'

Yayati rules the civilized or noble [ariya] center of his kingdom and apportions its more distant 'barbarian' parts among his sons. As first king, Yayati makes the great partitions of the world. He institutes all or part of the "great classifications of social life," and, by extension, "the great divisions of earth and of humanity" (1971:15). The "protector of the four cardinal points," his sovereignty or 'lordship' is signified by ritual circumambulations [pradaksina] of the altar and the capital in the direction of the sun.

"Lord of all powers," the great Hindu king controls the seasons, rainfall, and atmospheric phenomenon, the fertility of the soil and of women (cf. Vernant 1982:116). He is first in a temporal series, the primal source of order.

Thai Kings as "First Kings"

Until the reign of King Chulalongkorn in the nineteenth century (chapter 5), Thai kings were, like Yayati, referred to as "first kings." (They ruled in conjunction with a "second king," usually an uncle or brother, a potential rival for the throne.) They were first in a temporal series (for example, performing the model kathin ceremony that initiates performance of kathin throughout the kingdom). Their exemplary behavior and perfection of the ten Buddhist virtues [barami], the same as those perfected by the bodhisatta in his last ten lives

before rebirth as the Buddha, plus their protection of the Buddhist Sangha, qualified as them the "civilizers" of men and recalled the "golden age"--when the Buddha was on earth. Thai kings are racha, king or royalty, and their actions rachakan (royal activities). Their kingdoms are rajanacak or the 'circle' of the royal influence.

The geographical coordinates of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms are roughly similar. Like the Hindu king Yayati, Thai-Buddhist kings rule the 'civilized' [ariya] center of their kingdoms, the royal capital, and apportion its barbarian parts, the forest [pa] and outlying areas, among their relatives: half-brothers, sons, grandsons, or powerful nobles. In the Buddhist context, ariya means one who has 'entered into the stream of wisdom' or the Four Paths which lead to nibbana.¹

Like a universal Hindu king (albeit on a lesser scale), Thai kings make the "great classifications" of social life and humanity and the great geographical divisions of their kingdoms. They do this through control of the ritual process and the exercise of naming prerogatives, by distributing ritual privileges, ranks, names and titles with soteriological significance to those who serve them. The Thai-Buddhist king names and renames his people, the parts of his kingdom, and its social practices, calling them 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist,' civilized or uncivilized--or even 'democratic,' 'communist' or 'feudalist' as the occasion warrants (chapter 16). Through the constant purification of rachakan or royal activities and the transformation of the ritual calendar, the temporal monarch creates and recreates 'Thai custom' [prapeni thai] and 'Thai culture' [watthana tham thai]. In a 1979 interview, a palace official defined purification as "giving meaning to a practice according to its original purpose [cut prasong]." The

¹It also means honourable, respectable, noble and sanctified.

"original purpose" is that specified by the Buddha and, as another official made clear, is properly interpreted only by pure monks and/or noble kings (chapter 17).

The Thai-Buddhist king gives auspicious 'names' [nam] to select individuals and allows them to perform rituals 'in his name' [nai nam nai luang] as one form of royal alms [phrarachathan], a royal gift. In the exercise of his naming prerogatives the king commissions histories of the realm in which he constructs and reconstructs the past in the form of a royal genealogy that situates his ancestors in the lineage of the Buddha and locates his dynasty at a specific point in the unfolding of the kalpa or time distant from the Buddha's parinibbana or final extinction (chapters 8, 20). He names and renames dynasties and members of his dynasty according to whichever principles of purification are on the ascendent, Buddhist or Brahmanic (see below).

Like the Hindu king, the Thai king is the protector of the four cardinal points. In the Thai-Buddhist kingdom, 'face' [na] is a symbol of social rank, sight, a symbol of knowledge. Thus the Buddhist king, like his Hindu counterpart, faces the four directions during his coronation ceremony to signify his knowledge of all principles and all places, his omniscience.

Over the centuries, ritual circumambulation, the act of taking possession of the kingdom, became identified with the veneration of the Triple Gems [trairatana]: Buddha, Sangha and Dhamma. The royal progress, phrarachadamnoen, the king's 'circling' or circumambulating his kingdom in the clockwise direction of the prataksina, is munwian. Munwian came to connote 'drifting' in a sacred pattern to make merit, indexing the spontaneity of the merit-makers and therefore the absence of calculation in the gift-exchange (chapters 13-14). Munwian is a

symbol of virtuosity and encompassment. It connotes physicality, temporality, and virtue, a rotation through space, time, and the practice and perfection of all Buddhist virtues--the acquisition of transcendent knowledge.

The Lord of Life

Like mythic Hindu kings, the Thai king is the "lord of all powers." His titles are 'The Lord of Life' [cao ciwit] and 'The Lord of the Land' [phracao phaendin]. The source of a "resplendent order," (Reynolds and Clifford 1980), in common parlance the Thai king is called an 'initiator' or 'innovator' [khon riroem] of auspicious activities.

The Buddhist king controls the fertility of the soil by patronizing and/or performing a repertoire of Hindu and Buddhist royal rituals, the Hindu First Ploughing Ceremony,² for example, and the kathin ceremony, whereby monks are rewarded for their strict observance of the rainy season retreat and the barami of the king and Buddhist monks is ideologically connected to the harvest which follows. Both Hindu and Buddhist rituals share in common the belief that pure practice in religious domains releases prosperity in worldly domains (chapter 10).

He controls the seasons by his proper observance of the ritual calendar, by changing the robes of the Emerald Buddha to mark the beginning of the Buddhist Lent (Reynolds 1978), for example. He performs the Ceremonies of the Twelve Months to commemorate moments in the life of the Buddha and the monastic community. He controls the fertility of women by impregnating those who are offered to him as gifts from noble families and the rulers of tributary states. This latter was a religious act that expanded the noble lineage and spread 'the blood of

²After this ceremony his subjects "rush to collect the seeds" scattered by the Brahman officiant (Wales 1931).

warriors' (and perhaps that of future Buddhas) throughout the land. The king's procreative activities operate on the same transformative principles as do Buddhist rituals. They transform the invisible essence or name [nama] of the Buddha's teachings into a visible, material presence or substance [rupa], linking the lineage of ordinary men to the 'noble lineage' of the Buddha. The gift of royal blood endows men with innate capacities, with an extraordinary 'inclination' or leaning towards dhamma (see below).

The Story of Yayati and the Characteristics of Kings

The story of Yayati and his grandsons in the Mahabharata reveals some fundamental characteristics about the properties of kings and the properties of merit.

Yayati is known by his "prowess, veracity, and ritual exactitude." A "master of gifts," he is a rich king marked definitively by the "pious use he makes of his riches." He is characterized not as a man who is wealthy per se, "but as the distributor of abundant alms," a way of "announcing merits" (1971:34). The characteristics of righteous Hindu kings are apportioned among Yayati's four grandsons who are also (lesser) kings (chapter 9). Vasumanas is a "master of gifts," Pratardana a "master of prowess." Sibi is a "master of veracity" and Astaka a "master of sacrifice." All four junior kings exhibit the "highest degree of morality" which is called baramita (1971:31), which are the same as the ten barami perfected by the Buddha and righteous kings (Horner 1957).

Before his descent to the lower heavens, Yayayti possessed the qualities of his grandsons, including that of "faultless conduct towards men of all classes" (cf. chapter 17), a most fundamental quality of

royalty (cf. Inden 1976). Its reciprocal is, in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, "freedom from praise and blame," which is to say, the silence of lesser beings about the activities of royalty.

The sequences of the Mahabharata revolve around the powerful connections between veracity and celestial travel, the metaphor of religious wisdom, and almsgiving. As Dumézil notes, Yayati has two names, one, Vasu, probably alluding to his great wealth, the other, Uparicara, meaning literally "the one who circulates above" (1971:55).

Like those of Yayati and his relatives, the activities of the Thai king and his offspring are portrayed in terms of celestial symbolism. The king and members of the royal family are referred to as 'Lords of the Sky' [cao fa]. The Cakkavatti or Wheel-Rolling Monarch of Buddhist mythology travels through the air as do the grandsons of Yayati--and Buddhist saints.

The phrarachadamnoen or royal progression is also characterized by celestial and vertical symbolism (chapter 11). Thai kings are called 'supposed angels' or sommutthithep, those which inhabit the lower of the celestial realms. To travel from Bangkok, krung thep, the City of Angels, to the barbarian forests of the Northeast is to descend [long] from the heavens, to travel from the 'inside-center' to the outside of the kingdom (chapters 12, 16).

If 'circling the skies' is a theme of transcendent knowledge, its mythic correlate is the plunge from the heavens, a popular theme in Hindu epic tales. Kings are kept in the air by the strength of their merit and they fall when that merit is spent or when they commit irretrievable sins. Thus Yayati lives for millions of years in celestial comfort, touring the paradises, respected by all, until one day a fault appears in his perfection: he boasts to Indra, saying that

no one was his equal in ascetic merits. Indra replies, "Because you scorn your superiors, your equals, your inferiors, your merits will vanish and you must fall from heaven!" (1971:31).

Yayati plunges to the lower levels of the heavens where he encounters his grandsons, cavorting through the skies, racing their chariots. At this point in the story the connection between veracity and almsgiving is made explicit, as is the ranking of virtues (almsgiving/veracity first). Yayati's grandsons are fighting over who is best (fleetest) among them--who should go first. (Which is the most powerful of the virtues?) Astaka, the sacrificer, insists to Yayati that he should "go first in all things" because Indra was his ally. If this was so, why had Sibi, the veracious grandson, "gone at full speed" and left the chariots of the others behind? Answers Yayati:

Sibi, the son of Usinara, in order to go among the gods, has given all that he possessed: that is why he is the foremost among us. Almsgiving, austerity, truthfulness, the observance of duty, modesty, prosperity, patience, amiability, endurance, all this belongs to the incomparable and good king Sibi.
(1971:36)

In the above statement, Yayati enumerates the ten Buddhist virtues, the basis of the thotsaphirachatham ideology of Buddhist kingship (with its emphasis on pure action as a basis of rank). In the Buddhist tradition dana or almsgiving is listed "first" among the virtues of great Buddhist kings (see below). It is implicitly connected to veracity, a fact that acquired crucial significance when the financial structure of the kingdom was challenged and then transformed in the twentieth century. Truth and the dharma (duty) are coterminous in both Hindu and Buddhist royal traditions. In the Brhad Aranyaka Upanisad (1.4.1-14) we see: "This dharma is the sovereign power ruling over kshatra itself. Therefore, there is nothing higher than dharma Verily, that

which is dharma is truth [satya]" (cited in Tambiah 1976:22). The Buddhist king is the Dhammaraja or Righteous Ruler and dhamma and truth are used interchangeably in informal Thai social contexts: that which is true [cing-cing] or correct is referred to as dhamma (chapter 17). He who controls the interpretation of dhamma controls the production of a "legitimate" knowledge (Bourdieu 1983).

In the myth of Yayati we encounter two additional themes that are staples of Theravada traditions of power and kingship. First, merit, property and lordship are transformations of each other, the basis of an ancient concept of "celestial ownership" or perhaps of "meritorious lordship" that persisted unchallenged in Thailand to the end of the nineteenth century. Second, merit can be shared or transferred through a wish.

Thus Yayati falls from the top levels of heaven and his grandsons send him back by sharing their merit with him. Says Vasumanas, the master of gifts:

All that I have obtained in the world by my faultless conduct toward men of all classes, I give to you, that it may be your property! This merit produced by giving, as well as that from patience . . . and generally all the merit I have acquired, let them be your property!

Says Pratardana, the warrior:

Ever devoted to duty, ever ardent for combat . . . that glory proper to warrior lineages (ksatravamsa), which I have obtained in the world, the merit which is attached to the word hero . . . let it be your property!

Says Sibi, the master of truth,

Neither among children nor among women, neither in jest nor in combats, difficulties, calamities, nor dice have I, in the past, uttered a lie . . . by that truth, ascend to heaven! My life, my kingdom, O King, my comforts, I will all abandon, but not truth: by that truth, ascend to heaven! That truth by which I have gratified Dharma and Agni and Indra, by that truth, ascend to heaven

Finally, Astaka, the "sacrificer par excellence," says:

I have offered . . . sacrifices by the hundreds . . . take the merit from these! Jewels, riches, precious robes, I have spared nothing . . . as the cost of my sacrifice: by this truth, ascend to heaven! (1971:35)

In the story of Yayati's encounters with his grandsons we see yet another feature of the Theravada tradition (and of modern capitalist development), the ideal of the anonymity of gift-givers and gift-receivers. Unaware of Yayati's true identity, his grandsons transfer their merit to him. Because they are unaware of their blood ties, the actions of Yayati's grandsons are all the more meritorious and the purity of the intentions in making merit, their "selfless sacrifice", is confirmed. The theme of the "stranger in need" is the basis of official kathin ideologies (chapters 10 ff.) It surfaced in Rama I's reforms of the Sangha in the early nineteenth century and, as I shall demonstrate, is a structural feature of recent capitalist development in Isan, the basis of an elective affinity between Buddhism and capitalist expansion.

As is evidenced by Yayati's fate, king's can commit worse sins than boasting, however. They can commit what Dumézil calls the "suprafunctional sin of lying." In the final analysis, veracity is what keeps kings in the heaven, up among the gods. In his final interactions with his grandsons, Yayati distinguishes himself as the master of truth.

It is by truth that heaven and earth are mine, by my truth that fires burns among men. Never have I spoken a word that was in vain, for the good give homage to the truth. It is by their truth that all the gods, the munis, the worlds are worthy of honor, such is my deep conviction. (1971:37)

The Blood Tie and the Conspiracy of Knowledge

In the closing sequences of the interaction between Yayati and his grandsons we encounter yet a final central theme of Buddhist and Hindu royal traditions, the close linkages between the sharing of blood

(membership in a common lineage) and the sharing of secrets, transcendent knowledge. In a cosmos where celestial actors can change shape at will, knowledge of 'true [secret] names' equals knowledge of hidden intentions and therefore the secret dynamics of social events. In this sequence of the Mahabharata, the secret knowledge that is shared is that of Yayati's 'true name.' Thus when Yayati finally reveals his name to his grandson, Astaka, he reveals a hidden blood tie. "It is to men of my own blood that I disclose my secret: you have before you your mother's father" (1971:34). This same convention is found in the Jataka tales, stories of the Buddha's past lives. The Buddha reveals the 'true name' (identity) of the principals of the tale at its conclusion.

The assumption that celestial beings properly share secrets and "deep" knowledge of the causes and consequences of events (signified by knowledge of the 'true names' of actors in social dramas) is the basis of a system of rank in Thailand and a fundamental epistemological feature of the modern Thai marketplace.

Early Buddhist Conceptions of Kingship

Early conceptions of Buddhist kingship are discussed by Goshal (1959), Gokhale (1953), Reynolds (1972), Smith (1972), Ling (1973) and Tambiah (1976). In the following sections I will stress those features of Buddhist cosmology and kingship that are relevant to the story of modern capitalist development.

Two Genesis Myths, Two Systems of Rank

As Mus (1964), Stcherbatsky (1923) and more recently Tambiah (1976) have observed, early Buddhist cosmologies and concepts of kingship share and reject features of the Brahmanic. Hinduism has a central, personal,

concept of self-deity [atman] and Buddhism one of kammic energy. Thus Mus observes that Buddhism substituted its own moral and cosmic law [dhamma] for the abstract brahman of the Brahmins and the personal Isvara of the Hindus (1964:21-24, cited in Tambiah 1976:34).

In contrast to Hindu cosmology, Buddhist cosmology is based on the doctrine of impermanence [anicca] rather than on the idea of permanence associated with an enduring deity. What endures or is 'permanent' is the dhamma, the truth of the Buddha's teachings and the cosmic law they describe. (In Thai culture, 'permanence' is a metaphor for the presence of dhamma [chapter 20]). Buddhist cosmology likewise rejects the Hindu theory of self [atman] for that of non-self [anatta], according to which persons and social events are but momentary "flashings" of existence, the "coming together of elements" (physical, emotional, and mental) called skhandas or 'heaps' and social life is but an illusory 'tangle' of event-desires created by the interlocking desires of men (cf. Buddhaghosa 1976).

The Hindu Purusha myth is the basis of South Asian biological metaphors of the state, elements of which can still be found in the contemporary Thai polity. According to the old Vedic conception of world order as told in the well-known Purusha myth, Purusha assigned separate duties and occupations to those who sprang from his body, mouth, arms thighs and feet, brahmins, kshatriya, vaisya, and sudra, in order to protect his creation (cf. Tambiah 1976:20). The Brahmin (the mouth) was assigned the duty to interpret dharma and perform sacrifices. The king or warrior (the arms) was assigned what Tambiah calls a "delimited code of kingship," rajadharm. The king's duty was to apply force [danda] in political regulation and exercise the arts of governance in political and economic affairs [artha] (1976:39).

In Buddhism we see transformed some of these fundamental features of Hindu notions of rank: the use of biological metaphors to portray the state; the assignation of separate perceptual, linguistic and/or epistemological 'duties' to men of different occupations in the kingdom. The Buddhist myth of the origins of the world explicitly rejects the Hindu theory of divine creation and the ontological basis of the system of varnas or rank. Mus notes that under Buddhism the law of causation was rearranged to become a self-ordinating process which postulates an awakening produced by the law of retribution [kamma]. Who is the roller of the wheel of state, the Dhamma-rajah? asks a disciple of the Buddha in a dialogue in The Book of the Gradual Sayings. It is not a person, "It is Dhamma, monk!" exclaims the Exalted One.

Herein, monk, the rajah, the wheel roller, the Dhamma man, the Dhamma rajah, relies just on Dhamma, honours Dhamma, reveres Dhamma, esteems Dhamma; with Dhamma as his standard, with Dhamma as his banner, with Dhamma as his mandate, he sets a Dhamma watch and bar and ward for folk within his realm. (Woodward 1933:114-115, also cited in Tambiah 1976:40).

Like Purusha, the Buddhist Dhammaraja assigns a dharma [dhamma] or 'duty' [na thi] to his subjects (on the political rather than the cosmic scale) (cf. Inden 1976). Unlike in the Purusha myth or in South Asian society, however, where the caste system is relatively fixed, in Theravada societies these duties must constantly change in order to remain pure (to manifest order under constantly changing cosmic conditions in accordance with the principle of anicca (thus providing a natural affinity or adaptability to modern capitalist development). The Buddhist king must redefine these duties (give them new meaning) 'according to time and place.' This is the assumption of the tradition of purification, that men's proper 'duties,' too, are subject to the laws of anicca.

Buddhism has its own genesis myth, the Agganna Suttanta, which describes a slightly different order of men than does the Purusha myth but retains as its basic features assumptions about rank, knowledge and social difference and their correspond to a sacred geography. The Buddhist myth describes a world evolved from pure spirit to gross materiality, from order to disorder. All is in harmony until men begin to "look down upon those whose appearance is inferior to their own," and greed [lobha] and private property emerge simultaneously in society. As Reynolds describes this devolution,

the rice plant which had grown of itself disappears and its becomes necessary to cultivate the land. Soon, as men seek to accumulate more rice than is required for their immediate needs, the rice fields are parcelled out among them, thus bringing private property into being and with it theft and lying, violence and punishment. (1972:18)

As the Buddha relates the genesis myth, four 'circles' of men, nobles [khattiya], brahmins, tradesfolk [vessa] and workpeople [sudda] evolved in the world, warriors before brahmins. Social conditions deteriorated to the point that a Buddhist king called the Maha Sammata or Great Elect was elected to restore order among men: Maha Sammata because he is 'the great elect'; Raja because 'he charms other by the Norm' [dhamma] and Khaittya, Lord of the Fields. Men give one sixth of their rice crops to compensate the king for his protection and guidance.

The King as Future Buddha and Wheel-Rolling Monarch

The above genesis myth has an obvious problem in that it provides no system for succession, and thus over time in Southeast Asian historical traditions, especially the Sinhalese, the king became identified as a 'future Buddha' or bodhisatta and as a universal king, a Cakkavatti or Wheel-rolling Monarch.

Like Indra, the Cakkavatti is the Lord of the Four Quarters. He rolls the great Gemmed Wheel of the Law [dhamma-cak] to the East, South, North and West in a clockwise circumambulation of the cosmos (Rhys Davids 1921:64). In accordance with the Buddhist emphasis on pure action as the basis of rank, the king's virtue and realization of Dhamma, not the king (as an individual), is the force that rolls the wheel of the law. The king rolls the wheel because he upholds the ten superior virtues perfected by the Buddha before attaining nibbana, and dana or almsgiving (manifest in material support of the Sangha) is foremost among those virtues. This is the thotsaphiratchatham ideology of kingship, that based on the Tenfold Practice of the King.

The Buddhist king's relationship to his subjects is modeled after that of the Buddha to his disciples. They are distinguished not so much by a different code of conduct as by the degree to which they have perfected the ten virtues.

The Epistemological Features of Kingship and Rank

Early Buddhist ideologies of kingship gave rise to a tradition of knowledge and sovereignty by which men stand in relation to each other as revealers to revealees of cosmic process. As Reynolds points out, the dhamma is considered to be an unmanifest phenomenon (1972:15-16) and the king's most essential duty towards his subjects is to reveal the dhamma (pure practice): in a multiplicity of forms; in ways appropriate to their abilities and level of understanding; in accordance with the cosmic conditions of the moment. As Tambiah points out, in Buddhist societies the Dhammaraja performs the revelatory and sacrificial functions of the Brahman in Hindu society. Thus the historical evolution of Theravada Buddhist polities is characterized by warriors

and brahmins, and later warriors and monks, competing for positions as revealers of cosmic order, as interpreters of the dhamma.

Another difference between Hindu and Buddhist royal ideals is that the Dhammaraja rules by kindness [karuna] and conquers through righteousness, not force, according to the principle of dharma-vijaya (Smith 1972:33). Because of his perfection of the practice of sila or morality, the Buddhist king is detached from social process and thus "reveals the cosmic order, he does not participate in it" (Weber 1964). (The more pure the virtuoso, the less 'entangled' he is in social process.) This transformation has serious consequences for the king-Sangha relationship. In the Hindu formula, the brahmin's superiority rests on the fact that he knows and expounds the law whereas the king implements it through danda (Ghoshal 1959). In the Buddhist formula the non-violent king's superiority comes perilously close to deriving, like that of the monk, from the fact that he knows and expounds the law.

As a consequence, the concept of royalty became ambiguous in Theravada traditions in that it applies equally to great kings and great monks, to all revealers of cosmic process. "As men treat the remains of kings, so Anan, should they treat the remains of the Tathagatha," says the Buddha in the Maha Parinibbana Sutta, The Book of the Great Decease. Buddhist saints [arhat] are treated like great kings.

The Khmer Influence

A brief look at early Khmer royal traditions provides insight into some basic principles of divinity and royalty and the subtle transformations that have occurred in these traditions. The first royal traditions in the kingdoms of the central Menam Valley were heavily

influenced by the Khmer kingdoms (9th-12th centuries). The Khmer in turn borrowed heavily from South Asian ideologies of kingship and their early court rituals were brahmanic. Western characterizations of Thai kings as "absolute rulers" stem from literal interpretations of highly complex devaraja or Hindu 'god-king' concepts of kingship borrowed by the Thai from the Khmer. For example, in his discussion of early Thai royal traditions, of Thai kings as "absolute rulers," Quaritch Wales (1931) first discusses the devaraja concept and quotes from early Vedic texts which identify the king as a deity: from Manu, "Even an infant king must not be despised (from an idea) that he is a mere mortal, for he is a great deity in human form," from Narada, "How should a king be inferior to a deity, as it is through his word that an offender may become innocent, and an innocent man an offender in due course?" In Satapatha Brahmana the king "is Indra for a twofold reason, namely, because he is a Ksatriya, and because he is a Sacrificer" (1931:30).

Buddhist kings like Hindu kings have dual natures as warriors [kasat, khattiya] and 'supposed angels' or sommutthithev, 'supposed' because of epistemological dimensions of rank: mere mortals cannot 'know for sure' about the kammic heritage of kings or deities and their 'proper duties' or codes for conduct do not include guessing about the same. From this we glean two fundamental points: the essential duality of the natures of kings, and an implicit point, that interactions between king-deities and lesser beings have soteriological significance. The sight, touch, words, and materials gifts which comprise the interactions between gods-kings and their subjects are all 'the royal gift.'

The Devaraja and Siva-Linga Cults

The Hindu theory of kingship was introduced in Cambodia by Jayavarman II, who ascended the throne in A.D. 802. Jayavarman II patronized a royal cult known as the cult of the kamraten jata ta rajya, 'The God who is the Kingdom,' or the devaraja, 'The Royal God.' According to Wales, "this deity (which was a Siva-linga) represented the royal essence present in the living king of Kambuja and in all her kings" (1931:30). We see here powerful linkages between the king's naming prerogatives and his religious style and/or essence: Cambodian kings were often given posthumous titles indicating that they had gone to the heavens of their favourite deities, Siva or Visnu.

The Cambodian material is the source of much scholarly debate. Kulke (1978), for example, cautions against confusing the devaraja and siva-linga cults and argues that inscriptions which date back to the ceremony consecrating King Jayavarman II leave no doubt that the king of Cambodia was not, as previously believed, consecrated as god-king but rather the consecration took place around an image of the god Siva, who, as 'god, who is king' and as 'lord of the world' protected the kings of Cambodia who were 'lords of the the earth' (1978:36-37). This is to argue that Cambodian kings were not divine and sovereign because they were deities but because, as 'lords of the earth,' they were protected by Siva, the 'lord of the world,' and because they shared "subtle substance" with Hindu deities.

Jayavarman IV designated himself as "the deputy of Siva" and attributed his sovereignty to the linga he installed in a sacred temple containing a linga that was dedicated to Siva Tribhuvansevara, the 'Lord of the Three worlds.' Jayavarman, who was the lord of his own (this?) state temple, venerated this divinity as the supreme lord of the world, and, according to Kulke, attributed sovereignty to it.

To this linga's service he committed his sovereignty in order to constitute himself a portion (amsa) of this divinity and thus to possess a higher legitimation than the legal kings of Angkor. The idea of participation as an amsa of the god in divine lordship (devarajya) decisively affected the apotheosis of the ruler in the Angkorian kingdom from the time of Jayavarman IV on. Thereby the king became a participant in divine lordship, without himself being a god. (1978:38)

This interpretation, which ignores the inherently multidimensional nature of the king, nevertheless confirms the ambiguities that are and dualities inherent in Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of kingship and reveals a fundamental principle of social and religious action: that the worship (naming and/or dedication) of an object articulates the principle of sacrality of that object and enacts the sharing of some portion of that god-object with the worshipper.

Thus archaeological evidence suggests that the devaraja cult of Siva declined against the cult of the royal lingas that were located on central temple mountains, but the naming/sharing connection was still central to the tradition. Thus these lingas sometimes bore the names of the kings who consecrated them and were venerated as the kings' "inner subtle selves."

In his introduction to Kulke's essay, I. M. Mabbett, borrowing heavily from Paul Mus, suggests that siva-lingas embody the idea of the "bi-presence" of the god: In itself, "a divinity was abstract and unapproachable," but it could, through ritual, acquire a concrete form in which it could communicate with its devotees. Since the divinity was essentially abstract, there was no contradiction if it had two or more concrete forms as the sacred cult object, the community chief, who was temporarily and ritually divinized, and as his ancestors. Each of these forms was a partial manifestation of a divinity that was at once everywhere and nowhere.

In Kulke's discussion of Khmer archaeological data we encounter the phenomenon of portable images. Kulke suggests that the devaraja was a secondary, portable image that was distinct from the various fixed images in permanent shrines and that this was perhaps akin to the idea in India that fixed lingas in temples could be duplicated by processional images, utsavavigraha (1978:xi). The work of Eck (1981) and Babb (1982) would indicate that the processions in which these images were transported through cities and villages offered men the change to 'see' and worship their deities. As I shall demonstrate throughout the dissertation, this tradition has Buddhist correlates and important ramifications in the history of Theravada Buddhist polities.

'Gazing upon the sacred traces' of the Buddha is believed to have a powerful effect on men that is similar to the effect of their seeing, and being seen, by the (Hindu) deities. Buddhist meditation masters are said to have a 'discriminating eye' which is both spiritual and physical (Maha Boowa 1976a:164). Buddha statues are consecrated by monks who put relics in their heads in a ceremony called 'opening the eyes' of the Buddha (Tambiah 1984). With proper veneration, a Buddha statue 'sees' and 'knows' the wishes and circumstances of those who worship it.

The idea of the "bi-presence" of the god corresponds to the nama/rupe or essence-form distinction in Buddhism. The difference is that in Buddhism the law or dhamma rather than the deity is "abstract and unapproachable." The subtle essence and realization of the Buddha's teachings is called its nama or 'name.' In accordance with Kulke's comments about the multiple and non-contradictory forms of the Hindu deity, the essence of the Buddha and the dhamma is manifest in a myriad of physical forms called the Buddha's 'relic-body,' rupa-kaya and as the 'material aspect of dhamma,' wattana-tham. The dhamma is also manifest

through his 'teaching body,' dhamma-kaya (Reynolds 1977), whereby the physical 'form' [rup] of Buddhist monks manifest the invisible teachings. For example, Thai Buddhist monks are classified by the word rupa which means 'form' rather than khon which means 'person.' The body of Buddhist monks in the Sangha is said to comprise the Buddha's dhamma-kaya or 'teaching body,' physical manifestations of the Buddha's teachings, texts, rituals, art and architecture associated with the temple complex, watthana-[wathu-]tham or the 'physical aspects of dhamma.' The nama/rupa distinction, what Mus refers to as the "double symbolism" of Buddhism, is the basis of Thai notions of culture [wattana-tham] and is the central idiom of power and political process. When sacred Buddhist cult objects including the king and his ancestors are properly venerated, the dhamma is transformed from an unmanifest to a manifest phenomenon.

The custom of the palladia was present in early Thai empires. Like Khmer kings, Thai kings seen as "guarantors of fertility" but instead of transporting siva-lingas they transported Buddha statues and sacred relics from conquered territories and enshrined them in their capitals. These statues were symbolic of fertility and of the king's moral victory; war itself was but one manifestation of kammic laws at work. There is a universal exchange pattern of sacred objects and women. Buddhist princes brought Buddha statues in to the sacred capital and venerated them in specially-built shrines; monarchs then supervised the casting of uniform Buddha statues and sent them out from the capital to the farthest reaches of their kingdoms. Similarly, conquering warlords took (or were offered) women from the rulers of tributary or conquered states. They 'gathered' these women in a single place in the sacred capital, in the king's harem, impregnated them, and sent their sons,

replicas of the monarch, out to rule the outlying regions of the kingdom, acts that likewise signalled their moral victory over peoples at the edges of the kingdom. These patters are most clearly exemplified in the history of the Holy Emerald Jewel, captured from the Laotians in the nineteenth century (Reynolds 1978).

Like Khmer kings, Thai kings also enshrined 'pillars of the kingdom' and 'pillars of the city' called lak muang and similar to those which exist in Thai villages. These pillars, which are still to be found in the Royal Chapel in Bangkok, bear a remarkable resemblance to the siva-lingas found in early Cambodian kingdoms. Here we encounter another central feature of hierarchy, the exclusivity of opportunities of worship of super-sacred objects (and Buddhist monks), called paet okat or 'opening the opportunity' to make merit. The lak muang of the Royal Chapel were enshrined by Thai kings and venerated by them alone. Eventually, however, as the kingdom was purified of Hindu elements (in efforts of Thai kings to disassociate themselves from Hindu "god-king" traditions as interpreted by the West) they were 'renamed' and, since King Mongkut's time (chapters 4-5), came to represent a different tradition of worship. Instead of the god Siva, these lak muang or 'city pillars' are now said to represent 'The Guardian Angels of the Kingdom of Siam' in which the guardians are the former kings of Siam, reborn as angels or thewada.

Transformations and Continuities

The following are some general transformations and continuities between Hindu and Buddhist royal and religious traditions.

1. Sacrifice in Hindu traditions became identified with the Buddhist virtue of dana and boricak, almsgiving and renunciation. These

virtues are expressed as the sacrifice of self, of personal energy 'in the pursuit of dhamma,¹ a theme of modern Thai kingship, and more important, as material sacrifice to the Buddhist Sangha, encoded in the thotsaphirachatham ideology of Buddhist kingship. Dana is foremost among the ten virtues of the Buddhist king.

2. In both Thai-Buddhist and Hindu traditions, veracity is the singlemost important characteristic of the divine king. In the Buddhist as in the Hindu tradition, veracity is linked to dana and boricak. The Buddhist king is a "master of gifts," a "warrior," and a "sacrificer par excellence" but it is the qualities he shares with Sibi "who has given all he possessed," the "master of truth," that establishes him definitively as the Dhammaraja, as master of truth and therefore of knowledge.
3. Buddhist and Hindu royal traditions as based on the idea of the "bi-presence" of the gods, on the "double symbolism" and transformative principles of absence/presence, invisible/visible, and form/essence distinctions, all linked to processes of naming (a form and an essence). The subtle substance or essence of the god is shared through acts of veneration. The nature of the deity's powers are signified by the name assigned it (a prerogative of kings) and then further shared through the re-naming (or recasting) of the deity in the image of kings. Recalling or remembering the deity (the Buddha) is a central dynamic of Buddhist kingdoms, an idiom of everyday social life and power (chapter 18).

These are all fundamental aspects of royal traditions that have persisted to the present.

Encompassment

In the Theravada Buddhist polities of Southeast Asia, Hindu deities became encompassed within the Buddhist cosmology as guardians of the Buddha, and Brahmanic rituals, within Buddhist rituals. Wales writes the following of the relationship between Brahmanic and Buddhist royal traditions after the fourteenth century:

The Hinayanistic conversion . . . brought about a definite change, and in Siam to-day we find the only certain relic of the cult of the Royal God in the symbolism of the Coronation Ceremony by which the Brahman priests call down the spirits of Visnu and Siva to animate the new king; but possibly also in the role played by the king as Siva now or formerly in the Tonsure, Ploughing, and Swinging Ceremonies, and in the Meru and Kailasa mountains used on certain ceremonial occasions. (1931:31)

I suggest that powers of encompassment (the characteristics of Sibi) are the dominant characteristic and the distinguishing feature of Thai Buddhist kings. The king's phrarachabarami, the 'king's royal virtue,' enables him to absorb and transcend new ideologies and practices into a single pure tradition appropriate to the cosmic conditions of the moment. Over time the king's synthesis of new and alien (Western) practices became identified with the practice of the 'middle way.'

I raise this point because acts of inclusiveness are often misrecognized by Western scholars and diplomats as the king's adoption a new "belief" or ideology. When the king later purifies or renounces this belief as being inappropriate to cosmic and social conditions, or when he has perfected it in his own person and behavior, and then turned to perfect yet another virtue, the transition is interpreted as evidence a sign of his "untrustworthiness" as a ruler or the king is perceived as a dilettante, a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. This clash in interpretational frameworks is the structural basis of modern antinomy problems of Buddhist kings.

Wales supports the encompassment thesis when he writes the following oft-quoted statement, that under Theravada Buddhism

. . . the Hindu gods were reduced to the rank of spirits ministering to the Buddha, or demi-gods ruling over the inferior heavens. In fact, though they were fitted into the Buddhist scheme of things they were no longer taken seriously; and no Buddhist king would have been flattered to have been told that he was the incarnation of a Hindu deity--and nothing more. The conception of a king under Hinayanism is obviously that he is a Bodhisattva or incipient Buddha, or else a Cakravartin (Universal Emperor), and this belief, which is still held by all orthodox Siamese Buddhists, is derived proximately from imitation of the great Sinhalese kings and is strengthened in the minds of the people by the evidence of the popular Indian Jataka stories. (1931:31)

Deva-rajā, Dhammaraja

How can we best characterize the fundamental differences between Devaraja and Dhammaraja concepts of kingship? In Cambodian and South Asian traditions the king's sovereignty was based on the sharing [amsa] or the subtle 'substance' of the gods. The king-god relationship was portrayed in an idiom of physical-spiritual substance and it was a part:whole relationship. In Buddhist ideology the king's sovereignty is based on his perfection of the ten virtues. This, too, is a part:whole relationship or a question of degree, that of a partial to a total perfection of the ten virtues. This distinction encodes the king's relationship to his subjects.

In Southeast Asian polities, the king became the focal point of the soteriological process, in competition with monks in the Buddhist Sangha as revealers of the law. The "ordinating source" of dhamma, he was a major source of its physical and visible manifestations. Like the Hindu king, the Buddhist king "recreates the Golden Age" but does so by emulating or "sharing" the pure practice of the Buddha. From there the dynamic is similar to that of the Hindu king in that the dhamma is

conveyed from the king to his subjects visually, by the sight of his auspicious ritual performances or ritual forms he has purified and which stand as a model for ritual performances throughout the kingdom.

As I shall demonstrate in upcoming chapters, the history of modern capitalist development in Thailand can be seen as a working out of the implications of the notion of pure lineage. For example, the subjects of Thai kings addressed them as 'The Slave of the Lord Buddha.' Wales cites this form of address as evidence of the absolute powers of the Buddhist monarchy, noting that Thai kings were

tempted to . . . accelerate the process of attaining complete enlightenment to rid themselves of the galling necessity of showing reverence to the humble yellow-robed monk.
(1931:31-32)

It is of this "galling necessity" that I will speak presently.

The Denial of the "Hindu" Past

There is much scholarly discussion of the "Indian" influence on the early Southeast Asian kingdoms (Coedès 1968; Wolters 1982), and issue that is gradually dropped in studies of the fourteenth century kingdoms onwards, after Theravada Buddhism became the official state religion. There is almost no scholarly discussion of the "Hindu" influence on Thai kingdoms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Wales' statements are generally accepted as an accurate accurate description of the relation of Hindu to Buddhist traditions of kingship. He identifies the "Hindu" tradition in ritual practices--the Coronation, Tonsure, Swinging and First Ploughing ceremonies--in the Hindu Code of Manu, in architectural and dramatic forms, and with the popular Ramakhien, the Thai version of the Indian epic tale, the Ramayana. While this empirical approach is not inaccurate, it overlooks important structural features of Hindu and Buddhist royal traditions.

To begin the discussion I suggest that Thai kings rejected their "Hindu" past in response to threats by Western colonial powers in efforts to shed their images as "absolute rulers," "oriental despots," or men who "thought they were gods." This process began in the nineteenth century when the colonial threat was at its peak, most notably in the reign of King Mongkut. At about the same time, however, a curious renaming process began: Thai kings began to identify the practices that Westerners associated with despotism and with the devaraja concept as being "Hindu" or "Khmer" and renounced them. Thus the rejection of Hindu and Khmer "impurities" in the Thai religious system is a persistent theme in Thai and Western historiographic traditions. The "Hindu" practices which persist, "purification" to the contrary, are explained as *residua* (cf. Vella 1957, 1978; Moffat 1961; Riggs 1966), as custom no longer supported by belief. But what of the beliefs no longer supported by custom, which is to say the more subtle forms of kingship and sovereignty that are present but unarticulated in the Buddhist kingdom?

My argument here is that certain "Hindu" strands of the Thai royal tradition, most notably those concerning beliefs about the nature of the king's blood and his divinity, have persisted as the basis of concepts about the king's sovereignty and that they are the source of tensions and ambiguities that periodically surface in Thai historical dramas. The nature of these ambiguities must be understood if we are to understand the legitimation problems of twentieth century rulers and the cultural dynamics of recent capitalist development. Let us first examine the cosmological bases of Buddhist and Hindu concepts of lineage.

The Concept of Pure Lineage

The tension between blood and merit as competing criteria for sovereignty originated in early Buddhist texts which refuted the validity of Hinduism and rejected the doctrine of the soul [atman], with its social basis in the practice of rituals involving the exchange of pure coded substances as a basis of rank [varna], in favor of the doctrine of non-self [anicca] with its emphasis on pure practice as the sole source of religious salvation.

In Buddhist texts and monastic traditions, the perfection of virtue is at least theoretically separate from ritual practice (Buddhaghosa 1976:3; Tambiah 1976:19). In a much-quoted passage from the canonical suttas, the Buddha assails the brahmins for their belief in excellence based on birth and not on deed, and for preoccupation with the performance of ritual and traffic with gods rather than with the pursuits of a recluse (Tambiah 1976:33). In a pointed rejection of the caste system, the Buddha recruited his mendicants from brahman and shudra castes alike. In the Aggana Suttanta the Buddha tells the story of two probationary disciples, "brahman by birth and family," who were "blamed and reviled" for renouncing the best rank to go over to that "low class" of shaven-head mendicants. The Buddha relates the genesis myth to expose the fallacy of those arguments. Belief in the ontological reality of rank [yanna] is illusory in the same way as is belief in the ontological reality of the self or the soul. The Buddha asserts that the four yannas evolved as part of the early creation of the social order, but that good and bad qualities, "blame and praise," were distributed equally among them. Eventually the bhikkhu, "drawn from all classes," journeys forth from the life of the householder to that of the homeless mendicant. The bhikkhu is "chief among men"

because he is first to "destroy the fetter of re-becoming" and achieve the knowledge that makes him free. (Rhys Davids 1921:77ff.)

There are two superior beings in this schema, the king and the bhikkhu, but the bhikkhu is superior to the king. In the words of the Buddha, "The Khattiya³ is the best among this folk Who put their trust in lineage. But one in wisdom and in virtue clothed, Is best of all 'mong spirits and men" (Rhys Davids 1921:94).

The message that religious purity is unrelated to caste membership is repeated in the Sinhalese Pali text, The Path of Purification, a volume of commentary written by the fifth-century monk, Buddhaghosa. It was and remains the basis of Theravada monastic practice in Southeast Asian polities. Buddhaghosa writes that the path of purification is taught by "insight, by understanding (jhana), and in some instances by deeds (kamma)," and accordingly it is said,

"By deeds, vision and righteousness, By virtue, the sublimest life--
By these are mortals purified, And not by lineage and wealth."

And similarly,

He who is possessed of constant virtue, Has understanding, and
is concentrated, Is strenuous and diligent as well, Will cross
the flood so difficult to cross (1976:3).

Blood versus Merit: Two Concepts of Lineage

Marriot and Inden (1972, 1974) have argued that the idiom of power and purity in South Asia is that of shared coded-substances or biogenetic substances and that transactions in South Asian social life revolve around the the sharing of foods among castes or varna. These exchanges are the basis of a system of social differentiation. As Hanks' (1961) classic work on merit and power makes clear, the sharing

³In this context, khattiya means 'lord of the fields.'

of food or other types of substances has little if nothing to do with the concept of purity in Thailand. Reynolds and Clifford (1981) have argued that pure practice, the perfection of virtue [barami] and the selfless performance of merit-making ceremonies is the dominant idiom and source of purity in Theravada Buddhist societies.

The Thai royal tradition thus incorporates two co-existing and potentially contradictory cultural codes. According to that derived from the South Asian tradition, the king's divinity rests on his possession of pure substance or pure blood. 'Royal lineages' [chuaprawongse] are created through the sharing of pure blood and maintained through the observance of a proper code of conduct.

The tension between these two potentially contradictory cultural codes and ideologies of power did not become genuinely problematic in the Thai kingdom until the nineteenth century until Thai kings, under pressure from the West, adopted the image of the king as the "First Democrat" or as a "constitutional monarch." A distinction and then an opposition between blood and merit (or ability) emerged and the king's reliance on his pure lineage as the basis of sovereignty was portrayed as yet another sign of his despotic and undemocratic tendencies and inherent unfitness to rule. Thai kings began to identify themselves as the 'fathers of democracy' by invoking (and radically reinterpreting) the royal ideal as portrayed by King Ramkhamhaeng in the fourteenth-century kingdom of Sukhothai. Thai kings deemphasized pure blood and pure lineage as the basis of sovereignty and emphasized instead their perfection of the ten kingly virtues. This led to further problems, however, as dana, almsgiving to the Sangha, the implicit source of the king's veracity, was foremost among these virtues and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Thai kings came under heavy attack by Westerners (and eventually their own subjects) for ritual profligacy.

My field data indicate that the operant ideology of kingship is the traditional, substance-based Hindu ideology, that being that the king's divine powers inhere literally in his pure blood [lohit, luat], an ideology similar to that in the story of Yayati and his fall from the heavens. The Buddhist king's pure lineage enables him to 'circulate above,' to fly through the celestial realms (i.e., he is born with transcendent knowledge), but flaws in his virtue and his failure to follow an exalted code of conduct precipitate his plunge from the heavens.

A major difference between the South Asian and Thai royal traditions is that in the former the ideology of pure substance is explicit whereas in the Buddhist traditions it has become repressed. The explicit ideology of sovereignty is that of the king's perfections of the ten virtues. Mention of the king's pure lineage as the source of transcendent powers is virtually a taboo subject.

There is a logical explanation of why Hindu royal traditions were retained in Theravada Buddhist kingdoms. Buddhaghosa's formulation of rank or religious purity established no principle of succession and left Buddhist kings with an insufficient basis for exercising authority over the Sangha. How can the wisdom of a king be superior to that of a monk, of a true world renouncer?

The words of the Cakkavatti Sihanda Suttanta, that the celestial wheel of the law "is no paternal heritage, it must be earned" (Rhys Davids 1921:61), and Buddhaghosa's commentaries on genuine religious purity boded ill for Buddhist kings and even more ill for succession battles. And thus we see the evolution of the idea of the king as a Great Elect, as the Maha Sammata, into the ideology of the king as a bodhisatta or future Buddha. This gave rise to the following ambiguous

formula for Buddhist kingship and sainthood: The Buddha was born as a prince of pure blood, the literal source of his superior inclination towards dhamma. The purity of his blood enabled him to endure hardship, perfect his wisdom, and fulfill his dhamma and attain rebirth as a buddha or enlightened one.

The tension between blood and merit, between pure substance as opposed to pure practice, became manifest as rivalry between powerful kings who might be saints and powerful monks, who also might be saints, in Sinhalese, Burmese and Thai kingdoms. It was also manifest in Buddhist princes competing in succession battles by exchanging the princely for the ascetic life in order to establish their superiority over men of the same bloodline.

One doctrinal response to this tension between the desire to reject Hindu notions of rank and still maintain a powerful tradition of kingship is the Buddhist concept of the 'change of lineage' whereby ascetic practice enables men to cross over from membership in an ordinary lineage to membership in a noble [ariya] lineage, that of the Buddha. The Buddha's is a lineage of pure practice; 'lineage' becomes a metaphor for pure practice rather than the reverse.

The Change of Lineage

The concept of the change of lineage as pure practice receives its classical expression in the Trai Phum or 'Three Worlds' cosmology commissioned by the fourteenth-century Thai king, Luthai. This text incorporates much from the Visudhimagga, from Buddhosa's Path of Purification. The treatise concludes with a discussion of nibbana and the supramundane path which "involves knowing the truth of suffering and abandoning suffering" by realizing the truth concerning its origins. The

yogin meditates and has flashes of "insight-consciousness" until he reaches what is called the "change of lineage."

The change of lineage then arises for one moment, and Nibbana is taken as the object of consciousness; there the lineage of an ordinary person is eliminated, and the lineage of a noble person arises, and then the lineage consciousness arises. (Reynold and Reynolds 1982:344)

Of note here is that lineage is the idiom and not the essence of religious purity (the indexical relations between form and substance, nama and rupa, are reversed from the Hindu). Salvation consists of a search for truth which is knowledge of the origins or the 'arisings' of existing states. And thus, as I argue throughout the dissertation, Buddhism above all is a tradition of knowledge and a way of interpretation. Further, lineage is primarily a mental state. "Supreme in the world is mind" says the famous Isan meditation monk, Acaan Man (Maha Boowa 1976a:30): As the monk-author, Maha Boowa, says of the meditation master Acaan Man's relation to his disciples: "He was their life, his instructions their life-blood" (1976a:159).

The Tenfold Practice of the King

According to the thotsaphirachatham ideology of kingship, the sovereignty of the Buddhist king resides solely in his perfection of the ten virtues: almsgiving, liberality, rectitude, steadfastness, renunciation, etc. He perfects these virtues in the course of his unrelenting 'search for dhamma, 'suwaeng tham, which means literally 'lighting the dhamma.' This ideology downplays the king's pure bloodline as a source of religious enlightenment. It is but one of five "righteous attributes" of a divine king, but it is the first.

In a 1977 sermon celebrating the present King Bhumibol's completion of 10,000 days on the throne, the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet restates the

ancient thotsaphirachatham ideology and expresses as well its tensions and ambiguities. The abbot lists the Tenfold Practice of the Dhamma-King and enumerates the ways in which King Bhumibol's royal activities embodies them. The abbot then notes that "the Lord Buddha . . . mentioned that an anointed King who ruled over any people would be invincible if possessed of five righteous attributes." These are his "perfect lineage," his full treasury, the support of a full complement of armed men, "with all sections and, each soldier absolutely obeying his command" and the support of able ministers. These four attributes "possessed to the full" would in turn lead to the fifth, "the king's glory" which "means" that "the King's Power would be firmly established and acknowledged all around, striking fear in the heart of all enemies and creating security for his country and his people" (1977:31-33). (Here we see yet another feature of Theravada semiotic traditions. The proper 'meaning' of things is defined in terms of an appropriate practice or proper code of conduct.)

The abbot felt compelled to make several additional remarks on the meaning of the king's pure blood lineage and its soteriological significance, however. "A king of good lineage is likely to behave in an exemplary manner for the blood of his good ancestors is in him," he began " . . . but an ordinary person who has constantly avoided wrong actions is bound to turn out to be an equally exemplary person" (1977:35). There was a further qualification, however. "A person who has managed to maintain these abstentions is like having his blood cleansed of evil and thus compared well with a King who possesses a good lineage" (1977:34-35).

Lineage terms have evolved in two directions in the Thai polity. Chuasai is the general term for lineage. Royal lineage

[chua-phrawongse] refers to the royal family. Sai or 'line' refers both to monks in the same ordination or teaching line [parampara], i.e., to a 'line of monks' [sai phra], and to men who are in the same 'blood-line,' sai luat.

In the contemporary polity, the major distinction between the king and his subjects is not that between a man of noble and an ordinary lineage, but between royal lineage and no lineage at all. "Ordinary men don't have chuaprawongse," said said a palace official, "only kings." By this he meant that ordinary men do not trace their lineages back more than two generations. Ordinary men share common 'bloodlines' [sai lohit], of close maternal or paternal ancestors but in public affairs they are differentiated by their perceived fate or store of merit [bun-wasana] and their barami as manifested primarily in their material sacrifices to the Sangha. Members of the royal family are the exception to this rule in that they can be distinguished by the relative purity of their blood. The generally unarticulated belief that the king's special abilities inhered in his pure blood and derived from his membership in the 'bloodline of warriors' [sai lut kasat], was the root of major legitimation problems of twentieth-century Thai rulers. It precipitated a soteriological crisis in the kingdom after the revolution of 1932.

Rulers who lacked pure blood had to turn to the ritual medium to purify their minds and thus acquire the interpretive powers necessary to reveal the cosmos, rule the kingdom, and to prescribe proper laws (pure practice). Without such powers, they could not perform the revelatory functions of the divine monarch; they lacked the ability to enhance the soteriological status of the nation's citizens and to maintain the kingdom as a potent soteriological realm.

As I will demonstrate in upcoming chapters, a new ideology of lineage evolved in the kingdom after the revolution of 1932 in which men of disparate backgrounds could, through the resplendence of their merit-making activities, establish themselves in a single 'line of merit' [sai bun] 'at the "head" of the nation,' a somewhat unusual twist on Hindu biological metaphors for the state (chapter 20).

I further argue that there is an "elective" affinity between Thai Buddhism and the most recent stages of capitalist development in Thailand--marked by the growing influence of Sino-Thai corporations--in that the emphasis on pure practice that is central to the Theravada religious system is the source of an openness or flexibility in the Thai social system. In times of social upheaval men could quickly restructure power relations by following ancient lineage principles. The idea that one can, through the generosity of one's gifts to the Sangha, join the 'meritorious lineage at the head of the nation' has enabled powerful Chinese or Chinese-Thai "technocrats" to assume the prerogatives of divine kings as heritors and interpreters of the law. They have followed in the footsteps of Sibi and become the nation's new "masters of gifts" and of sacrifice, although whether their renunciatory religious activities will transform them into the "masters of truth" remains to be seen.

In the following chapters I will describe the evolution of the early Thai royal tradition in the kingdoms and indicate how the blood/merit tension was played out in a succession battle in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 4

THE CREATION OF A ROYAL TRADITION

Introduction

This chapter outlines the creation of the Thai royal tradition from the thirteenth century to its imminent destruction in the face of Western influence in the mid-nineteenth century as a means of understanding the changes that have occurred in the twentieth century. Features of the past that inform the present are highlighted, particularly the cosmological and semiotic traditions that are the basis of modern rhetoric of domination cum purification.

Since this dissertation is ultimately about the cultural and economic history of the Lao-Thai or Isan people, the focus shifts from a discussion of the formation of the central Thai polity which is based on textual and archaeological evidence to a narrative history of the polity as told by Isan informants.

This history differs from others of the Thai Buddhist polity in three respects. First, I lay the groundwork for a theory of Thai-Buddhist hierarchy that is based on the thotsaphirachatham ideology of kingship in which the monarch rules by observing the ten kingly perfections. Second, I describe the evolution of Thai-Buddhist kingship in terms of two parallel historical movements and dynamics, the "buddhicization" and "sinocization" of the Thai polity, dynamics that in turn comprise the backdrop of the history of Isan peoples. "Buddhicization" refers to historical and cultural processes that position new beliefs and

practices within an overarching Buddhist soteriological framework (cf. Ames 1964; Kirsch 1977; chapter 18) and which most often appear in the historical guise of 'purification,' a prerogative of kings.

Sinocization refers to the mechanisms, often religious, through which successive generations of Chinese immigrants are integrated into the polity. The buddhacization of the polity is widely acknowledged in Thai and Western historiographic traditions, whereas sinocization is almost universally denied and/or deemphasized, for reasons that will become apparent. Finally, I examine the changing significance of royal blood (i.e., the king's pure biogenetic substance) as a central but generally unstressed "Hindu" element of the Thai-Buddhist royal tradition.

This chapter and the next revolve around two general themes: how "the denial of the Hindu past" (and of Khmer-Hindu influences) became part of the Thai historiographic tradition, in part as a response to Western pressure; and the historical implications of the persistence of a "Hindu" strand of the Thai royal tradition, the belief that the king's pure blood is the literal source of his powerful inclination towards dhamma.

Sukhothai: 1238-1317

Theravada Buddhism became the predominant Thai religion in the thirteenth century, when Thai chieftains defeated the local Khmer commander and founded the independent kingdom of Sukhothai. Textual and archaeological evidence¹ demonstrates a shift in emphasis from Hindu to Buddhist ideals of kingship. Thus the first of the eight kings of Sukhothai took the title of Indra, or the 'Auspicious Indra,' Sri

¹Sources on Sukhothai include Griswold (1967), Coedès and Waithayakon (1965), Coedès (1968), and two Thai chronicles, the Jinakalamali and the Mulasasana.

Indraditya, and the last four the title of Mahadhammaraja, The Great Dhamma King.

The Economy

Sukhothai's major economic base was agriculture, rice farming and fruit growing. The capital flourished as a trading center and pottery was exported to Java, Sumatra, Pegu and the Philippines. The kingdom developed commerce with Indian, Chinese, Burmese, Ceylonese and Persian traders. Barter was the chief trading method, although coinage came to assume an increasing importance.

Evidence suggests that Chinese traders were present in the ports and waterways of the Gulf of Siam in the thirteenth century. King Ramkhamhaeng sent tributary missions to Peking in the latter part of the century (Skinner 1957:3,383; cf. Briggs 1951:242; Landon 1941:4) and imported Chinese artisans who made pottery and porcelain for export.

The Galactic Polity

The Sukhothai kingdom was loosely governed through towns in a feudalistic system controlled by the king. The influence of the kingdom grew in part because of judicious intermarriages between Sukhothai kings and the daughters of the rulers of tributary states and neighboring kingdoms.

The idiom of power was that of royal kinship, a conflation of things 'royal' [luang], 'lordlike' [cao], and familial [pha-luk]. Provincial towns near the capital were ruled directly by the king or his close relatives, distant towns, by governors appointed by the monarch who in theory enjoyed 'absolute power' [amnat det-khat, unlimited discretion as to the use of force] within their own territories. The capital was called the 'royal city' [muang luang], its surrounding territories,

cosmological replicas of the capital, 'offspring of the royal city' [luk muang]. Each of these cities had relics at their centers which were often enshrined in temples called Wat Mahathat or the Temple of the Great Relic (see below).

The Sukhothai polity exhibits features of what Tambiah (1976:112) calls the "pulsating galactic polity" in that the kingdom had a strong royal authority in in the capital and was surrounded by city-states with identical structures. Royal authority was strong at the center and weak at the periphery. The king was referred to as the 'lord' [cao] of the territory or the 'father' [phokhun] of his people, as were the rulers of his vassal states. Tax collection by the king and his representatives was referred to as 'eating the city' or territory [kin muang].

The Village as an Autonomous Dhamma-Realm

Little is known of village life in the Sukhothai kingdoms. The capital stood at the center of the kingdom, surrounded by smaller 'circles' [monthon] or similarly-structured tributary states. These so-called vassal states were ruled by hereditary governors or rulers [cao muang] who replicated the courts and officialdom of the center. Villages were periodically brought under control of of these ruling capitals as kings oscillated from strong to weak positions of control over their territories (ergo the "pulsating" galactic polity). The available evidence suggests that relations of production remained constant throughout these oscillations, however (see below).

As Reynolds and Clifford (1980) note, Thai villages were structured as independent dhamma realms or soteriological orders that could function independently of a strong royal capital. Like the capital,

they were ordered as a complementary opposition of Buddhist monks and Buddhist laity and the two orders were united and separated through acts of dana or alms-giving. The Buddhist rituals practiced in Thai villages resembled those practiced by kings in the sacred capital and include symbols of royalty and many of the cosmological themes and motifs that are found in the Trai Phum cosmology (see below). In this respect, the Thai, Laotian, and Khmer kingdoms were probably very similar (cf. Tambiah 1970; Porée-Maspero 1962-1969).

The Buddhist temple was and remains the center of village religious and social life (cf. Akin 1969:10-11), a focal point of the local economy in two senses. First, it was a center for the distribution of surplus (labor and goods). Second, it was the center of merit-making activities and thus a center for the distribution of prestige. If the Buddhist laity had surplus, they dedicated it to the temple in the form of gifts to monks. Some temples, mostly large urban wat, controlled manpower in that they had hereditary slaves exempt from the corvée assigned to them by the king (Coedès 1924:168; Wood 1924:60).

Abbots advised villagers on communal and personal affairs, mundane and religious. Since surplus accumulated at the temple, it was distributed to needy families from there by the abbot or the temple committee.² Ethnographic evidence also suggests that it is not uncommon for village abbots to lend money at profitable rates of interest to villagers.³

²Until quite recently, in northern villages, for example, surplus rice accumulated at the temple and was distributed to needy villagers by the abbot. In recent years, abbots have begun to ask that villagers make their donations in cash rather than rice. As the northern economy becomes more commercialized, the temple is playing less of a role in the distribution of rice to needy villagers. Personal communication, Anan Ganjanapan.

³Professor Lauristan Sharp confirms this for the village of Bang

Monks do not till the soil but they do perform some types of manual labor. In contemporary villages, and most likely in the past, they have at least partial responsibility for constructing monastic buildings and it is not uncommon for carpentry tools to be offered among the kathin gifts⁴ in village rituals (chapter 11).

The City and Its Palladia: War and Religion

The sacred center of the kingdom of Sukhothai consisted of the royal palace which was built as a replica of Mount Meru and a Buddhist temple called Wat Mahathat, the Temple of the Great Relic. One of the most important traditions to have survived to the present is that of rulers collecting Buddha statues and sacred relics from conquered territories and enshrining them in their capitals, an activity that is called 'putting them in a more pure place.' The kings of Sukhothai enshrined their prizes of war at Wat Mahathat. Wat Mahathat in Bangkok, the capital of the Cakkri dynasty, is the dwelling place of the twentieth-century rebel Isan monk, Phimonlatham, who played a prominent role in the social dramas of recent decades.

Each city had sacred relics at its center and these and/or Buddha statues were their palladia, protectors and guardians of prosperity. In the Theravada tradition, 'victory' in war and religious enlightenment are synonymous (cf. Griswold 1967:36-37) and thus a dethroned ruler not only took the oath of vassalage to the conqueror, he also surrendered his statue and sent to it the conqueror's capital. Phra Sihing, the

Chan. William Klausner's (1960) work on the northeast confirms the importance of the village abbot and the wat in organizing communal projects. C. Reynolds (1979a) describes the role of powerful urban temples in controlling land and labor in the nineteenth century. Sulak Sivaraksa's (1986) more recent articles make numerous references to monks and their association with capitalistic ventures.

⁴Personal communication, Suwanna P.

Sinhalese Buddha statue--carried from the sacred island of Sri Lanka--was the prize in the kingdoms of Sukhothai.

There is a reverse pattern of religious power and domination in that Thai kings, like their Khmer and Sinhalese counterparts, also 'restored' [burana] temples and venerated sacred relics in distant parts of their kingdoms as acts of domination. Similarly, they oversaw the casting of Buddha statues in the royal capital whose 'shape' was representative of a new version of religious orthodoxy (cf. chapter 17) and sent them out to distant parts of conquered territories, likewise as acts of domination.⁵ In periods when the capital was weak and the king was trying to attract (rather than subdue) allies, the relationship was more along the lines of an exchange of relics and texts. These patterns of appropriation and domination have persisted to the present, with interesting modifications.

Ramkhamhaeng: The Righteous Ruler in Retrospect

King Ramkhamhaeng (Rama the Brave) (1275-1317) is the most famous of the Sukhothai rulers, often hailed by Thai historians as the quintessential Righteous Ruler. A publication of the 1979 Kriangsak government, Thailand into the 80s (Office of the Prime Minister 1979),⁶ recapitulates the most persistent historical themes concerning the kingdom of Sukhothai and its relationship to the later kingdom of Ayuthaya. A statement of modern orthodoxy, this semi-official publication notes that Sukhothai rulers subscribed "exclusively to the Buddhist science of kingship . . ." (1979:21). King Ramkhamhaeng is

⁵For a discussion of the importance of the corporeal relics of the Buddha, see Wyatt (1975:65).

⁶Written with the help of Bangkok Bank's publicity department (chapters 19 and 20).

described as "a devout Buddhist" who "invited Ceylonese monks to purify the Khmer-corrupted Theravada Buddhism practiced in Sukhothai" (1979:19).

According to the text, the Buddhist "science of kingship" is modeled after canonical descriptions of the Chakravartin, "an enlightened monarch who ruled according to Buddhist precepts, cherishing righteousness, honesty and charity" (1979:21). The ideal Buddhist monarch is

a King of Righteousness who abides by the ten kingly virtues of piety, liberality, charity, freedom from anger, mercy, patience, rectitude, mildness, devotion and freedom from enmity. A paragon of virtue, such a king unfailingly upholds the five Buddhist precepts of abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, adultery and intoxicating drinks. Furthermore, he dispenses justice, protects the weak, enriches the poor and diligently guards his human and animal subjects. (1979:21)

The thotsaphirachatham ideal is a classical view of the Hindu ruler as espoused in the Mon Dharmasastra (cf. Dhani 1947). Like the Hindu king, the Dhammaraja is a warrior who protects and defends his people and the Sangha. As a sacrificer, he dedicates his life, energy, and worldly goods to the pursuit of dhamma. The ten kingly virtues or perfections are called barami or paramita. They are the virtues of Sibi.

Thammasat/Rachasat: Permanent and Temporary Law

According to Theravada ideology, the Dhammaraja maintained order by upholding and interpreting a body of law called the Thammasat, a restatement (i.e., a 'renaming') of the Hindu "Laws of Manu" that drew on the ideology of the king as the Great Elect [Mahasammat] and as the khattiya or 'lord of the fields' who 'charms others' and therefore earns the title of raja. These royal ideals are stated in the Digha Nikaya

(cf. Lingat 1959). In the Buddhist version of the creation of the law, the king is a bodhisatta and Manu is a royal councilor. The king becomes a Cakkavatti or universal sovereign by observing (abiding by) the above-stated rules of conduct, similar to those in the Satapathha Brahmanas (minus the performance of the Hindu sacrifices [cf. Dhani 1947]).

In theory, the king did not create or make the Thammasat but rather issued edicts and commands in harmony with it. Over time a second body of law containing the edicts of individual kings, called the rajasat, was appended. If rachasat were effective and conducive to moral order, they were retained; if not, they were discarded on the death of the king. This contrast of permanent to temporary law is crucial to an understanding of the king's role in the modern polity and thus in shaping modern capitalist development (chapter 16).

The King's Treasury

The Sukhothai inscriptions also identify King Ramkhamhaeng, the Righteous Ruler, as a supporter of "free trade" and, like the Great Cakkavatti King (chapter 11), as a king who do did not tax his people.

This Sukhothai is good. In the water there are fish. In the fields there is rice. The king does not levy a rate on his people . . . Who wants to trade in elephants, trades. Who wants to trade in horses, trades. Who wants to trade in gold and silver, trades. The faces of people shine bright (The Office of the Prime Minister 1979:21).

(Instead, individual lords taxed their subjects and paid tribute to the king.)

King Lithai's version of the royal ideal states that the king should make loans available from the royal treasury, but that he could not charge tax or collect interest like private citizens (Coedès 1924). As with other of the practices described in inscriptions (Andaya 1978:12), this custom may have been observed more in the breach than in actuality.

Kathin in the Sukhothai Kingdom

An equally famous inscription that dates back to Ramkhamhaeng's reign contains the first historical evidence of the performance of kathin in the Thai kingdoms. The performance of the ritual then as now defined the 'circle' of the king's influence and the limits of his kingdom as a realm of dhamma.

The inhabitants of Sukhodaya are given to alms, to the observance of the precepts and to charity. King Rama Gamheng, and women, nobles and chiefs, all without exception, without distinction of rank or sex, practice with devotion the religion of Buddha and observe the precepts during the rains seasons retreat. At the end of the rains season there takes place the Kathina ceremonies which last a month. During these ceremonies they make offerings of heaps of money, heaps of areca, heaps of flowers, and of cushions and pillows. The offerings made each year amount to two millions. They conduct Kathin ceremonies as far as the monastery of Arannikas, younder, and when they return to the city, the procession stretches from the monastery of Arannikas to the border of the plain. There everyone prostrates himself while the lutes and guitars resounds and hymns and chants are played. (Coedès, Les Inscriptions de Sukhodaya, cited in Wales [1931:109])

Now as in the fourteenth century the performance of kathin is cited as evidence of the Buddhist piety of a king and his subjects (cf. Wells 1960:106) and identified as an act of social harmony [khvam samakhi] (chapters 13-17). Here we also see a uniquely Thai-Buddhist and/or Buddhist ideology of egalitarianism in which all people are portrayed as being equal and united in their respect for religion in the context of the ceremony and all men are equally subject to the laws of retribution.

In the 1970s and possibly earlier, the government began to portray the kathin ceremony as a model of democracy for the whole polity (chapter 18). This was an intended act of domination, however, since the monks' side of the ceremony that was invoked as the model of democracy has as its main feature the customs of 'assent through silence' and monks 'speaking in a single voice' to approve senior monks' nomination of a kathin recipient (Kromkan Sasana 1978a).

The Historiographic Tradition

The Ramkhamhaeng (Sukhothai) ideal has been revived and reinterpreted throughout Thai history and eventually became a prominent feature of twentieth century antinomy cycles. Interpretations of Ramkhamhaeng's rule as a model of Buddhist democracy or benevolent paternalism derive from the king's title as pho khun or 'father of his people' (rather than that of cao muang or 'lord of the polity' which also appears in the inscriptions). They derive from the above-quoted kathin inscription and from yet another inscription which states that the king ruled as a father to his people:⁷ Anyone with a grievance could strike a bell outside Ramkhamhaeng's palace and be granted a royal audience. The king would then sit on a stone throne called the Manansilapatra throne (the throne of justice) and dispense justice directly to his people. As the government volume concludes from this inscription, King Ramkhamhaeng thus "enjoyed a paternal relationship with his people, embodying the open accessibility and closeness between king and subjects that epitomises the ideal Thai monarch" (1979:20).

In this context, a paternalistic royal ideal (later hailed as an incipient democratic tendency) is identified with: (1) the tradition by which the people are allowed a glimpse of their king; and (2) with the ruler's personal dispensation of justice. In Ayuthayan kingdoms, which borrowed heavily from the Khmer Devaraja concept of kingship, the king's subjects were rarely, if ever, allowed to see their monarch. In the 1960s, the custom of allowing his subjects a glimpse of their king became the basis of a national integration policy.

⁷Coedès (1924:107, Inscr. v) notes a similar inscription attributed to King Lithai, King Ramkhamhaeng's grandson; Lithai describes himself as a king who "loves his people like his own children." Andaya notes that the image of a king as a father is a common one throughout Buddhist inscriptions.

The kings of Sukhothai invoked the thotsaphirachatham ideology to distinguish their "benevolent" fully Buddhist rule from the "despotic" rule of previous Khmer overlords. In the nineteenth century, Cakkri kings began to identify themselves with the Sukhothai ideal of kingship by distinguishing the Sukhothai from the "despotic" and "corrupt" ruling traditions of Ayuthaya. In so doing they were seeking to refute Western accusations that they, like the kings of Ayuthaya (who based their rule on the Devaraja tradition), "thought they were gods." Ayuthayan kings were the very same "despotic" Oriental monarchs with whom Western traders and diplomats had first contact, often to the chagrin of both (cf. Wood 1924:216). By the late nineteenth century, the Thai elite were consistently identifying the hierarchical and repressive aspects of Thai royal traditions with Brahmanic rituals and with the Devaraja concept of kingship of the "Ayuthayan" kings.

In a more recent work, Charnvit argues that the tendency to regard Sukhothai as the first unified kingdom of the Thai people is a comparatively recent development from the late nineteenth century (1976:13-14) and that early historical process in the Menam basin consisted of the interaction of various muang, no one of which, Sukhothai included, was able to dominate its rivals. The Sukhothai-Ayuthaya-Thonburi-Bangkok periodicization of Thai history dates back to King Mongkut and was fully elaborated by his son, Prince Damrong.

King Wachirawut invoked the Ramkhamhaeng ideal in the 1920s in order to strengthen the connection between Buddhist kingship and the king's warrior status and from there to build an ideology of militant Thai nationalism. This ideology discriminated against Chinese merchants and was part of an effort to stave off demands for a parliamentary system of

government (cf. Reynolds 1973:45; chapter 6). In the 1950s, Luang Phibun, the military prime minister, invoked the Ramkhamhaeng ideal to contrast his democratic and benevolent style of rule with the "despotic rule" and "absolute powers" wielded by past Cakkri kings in an attempt to prevent the young and new King Bhumibol from making a comeback in true royal style (or from making an effective alliance with his rivals) (chapter 8). In the 1960s, King Bhumibol turned the tables and invoked the Ramkhamhaeng ideal as a model of village democracy, a thinly veiled criticism of the despotic rule of the military strongmen Thanom and Praphat (chapter 16).

The "Hindu" Influence and Other Issues

There is much scholarly debate over the putative "Hindu" or "Indian" influences on the Thai polity and ritual system and also over their (supposed) purification. As a way of approaching these issues, I first suggest that the major historical issue is not whether Buddhist kings subscribed "exclusively" to Buddhist ideologies of kingship (which runs counter to archaeological and textual evidence), but rather how the past has been interpreted in successive historical epochs, to what purpose, and how the purification process itself has been represented (or 'renamed') over time.

Second, I suggest that the most important and least recognized "Hindu" element of Thai Buddhist kingship concerns beliefs about the king's pure blood. Third, I suggest that the ostensive "purification" of Hindu elements plus the inclusion of new elements in the royal activities and the royal ritual repertoire can best be understood in terms of an overarching Thai-Buddhist (and perhaps Theravada Buddhist) principle of hierarchy that is based on the thotsaphirachatham ideology of kingship and related literary conventions.

Fourth, I suggest that ideologies about the king's royal blood and pure lineage relate to another historical movement, an ever-increasing tension between kings and monks in the kingdoms of the Menam valley, the basis of much Sangha "theatre" past and present. "Sangha theatre" is the major medium in which "economic" issues (questions about the king's "purity" or competence) are acted out. This is to suggest that Buddhist "economics" can only be properly understood in relation to the rhetoric and activities of religious purification, in terms of the language of religious images.

Finally, I suggest that, like ideologies of pure blood, the most important heterodox aspects of Thai Buddhism are often implicit. Some are revealed only when the monarchy is challenged by Western (or westernized) critics, or by situations which arise when men of royal blood are not ruling the polity. Other heterodox aspects of the tradition, including assumptions about pilgrimage and circumambulation, the cosmological premises underlying the performance of rituals, and the epistemological and linguistic dimensions of religious enlightenment, remain implicit, the structural conditions for the emergence of the modern economy. Let us reexamine the kingdom of Sukhothai in light of these suggestions.

The kings of Sukhothai, like the kings who followed, retained the Hindu coronation ceremony and other Brahmanic court rituals including the First Ploughing Ceremony, the Tonsure Ceremony, the Swinging Ceremony (Wales 1931) and ceremonies concerning the city pillar (shaped like a siva-linga). Although these rituals have been modified over time (or, at different times, judiciously removed from the sight of Western audiences), they were and remain the mainstay of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition of kingship and court ceremonial.

Of importance in the Coronation ceremony and other Hindu rituals is that the king is a god or a deity, Indra, The Lord of the Four Quarters. As Indra, he 'faces all directions' (i.e., pays respect to the gods at the eight points of the compass) and performs the ritual circumambulation [pradaksina] around the palace, symbolically taking possession of his kingdom (Wales 1931:36). The pradaksina or munwian is performed in Buddhist ceremonies as the three-times circumambulation of a temple that precedes the kathin offering, an act of homage to the Triple Gems. In the contemporary polity as in the past, pradaksina or munwian, "turning" or "circulating" activities, are symbols of domination and omniscience. They play a crucial role in the formation of the modern economy (chapters 9-20), so much that they can almost be said to constitute the structural conditions for its emergence.

There is another key heterodox aspect of the Buddhist tradition that is of interest to modernization theory, namely that Buddhist and Brahmanic rituals share the same underlying premise: the First Ploughing Ceremony, like the royal kathin, is based on the idea that the king's "precise performance of rituals" generates order and resplendence in the cosmos and in the polity. This is to say that Brahmanic rituals may have been temporarily purged from the royal repertoire and the Trai Phum ridiculed, but their underlying assumptions remain as the basis of beliefs about the efficacy of ritual.

Official interpretations to the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that King Lithai, grandson of King Ramkhamhaeng, was a strong supporter of Brahmanic practices and in so doing was acting in the encompassing manner of the Dhammaraja. For example, Griswold notes that Lithai restored

the lustre of the Hindu cults which were the indispensable support of royalty and strong government. In 1349 he founded

an image of Mahaesvara (Siva) and one of Visnu, and placed them in the devalayamahaksetra (Brahmin temple) in the Mango Grove, west of Sukhodaya, where all the Brahmins and ascetics were to perform the rituals of the cult in perpetuity. (1967:32)

As Tambiah (1976:87) points out, it is difficult to know how much influence brahmins had in the court of the Sukhothai kings or even in which ceremonies they officiated. And Ramkhamhaeng's "democratic" practice of dispensing justice from the Manasilaptra throne is susceptible to an alternative interpretation that hints at a possible rivalry and emerging tension between Sukhothai kings and their Sanghas. Weber (1958) identifies this tension as a distinctive feature of early Buddhist (as opposed to Hindu) kingdoms in South Asia, and relates the king-Sangha dynamic to a "weakening" (or, perhaps more appropriately, a complication) of royal kinship and succession dynamics. The tension is expressed over issues of rank: Who pays deference to whom, and in what contexts?

For example, the practice of dispensing justice from the Manasilaptra throne identified Ramkhamhaeng with that most powerful Indian king, Asoka. The inscription notes that King Ramkhamhaeng invited monks to come sit on the throne on uposatha or religious holidays to expound the dhamma, a custom which also harks back to the Asokan tradition as reported in the Mahavamsa or Sinhalese dynastic chronicles. The king rules righteously in normal times (i.e., most of the time) and formally accepts the superiority of the Buddhist Sangha over the polity only on the uposatha religious days. The monks come only at the royal invitation. This interpretation is supported by an inscription of Ramkhamhaeng's grandson, King Lithai, in which Lithai refers to himself as the mentor of "all the monks" who "observed his wisdom," he (Lithai) who "deserved to be honored by the wise ones" (cited in Andaya 1978:10).

What is uncontested is that from the Sukhothai kingdom on, Thai rulers subscribed to the thotsaphirachatham ideology of kingship; the Thai king observes the same ten perfections that were perfected by the Buddha in his last ten lives as a bodhisatta or future Buddha. I suggest that the thotsaphirachatham ideology is the basis of a Thai Buddhist principle of hierarchy. After a certain historical point, certainly by the early nineteenth century, rather than identifying a predominant religio-political orientation (Hindu, Brahmanic, Khmer, etc.), Thai kings' multifaceted religious activities demonstrated instead the encompassing movement of the Dhammaraja, who distills and incorporates all virtuous practices and all powers and knowledge into his sacred person and behavior. In this manner, all virtuous practices are brought under the umbrella of the Buddhist kingship. This encompassing movement is indicated primarily through the king's purification and practice of ritual.

I suggest this in part because the same encompassing tendency that is seen in the early kingdoms--for kings to "circumambulate" and subordinate Hindu and animistic ideologies and practices--was the predominant response of later Buddhist kings to Western influence. Thai kings systematically "enritualized" Western ideologies and practices (and discarded them) as the occasion demanded.

This interpretation of early royal traditions corresponds to Michael Aung-Thwin's (1983:72) statement about the Burmese kingship: that ideologies are "proclaimed" in rituals. In some respects it corresponds to Gesick's comments on the literary style of a Javanese poem, written by a court poet about an exiled king, Pakubwana VI (r. 1823-1830) (Day 1983), which she characterizes as a "piling up of images and equivalences" which reaffirm the experience of kingship (1983:6).

Finally, the theory corresponds to Paul Mus' view of the history of Buddhism and Buddhist kingship as a "layering of traditions" which gives rise to multiple paradigms for action. The perfection of each of these traditions and their paradigms and their inclusion in a transcendent 'royal' tradition, often expressed in "circling" movements, is the distinguishing feature par excellence of the Buddhist kingship, the master symbol or dominant "activity signature" (chapter 18) of the Dhammaraja.

Royal Blood and the King's Bodhisatta Status

Scholarly discussion of a Hindu, Brahmanic, or Indian influence on Thai society is generally confined to a discussion of cosmology, art and architectural styles, law or bureaucracy, or the king's performance of court rituals. As a final point, I suggest that this orientation fails to address the more the more crucial question, namely that concerning transformations in the concept of royal blood, the significance of royal lineage and of the king's membership in a 'bloodline of warriors' [sai luat kasat]. What was the changing soteriological significance of warrior status in the polities of the central Menam Valley? These issues are recognized as being of paramount importance in the study of early Southeast Asian states (cf. Gesick 1983:1-2). I suggest that they are not only significant in the study of the early Thai polity, but they are crucial to the study of the modern polity as well. Ideologies of warrior blood and religious purity undoubtedly changed over time as Thai kings expanded their power and influence through the central Menam basin and adopted a succession of royal ideals.

Tambiah summarizes changes in Buddhist conceptions of kingship in Sukhothai, Ayuthaya, and the early Cakkri period as the transposition of

the Cakkavatti concept on the concept of the king as a future Buddha or bodhisatta, according to which ideology the king rules by the 'ten perfections' of kingship. What are the implications of this statement?

First, I would argue that this transformation automatically entailed the transposition of "Hindu" concepts about the king's membership in a "solar lineage" (see below) onto ideologies of merit and power of monks and Buddhist saints. Or, it represents the transposition of Hindu ideologies of pure blood (the properties of the king's coded biogenetic substance) onto Buddhist ideologies of pure action so that the possession of pure blood entails the imminent possibility of the attainment of the rewards of pure ascetic practice, epistemic, linguistic, and magical. As per Weber's observation, this places the king in competition with Buddhist monks as a ritual officiant, divine seer, and predominant wise man in the kingdom. The formation of the early Buddhist polities in the central Menam Valley can thus be seen as a working out of the implications of intertwining warrior and monastic ideals.

On the basis of the above logical argument and ethnographic evidence (parts v and vi), I suggest that in the Sukhothai and early Thai kingdoms as in South Asian society, that the king's pure blood (pure biogenetic substance) was believed to be the literal source of his powers and wisdom, as the essence of his power and not, as is portrayed in Theravada ideologies, a mere accoutrement of high birth or a sign of good deeds done in the past. As in the myth of Yayati, the Buddhist king's kammic potential (the potential inherent in his pure blood) was believed to be released or enhanced through pure "Buddhist" action (exchanging kingship for asceticism), ordination as a monk, observance of the code of conduct of kings (perfection of the ten kingly paramitas) and the performance of whichever ritual corpus was current.

I also suggest that, over time, the innate abilities associated with the pure blood of warriors came increasingly to resemble those of 'awakened' or 'enlightened' [phutto] men, i.e., pure monks. For example, the powers of the Buddhist king are notoriously ambiguous in that they correspond to a putative level of spiritual attainment and according to the opacity principle, only a person with an equivalent or higher level of purity ('meditation') can ascertain exactly what level of purity that is.⁸

Thus a king can be making subtle claims to possess the powers of monks at any stage of advancement on the path of purification. These include yan, insight, as well as clairvoyance concerning the births and deaths of other beings. A king claiming arahant status is claiming the powers of arahants: the sixfold feats of levitation, clairaudience, mind reading, recollection of past lives, and clairvoyance, with different types of iddhi or magical powers. If he is making claims to have reached the highest level of arahant status, that of the supreme teacher (dedicated to the salvation of others), which is implied by Tambiah's theory, then he is making claims to possess the powers of supreme arahants, some or all of the four kinds of "fluency of discernment": the giving of explanations with regard to causes and to results, fluency in the use of language, and in the methods and techniques of application (Tambiah 1984:27).

I suggest that these four kinds of "fluency" are the powers that are believed to be entailed by the possession of pure blood, the incipient characteristics ("innate abilities") that enable Buddhist kings to rule wisely. As a final point, if the king is claiming to be a fully

⁸A meditation monk in Khon Kaen Province said, for example, that the famous Isan meditation monk, Luang Pu Phang's (chapters 15, 20) 'level of meditation' [radap vipassana-kammathan] was 'higher' than his.

realized Buddha (as Lithai apparently was), then his powers correspond to those gained by the Buddha on each of the three nights of meditation that preceded his enlightenment (cf. Bareau 1963), the same powers possessed by the arahant who is the supreme teacher.

These powers are not claimed verbally by Buddhist monks any more than they are by the Buddhist king; to do so violates the rules of the vinaya. Rather, they are reported by attendants and conveyed to the general populace through the speech categories of rumour, gossip, and through various instances of reported speech (chapters 15, 20).

What are the historical and cultural implications of the above transformations? First, the purity/power, Brahman/warrior opposition that Dumont argues is the basis of South Asian principles of hierarchy and kingship is collapsed in the person of the Buddhist king. This observation is the basis of Tambiah's theory of the transformation of the monarchy from the Rajadhamma to the Dhammaraja ideal. Second, as noted above, this ideological change threw the king into competition with Buddhist monks as interpreters of dhamma, language, and the cosmic process, a movement manifest in the overlapping vocabularies of royal virtue and religious purity. The tension is manifest in glossing wars between kings and monks, particularly in kings' attempts to exercise royal naming and interpretive prerogatives so as to establish equivalences between royalty, enlightenment, and 'sacred' objects and non-equivalences between monks and things royal and sacred [saksit] (chapter 17).

The implications are more than this, however. The Buddhist principle of hierarchy is not that of "the inclusion and transcendence of opposites," pure and impure, a series of "successive dichotomies or inclusions," or "the pairing of opposites" (Dumont 1980:43, 67, 69),

features that Dumont uses to describe South Asian traditions of hierarchy and kingship. Rather, hierarchy tends towards a series of encompassing movements in the mode of the Buddha's or the bodhisatta's perfection of the ten virtues, a serial movement evidenced in the Buddhist version of the last ten of the Jataka tales in which the bodhisatta perfects each of the ten paramitas before being reborn in his last life as the Buddha. The Jataka tales originated in South Asia and Theravada polities altered the tradition to identify the last ten of the tales with the bodhisatta's perfection of the ten virtues (Horner 1957). If remnants of the South Asian code, the "pairing of opposites," persist, they do so in the ideology and practice of the 'middle way' whereby the bodhisatta perfects each of two opposing virtues (e.g., meditation and textual study) and then combines them in a third synthetic 'middle way' or 'royal' tradition as one step on his path of purification.

Like the bodhisatta in the Jataka tales, the Buddhist king can perfect a single virtue and bring it to completion [tham hai sombun]. Without contradiction, he can then 'renounce' and/or transcend this practice cum virtue and move on to perfect another, thereby widening the 'circle' of royal activities, like the bodhisatta in the Jataka tales, his power and knowledge growing with each new step on the path of purification (Gray 1978). The sight of the deity-monarch (and his pure practice) then transforms the impure to the pure in the Buddhist kingdom, instilling men 'outside the dhamma' with a powerful inclination or 'leaning' toward dhamma. This paradigm corresponds to the Buddhist doctrine of anicca by which all things are impermanent and actions appropriate to one cosmic era or social conditions are not necessarily appropriate to another. It is, particularly in the hands of the prince-king Mongkut, a paradigm of change and social adaptation.

This royal tradition represents the distillation of several aspects Hindu concepts of kingship and power. Of all the virtues exhibited by the grandsons of King Yayati, the Buddhist tradition selects out the virtues of Sibi, the perfection of the ten paramitas, as the basis of kingship. Of all the pure biogenetic substances possessed by the Hindu king, it emphasizes that of the royal blood (cf. Inden 1976:15-17). The Buddhist tradition replaces Hindu transactions that involve the exchange of coded substances--blood, semen, food--with Buddhist rituals as the medium through which the king contracts close social relations, and, traditionally, at least, the ranked performance of Buddhist rituals parallels the ranked system of intermarriages within the royal family. Instead of engaging in transactions that involve the exchange of food, the Buddhist king offers kathin robes or gives Buddha statues to the temples with which whose 'owners' he wishes to contract alliances (or share his pure blood). In some respects, this Buddhist concept of hierarchy is a replica of that expressed in the code of Manu, with one exception: rituals and metaphors which concern food and eating are downplayed or eliminated. For the Buddhist king as for Manu, "sovereignty is a multifarious sacrifice" (of all the king's subjects to the monarch). Unlike Manu, however, the Buddhist king does not enjoy them as his "proper food" (Mus 1964:21-24).

Finally, these historical and cultural movements generated a contradiction with regard to the ideology of the Buddhist kingship: The wheel of the law, which, according to Theravada ideology, is "no paternal heritage," became one. Thus a contradiction developed between blood and merit-prowess which was not fully drawn out until the late nineteenth century.

The Harem and the Distribution of Royal Blood

There was one practical advantage in promoting beliefs about the special properties of royal blood. They enhanced the attractiveness of marriage with the monarch or with royal princes and therefore increased a king's ability to build this harem. The desirability of marriage to particular kings is perhaps indistinguishable from perceptions about their state of religious purity (i.e., proof of the purity and efficacy of their royal blood).

As Dumézil points out, the harem was the basis of the king's control over his polity: over war and commerce. A king enhanced his "commercial possibilities" by marrying his daughters to the rulers of tributary states. The production of sons created allies in war and enhanced the king's ability to stave off challenges for the throne. It created a new generation of rulers for tributary states. As indicated above, some of the king's territories were governed by hereditary rulers and others by the king's relatives. Oscillations between the two ruling modalities correspond to oscillations in the king's power and to points in the succession cycle.

Tributary relations were not necessarily isomorphic with the distribution of external trade rights, however. The king's possession of the capital, the throne, and the royal regalia were what endowed him with rights to control external commerce. As the state became more highly organized, distribution of external (and some internal) commercial rights became a way of regulating political competition. The king could distribute commercial rights to whomever he chose, Chinese traders, competing foreign powers, or members of the nobility. Thai kings' legendary "absolute powers" over commerce that so irked Western traders were tempered by (or oscillated with) the dynamics of

succession: a trading "mode" or monopoly remained constant only as long as a particular king could retain his throne. As evidence from the Sukhothai and Ayuthayan (Wood 1924) kingdoms indicates, an oscillation in trading styles from royal monopolies to "free trade" corresponded to oscillations in the power of the royal authority in the capital.

The Three Worlds Cosmology: The Development of a Dramatico-Literary Tradition

Phya Lithai, heir apparent to the throne in 1345, was another famous king of Sukhothai, author of what Reynolds refers to as the "first truly literary work written by a Thai author," the Sermon on the Three Worlds or Trai Phum cosmology (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:5). This work, later known as the Three Worlds According to King Ruang [Trai Phum Phra Ruang]⁹ is the basis of cultural, rhetorical, and dramatic traditions that have persisted to the present. From it derive the symbolic coordinates of Buddhist rituals.

The Trai Phum, which draws heavily from the Pali canon and the work of the Sinhalese monk-commentator, Buddhaghosa, contains the first systematic description of the Buddhist cosmos, of its thirty-one levels of rebirth and existence and the laws of kamma and dhamma that govern cosmological process. According to this schema, the top levels of the cosmos are inhabited by brahma [phrom], beings of sensation with no or little form and representative of the states achieved by the highest levels of spiritual attainment, and lower levels of heaven are inhabited by thewada or thep, beings with form and sensation, all pleasant. Dusit, the fourth level of heaven, was the abode of the bodhisatta before he returned to earthly realms in his life as the Buddha. The

⁹Phra Ruang is a composite name given to members of the Sukhothai dynasty.

earthly realms are the only ones in which men can improve their kamma by performing meritorious deeds.

Like the Buddha, the Buddhist king mediates heaven and earthly domains. Called a sommuthithev or 'supposed angel,' he stands at the top of the social order. In Lithai's fourteenth-century cosmology, princes and kings enjoy pleasurable lives characteristic of the heavenly thewada. This view is shared by an educated Thai informant who, in the following statements, demonstrates the still powerful linkage between idioms of rank and religious purity.

"The king is like a thewada because he succeeded from thewada, from a pure [ariya] race of men of pure blood," she began. "He is not like ordinary people because he has power, barami and annat that common people do not have. He has these powers because he was born in a family whose members are not common people, they are chwasai, of pure lineage, and because his status as a leader of the group is like that of a god, an angel or divine being, to the common people."

The classificatory system of the Trai Phum is the basis of contemporary ideologies of rank in Thai society. Thus Lithai describes four categories of human beings, some of whom share the characteristics of beings in the hells or the lower realms of suffering. In addition, he divides humans into two general categories, of men who are within the precepts ("men who are fully human") and those who are not ("men who are like hell beings" or "suffering ghosts"). Ignorant men, "men who do not know merit and evil, who speak without loving kindness and compassion" are "men who are like animals" (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:123), categorizations which play a major part in the dramas of modernization and development in the 1960s and 1970s (chapters 11-13, 14).

Lithai describes the Buddhist hells in gory detail, recounting the bad deeds of the men who reside there and the punishment they receive. The hells are guarded by fierce yamas or demons who are themselves likened to "suffering ghosts." They are assigned this unpleasant task because they did evil deeds in the past along with some meritorious deeds, a kammic heritage that is ascribed to Thai policemen in the present. The cosmos are also populated by yakkshas, another type of demon from the Indian cosmological schema.

Finally, there are a host of mythical creatures with special powers, the krut or garuda bird (the beast which is half-man, half-bird and who became the symbol of royalty) and the naga snake foremost among them (cf. chapter 11). The symbolism of the krut in particular plays an important role in the creation of the modern economy (chapter 20).

The Themes of Cosmic Decline: Literary and Dramatic Traditions

The circumstances that led to the commissioning of the Trai Phum are of particular interest because they comprise a classic example of a paradigm of purification. The production of the text thus represents a clearly identifiable moment in the development of the Thai-Buddhist cultural system. To understand how this paradigm works, one must understand Thai-Buddhist versions of the theory of cosmic devolution and three interlocking scenarios of decline which comprise the temporal framework from which the text and the drama that attended its production derive their meaning.

The most inclusive framework is that of the kalpas or world systems which are destroyed and reformed in cycles of vast stretches of time.¹⁰

¹⁰The Agganna Suttanta, called the Buddhist genesis myth, describes part of this process: the dissolution and re-formation of the world, the occurrence of increasing immorality and greed among men, and the instituting of kingship to regulate men's affairs and the monk's

A second, related framework derives from the Parinibbana Suttanta, a text which describes distinct phases and characteristics of cosmic decline in relation to the decline of the Buddha's teachings and the dispersal of his relics. On his deathbed, the Buddha gives instructions for the distribution of his remains. At the same time, he predicts the decline or loss of his teachings in five stages, dating from his parinibbana or final release. Andaya describes these five stages thus:

Stretching over five thousand years, this deterioration would be marked by the successive disappearance of, firstly, the acquisition of the degrees of sanctity; secondly, the observation of the precepts; thirdly, the knowledge of the scriptures; fourthly, the exterior signs of Buddhism; and, lastly, by the disappearance of the corporeal relics.
(1978:4)

Several such devolutions may occur within a single kalpa (cf. Reynolds 1983).

The dialogue is repeated in the replies of the monk Nagasena to King Milinda's questions in The Questions of King Milinda, a dialogue which in turn is embedded in the commentaries of Buddhaghosa (cf. Rhys Davids 1910:71-91). Prophecies about the decline of religion are the mainstay of both an "economic" rhetoric and the contemporary Isan hagiographic tradition (Maha Boowa 1976a).

A third and more immediate temporal framework derives from The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara Nikaya) (Woodward 1933), a text which attributes order in the immediate cosmos ("moon and sun go right in their course") and in human society ("Thus townsfolk and villagers are righteous") to the righteousness of the Buddhist king. This theory is

attainment of nibbana and the supraworldly path. Lithai's Trai Phum describes the whole cosmos, the destruction of the Mahakappa, the cosmos and the world order, and then its recreation, beginning with the heavens. Reynolds (1983) describes the complexities of Buddhist eschatology, including the complex relationship between Theravada and Mahayana traditions (cf. Tambiah 1984:17,21; Lamotte 1958:65-70).

explicit in Lithai's inscriptions ("without royal morality, the people suffer, the harvests decline" [Andaya 1978:10]).

The reverse situation, the signs of rule under a foolish and evil king, are described in the Cakkavatti Sinhanda Suttanta (Dialogues of the Buddha, Part III; Rhys Davids 1921:67): "poverty grew rife; from poverty grew stealing increased, from the spread of stealing violence grew apace, from the growth of violence the destruction of life became common, from the frequency of murder both the span of life in those beings and their comeliness also wasted away" A lack of royal virtue thus results in the breaking of two of five of the Buddhist precepts and in the disappearance of the four benefits of merit: long life, health, happiness, and good fortune.

These scenarios form the basis of a rich system of indexical meanings that are utilized by princes, kings, and monks in struggles over the purification-cum-domination of the polity. The discourse style of purification dramas is thus based on two interrelated premises: that order in the cosmos is a direct function of the purity of the ruler; that the intentions [cetana] of rulers in performing an action are opaque or unknowable to lesser men (intentions being the primary determinants of kammic outcomes.) Criticism is thus manifest as a form of hinting or "indirect talk" (cf. Buddhaghosa 1976:28-29) which takes the form of a negative reading of the cosmos that impugns the virtue of the ruler.

As a final point, men's ability to utilize this system of discourse is a feature of the system of hierarchy. Only Buddhist kings or pure monks may properly observe the whole of cosmic or temporal process or the specifics of the decline of religion. To lesser men remain observations about the immediate present and their immediate material

circumstances: i.e., of their suffering [dukkha], as benefits their low rank and religious status.

Eye symbolism predominates in this tripartite paradigm. The prince-actor first 'scrutinizes' society and the cosmos for signs of decline. Once having observed signs of decline--manifest in such statements as "There are no true monks in the kingdom today" (an observation on the loss of the degrees of sanctity) or "The people are hungry and forced to steal rice" (an observation that implies flaws in the king's virtue) he then professes worry or a 'disturbed heart' [kangwon-cai] over these conditions and then acts to purify the kingdom, by commissioning the recension of a text, starting a holy war, unseating an unrighteous king, or purging the Sangha of impure monks. This paradigm, with some modifications, has persisted to the present and has become the basis of twentieth century coup rhetoric. Hence it is also a rhetorical style that precedes a restructuring of the modern capitalist economy (chapter 8).

Lithai

How is this paradigm revealed in the actions of King Lithai? Modern historians initially characterized Lithai as a scholar-prince who was so preoccupied with religion that he resigned his crown in 1360 to enter a monastery (Hall 1964:164) and that he submitted to Ayuthaya out of a pious anxiety to avoid warfare (Sarkisyanz 1965:47).¹¹

¹¹These are typical Western interpretations and misreadings of Buddhist "detached action" as being impractical and ineffective. They derive from a Western cosmological framework and ideologies of direct causality (or "practical action") and they fail to account for Buddhist ideologies of indirect causality in the communication and succession process.

In fact, more recent evidence indicates that he was a dynamic ruler who succeeded in regaining some of the territories lost during his father's reign; that Sukhothai did not submit to Ayuthaya until well after Lithai's death. Griswold's (1967:208-209) eventual judgement was that Lithai was an able statesman and soldier who "attracted" a number of vassal states who had previously broken away (possibly by the strength of his religious claims) and subdued others by military force.

The historical circumstances under which the text was produced are the following: Lithai was ruling at Sajjanalaya as Uparat, Second King or Heir Apparent, when he commissioned (or wrote) the Trai Phum. There is evidence of tension with his father: Lithai's city sheltered a powerful Asokan relic which he "reluctantly surrendered to his father" (Andaya 1978:8). (As Wood [1924:159-160] indicates, filicide, although rare, was not unheard of in the early kingdoms.) Although it was originally thought that Lithai succeeded his father directly, an inscription discovered in 1956 (Griswold 1967:29) indicates that a usurper had seized the throne before Lithai regained it (Coedès 1924:97 Inscr. v), that he had to fight for his throne.

Thus in the famous Nagara Jum inscription of 1357 (Coedès 1924-29, I:77-90), Lithai describes the five stages of cosmic decline. He 'observes' or locates the particular state of decline in which the kingdom found itself, and professes concern over this state, over the decline of morality.¹² His understanding of the process was that the next stage of decline would occur in the following century and would be characterized by the decline of the Tripitaka. He then wrote the Trai Phum as a corrective.

¹²A concern which, as Coedès notes, was clearly present well before time of the inscription, i.e., at the time he was still a prince.

In the manner of the Prince Sidhatta, he consulted first with the established wise men in the kingdom--with senior monks and with his teachers--and then renounced (or went beyond) them. He compiled the text on his own, using portions of "all" (or most) of a corpus of holy books--thirty-one in all (corresponding to the thirty-one levels of the Buddhist cosmos) (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:46-47), a literary style that is itself an expression of the encompassing movement of the Dhammaraja.

Such textual recensions are indexical symbols which have important autotelic or self-referring dimensions in that they are implicit claims of purity on behalf of the author (chapter 18). For example, Lithai notes in the prologue that he commissioned the text for his mother, a statement which draws an implicit parallel between his life and that of the Buddha (who descended from heaven to preach to his mother before being reborn as the Buddha). In addition, the text describes the 'whole' of the cosmos and, by implication, of soteriological process, an implicit claim to omniscience: Lithai knows and can describe the condition of the entire cosmos, both its visible and invisible worlds.

The creation of the text was also part of the larger historical and cultural movement described above. It was an explicit commentary on the idea of a legitimate succession which fused the ideology of pure blood and royal lineage with the bodhisatta ideal. Lithai notes in the prologue, for example, that he is the grandson of King Ramkhamhaeng "who was in the solar lineage" (1982:45) and then makes use of literary devices which symbolize his bodhisatta status.

The significance of the text must be further examined in the context of Lithai's entire career. As Reynolds (1982:9) notes, as Lithai's reign progressed he associated himself "very directly" with the

bodhisatta ideal¹³ and "even with the figure of the fully realized Buddha." Lithai even pronounces a bodhisatta vow--to work for the salvation of all beings--in an inscription (cf. Sarkisyanz 1965). Later in his reign, he supervised the casting and distribution of Buddha statues that were portrayals of himself in the guise of the Buddha (Andaya 1978; cf. chapter 17).

Monk-Kings and Warrior-Monks: The Ideology and Its Historical Actuality

As Shorto (1962) notes, the Buddhist king possesses many kinds of powers: those derived from the possession of magical objects, relics, and regalia, as well as the powers of asceticism. He argues that a distinction must be made between the powers gained from possession of magical objects and those gained through ascetic practices. He also points out, however, that "legitimation through genealogy" is a major theme in Southeast Asian history. I suggest that there is a close connection between the powers gained through ascetic practices and the genealogical claims of Buddhist princes. As I suggested above, to a great extent, the powers gained by kings through ascetic practice are considered to be a function of the purity of their blood. Ascetic practice "enhances" or releases the potential of that substance.

I further suggest that the fusion of ideologies of pure blood and pure practice was realized in historical practice in patterns of exchange of the kingship (or the princely life) for the ascetic life. Such patterns characterize Lithai's career and became a predominant theme of Thai kingship in the Sukhothai kingdoms if not earlier.

¹³The bodhisatta is a future Buddha who has committed himself to the perfection of the great Buddhist virtues and to the task of leading his fellow beings towards salvation.

Sukhothai was a relatively short-lived dynasty. Lithai may have had to rely on conspicuous ascetic and religious practices not just to buttress his claims to a legitimate succession, but to establish the idea of a legitimate succession as that passing from father to son. By the medieval period of the Ayuthayan kingdoms, the ideal, if not the actuality, was firmly in place, in the Khmer kingdoms (Leclère 1914) as well as in the Siamese (cf. Wood 1924:160,176). The ordination of kings and princes became an integral part of the succession dynamic.

Over time, the blood of the Buddhist king became increasingly associated with the wisdom and pure intellect of the Buddhist saint. The well-known Nimi Jataka, for example, concludes with the statement that King Nimi was like other of such kings (who had renounced their thrones for the ascetic life) who "like their forefathers, upon death entered the heaven of pure intellect" (Wray 1972:48), the brahma heaven "where all is mind and wisdom" (1972:52).

There is a corresponding royal strand to the arahant tradition. As Kloppenborg (1974:18-20) points out in the Sutta-Nipata commentary, the perfect Buddha¹⁴ is born only into families of khattiya (warrior) or brahmin status and thus the king's potential for full arahant status is thus at least partially a function of his royal blood or high birth. Or, high birth is the sine qua non for the attainment of full arahant status. There is a corresponding strand in the cosmological tradition; the gods were believed to have "white blood" (see below).

There is a further stage to the historical process, however. In the kingdoms of Ayuthaya in particular, religious ordination became a way of mediating the claims of close royal kinsmen to the throne. Ordination

¹⁴As opposed to the paccekabuddha, the silent Buddha who achieves salvation only for himself and not others.

signified the full realization of a prince's dhamma or princely code of conduct (a function of his coded substance). In addition, ordination as a monk may have enabled lesser beings, members of the nobility or talented commoners, to "catch up" to princes and kings in the purity department. Monkhood--or different types of conspicuous religious activity--may have smoothed the way to the throne for royal princes, or become a means of upsetting the royal succession dynamic for commoners (cf. Chula 1960:79). This concept accords perfectly with the Theravada emphasis on pure action--with the principle that pure action transforms substance, in this case, the purity of one's blood.

The mixing of the statuses of warrior and priest resulted in a constant tension between righteous kings and warrior-monks, and between kings and prince-monks who would be king.¹⁵ Certainly by the Aythayan period, monastic ordination had become caught up in the most chilling of succession dramas, in some cases as the ideology of a legitimate succession went seriously awry. The Ayuthayan chronicles report an instance in which a powerful court official compelled the young King Jett'a to enter a monastery, "when he was, however, quickly removed in order to be clubbed to death in a velvet sack, after a reign of little more than a month" (Wood 1924:175). The official became known as King Prasat Thong, the king of the Golden Palace, and was, as Wood (1924:176) writes, "the first monarch since the foundation of Ayuthia, with the single exception of K'un Worawongsa, who must frankly be called a usurper, for he had no kind of hereditary claim to the throne."

¹⁵Cf. Wood (1924:106) on the succession of the monk who became King Songtham.

The Kingdom of Ayuthaya: 1350-1767

Sukhothai rulers had subscribed exclusively to the formalised Buddhist science of kingship, and were both paternal and accessible to their people. Ayutthayan kings, however, while not relinquishing Buddhist ideals, embraced the Brahman concept of divine kingship to become increasingly highly structured and remote. ("Changing Monarchical Styles," Office of the Prime Minister)

By the late fourteenth century Sukhothai had become a vassal state of Ayutthaya, a young, expanding kingdom 250 miles down the Chao Phya river valley. The rulers of the Ayutthayan kingdom subscribed both to Buddhist and Hindu notions of kingship, with Hindu notions in the ascendant--at least according to the official Thai historiographic tradition. Ayutthaya kings, upon coronation, were invested with the trappings and ceremony of Brahmanic ritual and retitled with the names of Hindu gods.¹⁶ King Ramathibodi imported eight Brahmans from the Hindu city of Benares to preside over his coronation.¹⁷

The Economy

The Ayuthayan economy was based primarily on rice monoculture. There was commerce in teak, salt, spices, hides and other basic commodities. As the kingdom grew, it became increasingly dependent on village produce, and a merchant class began to flourish.

By the 1450s, wealth was becoming synonymous with land ownership or control over land. King Trailoknat (1448-1488) bestowed titles and land as royal favours [phrarachathan] on civil and military officials (Office of the Prime Minister 1979:26).

¹⁶For example, the founder, Ramathibodi (Uthong, see below), derived his name from Rama, the god Vishnu's reincarnation, the hero of the Indian epic, the Ramayana.

¹⁷Their descendants continued to conduct ceremonies in the Thai royal court through the nineteenth century and a few remain in the service of the king to this day.

External trade was conducted under royal authority or license with the Crown also levying taxes. "In this fashion the kings established widespread levy systems to finance the royal court, wars and public works (building temples, fortresses, roads and canals). Subjects paid taxes in food, cash, precious metals or corvée labour" (1979:26). New classes of craftsmen such as potters, swords-makers, goldsmiths and jewellers emerged.

Although popular historical interpretations of Ayuthaya cite the "absolute" power of Ayuthayan kings, evidence suggests that their power, like that of the kings of Sukhothai, was tempered by constant warfare with neighboring polities and competition among nobles to succeed the throne and to control manpower. This competition affected oscillations in trading styles.

As Akin (1967:16) notes in his classic essay, The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873, the object of warfare in the Ayuthayan as in earlier kingdoms was the capture of men rather than of territory. Control of manpower was essential because land was abundant and the population small. If the demands of the lords became too oppressive, villagers and commoners would flee to the 'forest' [pa], and clear new settlements.

This custom of "fleeing the king" and taking refuge in the forest is a staple of the Theravada cultural tradition (cf. Gokhale 1969-70), with unfortunate consequences for the perceived religious status of the refugees. In fleeing the royal influence (and freeing their labour), such men automatically lost their names¹⁸ or social identities and identified themselves with "men who are like animals" in the Buddhist

¹⁸Writes Chandler (1985:102) of Cambodian bureaucrats fleeing the capital, "Driven into the forest, they lose their identity," and regained it only when the king bestowed new titles.

cosmology: they were living in the forests, away from the centers of righteousness and civilization (chapters 13, 14).

The Sakdina

An elaborate bureaucratic system was developed in the kingdom of Ayuthaya (Wales 1934) along with an elaborate system of titles and ranks called the sakdina. The sakdina, which has been identified as the distinctive feature of Thai feudalism (Chit 1974), lasted from the fifteenth century until the revolution of 1932.

Sakdina means literally 'power of the land' [na, 'fields']. The king distributed these "dignity marks" from royalty down to beggars and slaves. Each mark represented one rai of land (two-fifths of an acre).¹⁹ 'Common people' [phrai] and slaves [kha] provided manpower to serve the king, princes, and nobles.²⁰ The distribution of sakdina was a royal gift, saksit because it came from the hands of the monarch.

According to the ideal stated in royal chronicles, all phrai from the fourteenth century onward had to be registered under a leader; they had no legal status except through their leaders. Phrai fell into two categories, 'royal phrai' [phrai luang] and the phrai of nobles [phrai som]. Royal phrai were subject to six months corvée every year for the king, who assigned them to nobles. Ordinary phrai belonged to and served princes and nobles. Men could escape the corvée by becoming temple slaves. Chinese traders were exempt from the system.

¹⁹A noble with sakdina grade 400 controlled sixteen men, each of whom was estimated to cultivate up to twenty-five rai, or ten acres.

²⁰Kha or 'slaves' were more debtors than slaves in the Western sense. They were bonded to a patron until the debt was paid off. One could also bond oneself to a noble to avoid military service or corvée.

The Apotheosis of the Buddhist Kingship: The Evolution of the King's
Warrior Status

The Ayuthayan concept of kingship was heavily influenced by the Devaraja cult from Cambodia. According to this tradition, the king was a divine being in that he was identified with and perhaps believed to be an incarnation of the Hindu gods, most often of Siva.

Tambiah's interpretation of the king's role as Dhammaraja and Devaraja supports the encompassment and "buddhicization" theory. He argues that in Ayuthaya, as in the Khmer kingdoms, the king appropriated both the role of warrior [khattiya] and priest [brahmin] in the ritual context (1976:97-99), which means that the separation between temporal and spiritual power that Dumont identifies as the basis of Hindu kingship and South Asian systems of hierarchy was no longer present in the Thai kingdom.

There were parallel encompassing movements in the Hindu-Buddhist cosmological system. In the Hindu cosmology Mount Meru is represented as a temple. In the Buddhist polities of Sukhothai and Ayuthaya the palace complex (containing the royal shrine) was portrayed as the center of the universe. The king's palace was identified with Mount Meru and the king with Indra--which in no way suggested the abandonment of the thotsaphirachatham ideology. Thus Tambiah argues that the Buddhist concept of the king in the medieval period, in Sinhalese, Thai, and Khmer traditions, "could and did lead to more ambitious heights than was possible in classical Hinduism" (1976:97).

Tambiah summarizes the Buddhist-Hindu concept of kingship as it developed in Sukhothai and Ayuthaya by referring to a tenth century Sinhalese inscription of King Mahahinda IV. This tells us something of the fate of the king's khattiya status. This inscription declares that

the khattiya became a king "for the purposes of defending the alms-bowl and the robe of Buddha" (i.e., the assumption of the kingship was an act of renunciation). The inscription also notes that the Sangha conferred kingship on the king. Tambiah arrives at the following synthesis and summary of the evolution of the Thai royal tradition: the king was a bodhisattva on whom the Sangha bestowed kingship in order that he may defend the bowl and robe (Tambiah 1976:97). The Sangha took on the ordinating role of the brahmin, but the king appropriated the roles of both monk and brahmin.

The Royal Temples

The great kings of Ayuthaya, like the great kings of Sukhothai, built magnificent Buddhist temples to commemorate their victories in war, to enshrine the relics of the Buddha, and to commemorate their illustrious ancestors. Several of these temples still stand today. Two are important royal temples (chapters 10 and 11). The symbols of the Buddhist temple and of the kathin ceremony are those of King Lithai's Three Worlds Cosmology. Placement in the ritual was associated with men's placement in the celestial hierarchy.

Monastic schisms began to reflect palace factionalism, and the Sangha became a theatre for issues of state and succession. Powerful princes and members of the nobility also built great Buddhist temples and supported the monks who resided there.

As the Sangha, like the state bureaucracy, became more centralized, a strong royal-religious tradition of knowledge was developed (Tambiah 1976; chapter 10). Royal temples housed the most powerful and educated monks in the land whose duty it was to study and purify religious texts and preach the dhamma to the king and his subjects. 'Royal monks'

(those under the king's personal patronage) controlled the production of an orthodox Buddhism, and, we can assume, monks supported by rival princes challenged this orthodoxy.

The king commissioned inter-kingdom monastic pilgrimages in search of new texts, relics, and meditation techniques. Religious pilgrimages and travel beyond the boundaries of the kingdom by royal figures were and still are forms of personal and communal purification (chapter 12), implicitly seen as the "bringing of new ideas" into the kingdom (cf. Phra Sarasas 1960:130).

The king thus controlled the dissemination of knowledge among monks and laity. He controlled pilgrimages, the traffic in religious objects, and the building of new temples. He invested 'royal' monks who controlled the production of an orthodox Buddhism, one whose messages were often conveyed in the visual medium--in rituals, artistic and architectural styles (chapter 18). He allocated ritual privileges among his close allies and thus controlled the production and distribution of barami or religious purity among the Buddhist laity.

The Kathin

European travellers who visited Ayuthaya in the seventeenth century provide the first non-indigenous account of the kathin ceremony. Above all, they were struck by the splendor of the royal kathin processions.

Jeremias van Vliet's Description of the Kingdom of notes two kinds of kathin, 'land kathin' and 'water kathin.' Van Vliet, an agent of the Dutch, described the water kathin in great detail. Three hundred fifty to 400 large barges participated in the procession, including a contingent of the king's Japanese bodyguards.

The kathin procession was comprised mostly of the king's relatives. Queens and members of the harem accompanied the king in their own barges (Wales 1931:26-207). The procession indicated a ranking of the nobility. Van Vliet's account inadvertently reveals tension over the succession, between the king's younger brothers and his son. In the procession, the king was followed immediately by his son, "the heir apparent," and his brother, "the nearest to the throne" (cited in Wales 1931:206).

According to van Vliet, only the highest-ranking members of the procession were allowed inside the temple. "Altogether about six or seven thousand persons participated in this ceremony, but only his Majesty, his wives, his children, his brother, the four highest bishops and other priests enter the temples" (Wales 1931:207). After about two hours, they left the temple and the "whole splendid train" returned to the palace.

Vertical symbolism dominates in the royal procession. The king, the 'supposed angel,' leaves the palace (built as a replica of the Hindu-Buddhist Mount Kailasa), 'circles' his city (the earthly realms) disappears 'up' into the temple (replete with the symbolism of the celestial realms) to perform the kathin. Afterwards he 'descends' [long] from the temple to the earth, circles back and returns upwards into the palace, into the sky. Like other components of the cosmological tradition, the paradigm of sacred travel has important consequences with regard to the emergence of the modern economy, especially insofar as it concerns commoners' attempts to control and transform it (chapters 20, 21).

According to van Vliet's description, the king's subjects dared not cast their eyes on the king.

The streets are very crowded with people, from the palace to the temple, but everyone is lying with folded hands and the head bent to the earth. It is forbidden to anyone to look at the king's mother, his wives or children, and the people turn their faces when the royal family passes. Only strangers or foreign ambassadors are allowed to look at them. (cited in Wales 1931:207)

The taboo against seeing the royal personage was so strong that the following customs were observed during the water kathin.

Along the whole way which His Majesty passes, the houses, monasteries and temples are closed with mats, and nobody is allowed to stay in them in order that nobody may look at the king from a place higher than that of His Majesty. (1931:208).

Wales took issue with even van Vliet's statement that people were allowed on the streets during the royal procession.

Van Vliet's statement that the streets were crowded with people is certainly inaccurate, as we know from many other sources that right up to the time of Rama IV the people were confined behind wicker fences during a royal progress. (1931:208)

The Taboos Concerning the Royal Personage

The royal tradition of Ayuthaya was characterized by taboos which persisted through most of the nineteenth century and which stem from the belief that everything touched by 'the hands of the monarch' [phrahat nai luang] was sacred [saksit] and that the receiver of the gift became enlightened through the transaction.

1. No one could touch the king's person; objects were handed him on a golden plate, never by hand. Touching the king's hand and head was a crime punishable by death. No one could touch the royal head or hair, the most sacred part of the body.
2. It was forbidden to look on the face of the king. As Kaempfer wrote of the Ayuthaya kingdom:

If one happens to chance to meet the king, or his Wives, or the Princess Royal in the open fields, he must prostrate himself with his face flat to the ground,

turning his back to the Company, till they are out of sight. (cited in Wales 1931:34-35)

3. The king "never sets his foot upon the Earth, but is carried on a Throne of Gold" (1931:36). Thai kings, like Hindu deities, circulated through the air, held in place by their magical powers [iddhi]. Kings and monks gained these magical powers through the practice of meditation.
4. It was forbidden to use common forms of address when speaking to or about a king. There was and remains a special vocabulary or court language for referring to royalty called rachasap. All parts of the king's body have special terms as do the implements he carries. There are special words for expressing relationship to the king and to his bodily action. The king does not "go" places, he 'proceeds in a royal procession' [phrarachadamnoen]. The royal procession, i.e. the sight or presence of the king, was itself khong phrarachathan, royal alms. The death of a king was referred to as 'migrating to heaven' and a former king was referred to as the 'king in the urn,' i.e., already migrated.
5. 'I, the slave of the Lord Buddha' [kha phra buddha cao] is the first person pronoun used when speaking to the king, 'He, dust beneath the soles of the august feet' [tai fa lahon dhuli phra pada], the second (cf. chapter 10).

No one dared use the personal name of the king. The king had the power to name objects, persons, and activities in his kingdom (Wales 1931:31-41).

6. Lastly, it was forbidden to spill the royal blood. If a member of the nobility was killed, he was beaten to death in a velvet sack or thrown into the river in the same.

Enter the Chinese

The Chinese have had a long and complex history as the foremost traders of the kingdoms of the Menam basin. It is crucial to make analytic distinctions between Chinese immigrants, the cultural category 'Chinese' [cin], and the cultural category 'commercial activities' [setakit], all of which have undergone interesting transformations in the history of the Thai kingdom. At times they are coterminous, at others, not.

As Skinner notes, the first Ayuthayan king obtained investiture from Nanking as a way of gaining recognition that Ayuthaya was a legitimate successor to the early Tai states and to gain acceptance for the subjection of Sukhothai. Thai tributary missions and state visits followed official recognition from the Chinese emperor, lasting well beyond the era of the Ming maritime missions (1405-1433).

Early Chinese envoys were favorably impressed by the independent status of Siamese women and their supposed predilection for Chinese men. As Skinner (1957:3) notes, "the fabulous stories told by the expeditionaires [about Siamese women] after their return to China greatly stimulated trade and emigration . . ." Thus if the establishment of Chinese artisan industry in Sukhothai had not already done so, the early fifteenth century expeditions may very well have led to the first of Siam's lukcin, children of Chinese fathers and Siamese mothers. By the early sixteenth century there was a Chinese quarter in Ayuthaya.

Assimilation was apparently rapid and mostly trouble free, aided by the fact that Siamese women did not emigrate to China. Becoming Thai may have been as simple as changing (or deleting part of) one's name. A Chinese source from the sixteenth century indicates that

Chinese had been settled for several generations: "In this country, people have no surnames. The Chinese at first retain their own surnames, but give them up after a few generations" (Skinner 1957:3). After a survey of sixteenth century Portuguese accounts of Siam, De Campos mentions Chinese merchants as being "everywhere established in Thailand"--or everywhere the Portuguese went (1957:7).

The Dutch and the British who began trading in Ayuthaya early in the seventeenth century reported that Chinese populations dominated the port cities, and, in many instances, far outnumbered the native population. As Skinner notes, the general trend during the first two and a half centuries of the Ming dynasty was that of steadily decreasing tribute missions from Siam accompanied by steadily increasing private Chinese trade and Chinese immigration.

In the 1620s the situation was reversed when either the king or Siamese nobles came into conflict with Chinese traders. For example, van Hasell, a Dutch trader at Songkhla, complained in a letter that the new king was incapable of controlling the Siamese officials and noblemen, and that this in turn had led to the deterioration of the Chinese trade (Giles 1938:175). Van Vliet (1638:51) indicates that Chinese junks were being detained by the deceit of the (Siamese) mandarins--"apparently with the knowledge of the king" (cited in Skinner 1957:8). Perhaps Chinese traders were gaining too much economic power?

The situation for Chinese traders reached a nadir in the period from 1620 to 1632, and then steadily improved to 1767 and the sack of Ayuthaya. For the Chinese, receipt of trade concessions was in part a function of succession battles (and battles over ideologies of succession). King Songtham (1620-1628), a former monk, built up strong ties with Japan, and Japanese influence reached unprecedented heights

during his reign. His eventual successor, the below-mentioned "crowned monster," King Prasat Thong (1629-1656), began his reign by massacring the Japanese colony in Ayuthaya, i.e., by eliminating his predecessor's trading partners. A portion of the Japan trade then passed back into the hands of the Chinese. Prasat Tong established royal trade monopolies which initially challenged Chinese interests but Chinese traders quickly adapted to the new system of royal trading monopolies and, probably just as quickly, the king realized that he would gain greater profit if he used Chinese traders in royal trade as they were the most able seamen and had access to the majority of Chinese ports. Some were appointed as the king's factors, others to high positions and offices (van Vliet 1638:51).

According to Mandelso, writing of 1639, the king's factors, warehousemen, and accountants abroad were Chinese, plus Chinese were allowed to develop private trade in addition to the royal monopolies.

By 1663 the Chinese found themselves in conflict with the Dutch. The Dutch retaliated against a Chinese attack with a show of force and by forcing King Narai to sign a one-sided treaty which prejudiced Chinese interests. The attempt failed for various reasons (the Dutch were unwilling to offend the Chinese emperor) and Gervaise (1688:29) and Tachard (1686:365) indicate that the Chinese had the major share of the China and Japan trade (cited in Skinner 1957:11). An anti-Western revolt in 1688 spelled the end of trade with the French and the British for well over a century--so that the European share of trade with East Asian countries then fell to the Chinese.

As Skinner (1957:11) notes in summary, "The Portuguese, Japanese, English, French, and Dutch, each in turn, stimulated trade in Siam for their own benefit, but each in the end was forced to quit, leaving what

remained to the Chinese." He attributes this to the simple fact that the Chinese were apparently never considered foreigners by the Thai (cf. Phra Sarasas 1942:49).

By the seventeenth century, the Chinese quarter in Ayuthaya had grown. Boats arriving at the capital docked in the Chinese quarter at the southeast corner of the city, at the foot of a street called "China Row" by English authors. The other major street ran northward, from China Row to the royal palace.

According to van Vliet's description, each foreign quarter had its own official or officials (nai or nai amphoe). They were similar to the krom chiefs under whom the freemen of the Siamese population were ranged for corvée service. The officials of each foreign camp, all bearing Siamese nobles title, "never let any opportunity pass of drawing profits from their subjects" (1638:66).

By the seventeenth century, the Chinese community in Ayuthaya consisted not only of merchants and traders, but of scholar-officials, physicians, artisans, actors, and pig breeders as well as vegetable gardeners. It is not known whether there were any manual laborers.

As the centuries passed, Chinese traders found themselves suspended between the Siamese and the Chinese kingdoms depending on the internal situation in each polity and on the relations between them. This liminal status intensified after the fall of the Ming dynasty to the Manchus in the seventeenth century. Eighteenth-century Manchu emperors considered their nationals trading abroad "undesirable" and decreed death by decapitation. Emigration and Chinese trade was hindered by restrictive and punitive imperial edicts, one of which forbade vessels

of foreign merchants trading in China to take Chinese passengers back with them.²¹

Private Chinese trade continued to increase in volume along with the state trade of the Thai kings throughout the seventeenth century. When Captain Hamilton visited Phuket early in the eighteenth century, he reported that the governors of the island were "generally Chinese who buy their places at the court of Siam and, to reimburse themselves, oppress the people" (cited in Gerini 1905:31-21). The relationship between the king and the Chinese was not without tension, however. In 1733, after a bitter succession battle, Chinese attacked the palace of the new king Baromakot; they were apparently heavily involved in palace factionalism.

In 1767, the Chinese helped defend Ayuthaya against the attacks of the Burmese. In the next reign, that of King Taksin (1767-1782), we see the sinocization of the Siamese monarchy. As I shall discuss presently, this process which may have begun much earlier, with the establishment of the kingdom of Auythaya.

First Contact and the Western Historiographic Tradition

As indicated above, the Thai kings of Ayuthaya maintained the throne in part by rotating trade concessions among Europeans, Japanese, Chinese, and members of the Thai nobility. Before Ayuthaya, when Europeans had no economic interest in the polity, Siamese kings were judged by Western historians with a relatively friendly eye (reflecting, one assumes, the judgements of Siamese dynastic chronicles and inscriptions) (cf. Wood 1924:57).

²¹An edict in 1712 declared that the Chinese government "shall request foreign governments to have those Chinese who have been abroad repatriated so that they may be executed" (Skinner 1957:15-16), although it is improbable that such a request was ever put to the Siamese. Chinese colonies were commonly considered to be hotbeds of anti-Manchu elements, "organized by refugees and their indoctrinated descendants into secret societies whose aim was to restore the Ming dynasty."

Wood's A History of Siam is a classic example of the earlier Western historiographic genre insofar as it concerns the characteristics of Thai Buddhist kings (cf. Charnvit 1976:31; Mote 1964:104). In Wood's history we find the adjectival staples of early contact situations between Europeans and the Siamese, terms used by traders, missionaries, priests, and diplomats and most conspicuously in Anna Leonowen's (1870) English Governess at the Siamese Court (cf. Cady 1960:75, 79). More important, we see a temporal progression in the narrative. As Wood moves out of the past towards the present his work exhibits a parallel movement from positive to negative evaluations of the moral characteristics of Buddhist kings and royal institutions (cf. Fabian 1983). Siamese kings are "cruel," "dishonourable," "vile scoundrels," "depraved" and "intemperate," more so as Westerners began to dominate or covet specific aspects of the Siamese economy.

Interestingly enough, the institution of the royal harem was not actively castigated, either by Wood or by early European visitors (see below), until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the voices of Christian missionaries were raised in criticism of the various barbarities of the monarch (and the polity was in danger of becoming a British colony). In his description of the early Ayuthayan period, Wood reserves his most pungent adjectives to refer to succession battles ("King P'rajai [r. 1534-1546] obtained the throne by means which are repugnant to our moral sense") (1924:74-75, 106).

Eventually Siamese taxation policies become subject to moral evaluations--although whose, Wood's or the Thai's, is difficult to ascertain: "It seems probable that King Ekat'otsarot's [r. 1605-1610] shop and market tax was the first tax levied regularly in cash, and

perhaps it was this new system of taxation which gained for him the reputation of a 'covetous man'--a statement immediately followed by "In King Ekat'otsarot's reign, Dutch ships and Dutch merchants began to visit Siam" (1924:158-160). Accusations of madness also enter the scenario, again, in regard to succession battles: "The King [Ekat'otsarot] appears at this time to have been to some extent mentally afflicted. He caused his son to be executed" (1924:160).

Wood reserves the term "modern" to describe those kings who promoted free trade--free, at least, from the European perspective: "King Songt'am [r. 1610-1628] deserves, in fact, to be regarded as the first King of modern Siam, for it was under him that the habit of free intercourse with foreign Powers became well established" (1924:162). This king's "absolute powers" over commerce were not necessarily morally repugnant, however. On the contrary, they exhibited a certain type of efficiency:

The King himself was thus the principal import and export merchant in the country. The result of this was not so inconvenient as it would be in a modern State, since all the revenues of the country were, in any case, the personal property of the King, and by making large direct profits through trading, he was, presumably, able to manage with a proportionately smaller amount of revenue derived from taxation. (1924:163)

For Wood, as for some Western visitors to the polity, Buddhism appears to have alleviated at least some of the king's more "despotic" trading tendencies. In fact, the Buddhist king who promoted free trade could attain a near saintlike status, in the eyes of Europeans and Thais alike.

Van Vliet tells us that King Songt'am, who was personally known to him, was good, liberal, fond of study, not warlike, but devoted to religion. He gave up most of his time to religious and ecclesiastical affairs, and to the laws of the Kingdom. He was generous to the priests and to the poor, and repaired or constructed more temples than any previous King. He kept great state, and like to see his nobles live

magnificently. Foreigners and Siamese alike sang his praises, and regarded him as a good and just ruler, almost as a saint. (1924:171)²²

From Wood's History, it is apparent that Ayuthayan kings had begun to fear the influence of Europeans, a fear articulated as belief that the dispersal of native blood would bring with it the dispersal of state secrets (i.e., trade information), both of which were associated with the decline of religion. Thus in 1657, most likely after a particularly trying session with van Vliet, King Prasat T'ong issued an addition to the Law of Offenses to the Government:

If any subjects of the Realm, Tai or Mohn, male or female, fearless of the Royal displeasure and Laws, and seeing the wealth and prosperity of merchants from foreign lands, shall give their daughters or granddaughters to be the wives of foreigners, English or Dutch, Japanese or Malays, followers of other religions, and allow them to become converted to foreign religions, those persons are held to be thorns in the side of the State and enemies of the Realm. They may be punished by confiscation of their property, imprisonment for life, degradation, being made to cut grass for the Royal elephants, or fines of various grades. This is for an example to others. Why is this? Because the (foreign) father will sow seed and beget future progeny, and the father and son will report the affairs of the Realm in foreign lands, and when they became known, foreigners will assail the Realm on every side, and the Buddhist religion will decline and fall into disrepute. (1924:187)

King Narai's [r. 1657-1688] declaration of war on the East India Company and pointed receipt of a second embassy of King Louis XIV (1687) earned him the unqualified appellation "mad," not for traditional legitimating activities but for admitting so many foreign troops to his country. As Wood admits, however:

²²Wood observes in a footnote that Turpin (1771), writing 140 years later, describes King Songt'am as a "crowned monster" but concludes that Turpin probably had confounded King Songt'am with King Prasat T'ong, who Wood felt was quite capable of the atrocities ascribed to Songt'am (1924:171).

It was not . . . until after the world had beheld with amazement the exploits of Dupleix and Clive in India that it was understood with what comparative ease a clever and capable man, backed by a few well-disciplined European troops, could overcome an Oriental Kingdom. (1924:210)

As he moves towards the present, Wood increasingly accuses Thai kings of intemperateness or depravity: for the longstanding custom of a prince marrying his father's widows upon succeeding to the throne, for example (a practice which assured the concentration of royal blood in his offspring and prevented its dispersion to his rivals) (1924:225). Wood implicitly associates the harem with the immoral propensities of Oriental monarchs: King P'rachao Sua, "worn out by drink and debauchery, brought his short and inglorious reign to a conclusion by dying in the year 1709, aged forty-four" (1924:226).

In 1606 the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in Siam. Their successors were apparently willing to view Buddhism, in the main, as a "philosophy" and Brahmanic rites, in particular the practice of astrology, as "superstition," a judgement with which Protestant missionaries were apparently willing to concur (cf. Feltus 1924:191). Pallegoix, for example, while placing great positive emphasis on the Vessantara Jataka as embodying the charitable ideals of Buddhism was more than willing to associate the "superstitious" aspects of Siamese religion with "Hinduism," with the activities of court Brahmans, and to the pernicious influence of the Chinese (1854, II:46ff.). Curing rituals were the exception, considered superstitious to the extreme by Westerners. (Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries tried to win converts by setting up dispensaries.) The cosmological nexus that linked the purity of the king, his precise performance of rituals, and the well-being of his subjects was under attack.

Buddhism may have had its "rational" components, but a king's extraordinary claims to sainthood (at least insofar as they concerned European trading interests) were not among them. Writes Wood (1924:24) of the Burmese King Alaungpaya's inducement to the Siamese to surrender by asserting that he was a Bodhisattva, or embryo Buddha, ordained by Heaven to reform the Buddhist religion: "His impious pretensions were laughed to scorn." In the future, Siamese kings would more carefully to disguise such claims from their Western audiences.

The Siamese and Laotian Kingdoms

What of the Laotian kingdoms during this period? The northeastern plateau of what is now Thailand was originally part of Khmer civilization. The present city of Korat and the ruins of Pimai marked the westernmost boundaries of the ancient Khmer kingdoms. From the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries the Laotian kingdom of Lan Chang (Country of a Million Elephants) flourished and the northeastern plateau was part of that kingdom. Lan Chang was heavily influenced by Ayuthaya but also had strong links with the northern kingdoms of Lan Na (Chiengmai). Laotian princes of Wiangchan married Chiengmai princesses.

From around 1550 to 1650 the Burmese invaded Chiengmai and occupied Lan Na, from there extending their control to Wiangchan and the northeast. By the eighteenth century the Laotians were able to reassert their independent political existence, but at the cost of splitting into two independent kingdoms, Wiangchan and Luang Prabang (Vella 1957, chapter 2; Wyatt 1963)).

The four major cities in what is now the northeast of Thailand comprised the border capitals between the Siamese and surrounding kingdoms. The city of Korat is now called the "entranceway to the

northeast." Its formal name is Nakorn Rachasima, 'The City of the Royal Boundaries.'²³ Korat marked the westernmost boundaries of the kingdoms of Angkor and the easternmost boundaries of the kingdoms of Ayuthaya. Ubon, in the easternmost part of the region, is linked culturally and historically with the Khmer kingdoms. It had strong ties with Battambang, the site of many great battles between Siamese and Cambodian armies. Udorn region has linguistic and religious features which link it to Chiangmai and distinguish it from the rest of the northeast and lower Siam. Nongkhai, located in the northernmost part of Isan, is on the Mekong river, across from the present nation of Laos has perhaps the strongest pure 'Lao' characteristics of the northeastern capitals.²⁴

In 1752, King Taksin recovered Ayuthaya and in so doing came to control Luang Prabang, the royal capital of Laos. In 1778, one of his most powerful generals, General Cakkri, captured the kingdom of Wiangchan (Vientienne) and send its palladium, the Emerald Buddha, to the capital in Thonburi. The loss of the Emerald Buddha represented a severe setback for the Laotian kingdoms of the northeast, one from which they never recovered.

²³The word sima or 'boundaries' connotes sacrality, the demarcation of a king's dhamma realm. Sima stones mark the boundaries of Buddhist temples, the innermost pure space of the bot, where formal Sangha action takes place.

²⁴There is evidence to indicate that Buddhist monks of Nongkhai have attempted to retain their independence from the central government even in the present. In 1979, Nongkhai was one of the few remaining large capitals of Isan whose best monks had 'not yet asked for the royal alms'--to be elevated to the status of a royal temple. Before they could ask for royal alms of this sort, their teaching and practice had to conform to the uniform "state Buddhism" advocated by the central government (see chapter 15).

Taksin and the kings of the Cakkri dynasty took the daughters of Laotian nobility into their harems. According to a story told by a member of the Laotian branch of the Cakkri dynasty, Taksin impregnated the daughters of the Laotian nobility and sent them back to become wives of provincial governors with the proviso that Taksin's offspring become the future governors of the territory.²⁵

Like the central Thai, the people of the Laotian kingdoms were strong supporters of the Theravada tradition. They accepted the ideology of the king as the Dhammaraja and as the Cakkravartin or Wheel-rolling Monarch. Religion thus formed a major link between the peoples of the central Menam basin and those of the northeast Laotian territories, as opposed to other of the tributary states, the Malay, for example (cf. Vella 1975, chapter 3).

Lao-Thai monks played a major role in the integration of the northeast Lao territories and, by the 1950s, they had come to play a major and oftentimes disruptive role in Thai social and succession dramas. The mid-nineteenth century marked a turning point for the monks of the Laotian territories. Prince Mongkut (Rama IV), in establishing his schismatic Thammayut reform movement, ordained a monk from Ubon named Phanthumalo (Di). The systematic merging of the Northeastern and central Thai monastic orders had begun. This event had a major impact on the creation of the modern Sangha.

Mongkut created a network of Lao-Thai Thammayut temples in Bangkok--temples which were eventually drawn into the conflicts between him and his older half-brother, Nang Klao (King Rama III). He built up

²⁵King Mongkut (Rama IV of the Cakkri dynasty) also had several Laotian women in his harem, the descendants of Taksin. The two royal lines thus became conjoined through intermarriage in successive generations.

ordination lines running from Bangkok to the northeastern territories, beginning with the city of Ubon near Cambodia and extending outwards from there to the major cities of Isan.

In this and upcoming chapters, the history of the modern polity will increasingly be told from the perspective of members of Phanthumalo's ordination line, the Isan branch of the Thammayut order, because the story of Phanthumalo and his followers is a thread that runs through all of modern Thai history, culminating in the rapid commercialization of the Northeast economy in the 1970s and the spread of Chinese commercial banks throughout the region (chapters 20 and 21). Isan was the last major region of Thailand to undergo such intensive economic changes. The fate of the Lao and the Chinese have been linked throughout Thai history. In many respects, the invisibility of these linkages was what made them effective.

Before returning to the story of the fall of Ayuthaya and the rise of the Cakkri dynasty as told by Isan informants, I will summarize the modes of production of the early kingdoms.

Modes of Production in the Early Kingdoms

The economies of the early Thai kingdoms conform to what political economists refer to as the "Asiatic mode of production," the major features of which are summarized by John G. Taylor in From Modernization to Modes of Production (1979:175-185). Taylor's discussion provides a basis for comparison with later historical periods and highlights the importance of lineage concepts and the institution of the harem in the formation of the early states and in the survival of the monarchy (chapter 17).

In the Sukhothai and Ayuthayan kingdoms, agricultural production was organized on the basis of the local village and the family or a combination of families was the basic unit of production. There was a small amount of artisan industry, but in general communities were organized around the production of use-values for immediate consumption.

Peasants were "direct producers in possession of their own means of subsistence and means of production" and surplus was extracted in the form of labor or tribute, "because the monarch has an 'ideological right' to it, a right accepted by the communities and expressed in religion, art, literature, and so on" (1979:182). "Oriental despots" (kings) who sacralized everything they touched were ideologically defined as the owners and controllers of the soil. Siamese kings were called 'lords of life' [cao ciwit] and 'lords of the land' [phra cao phaen din], their subjects, 'dust under the royal feet.' All men were servants or 'slaves of the king,' royal commissioners at the turn of the twentieth century, 'great royal slaves' [kha luang yai]. Civil servants are still referred to as 'slaves of the royal work' [kha rachakan].²⁶

As Taylor writes of the so-called "Asiatic" mode of production, "state power devolves on a lineage and family, and--ultimately--on an individual monarch, whose rule is legitimised through birth, genealogy and tradition" (1979:180). The task of the monarch was to ensure that communities were economically prosperous and the king was perceived as the "guarantor" of fertility. He guaranteed fertility through his performance of Buddhist and Brahmanic rituals (like the First Ploughing and kathin ceremonies) and through the institution of the harem. The

²⁶Polite particles are added to the end of sentences when addressing royalty or as signs of respect to officials and elders. Women use the particle kha or 'slave,' men and women the pronoun khaphracao, 'slave of the royal lord,' to address nobility.

harem was the institution that linked the lineage of ordinary men, the rulers of tributary states, with the pure lineage of the king (and the Buddha).

The actual apparatus of the state was sub-divided into a series of functionaries, carrying out ceremonial, administrative, religious, intellectual and other functions. The reigning monarch and his lineage or family always remained at the head of this apparatus (1979:180).

The state--the king--defined the boundaries for the production of exchange-values; he determined men's duties as workers, who could trade, what, and where. The assignation of such roles was part of his assignation of men's ritual and soteriological status; the king assigned men "economic" roles by assigning them a dhamma or na thi, a religious 'duty,' a theme of paramount importance in understanding the king's role in capitalist development in the present (chapter 16).

The "despot" or king (as Marxist interpretations characterize the sacred ruler) extracted surplus labor in the form of corvée labor or as tribute in kind paid directly to himself or his representatives.²⁷ Control of production occurred as control of labor surplus: control over village communal labor in the construction of irrigation systems, control of armies, redistribution of village lands, etc.

²⁷Taylor's discussion of the so-called "Asiatic mode of production" too often accepts ideology for fact and places too much stress on the "absolute" powers of Asian rulers. Wales' description of the tax-collecting process in the old Siamese kingdoms provides a more realistic picture of the organization of the state and the powers of the king:

. . . every conceivable species of corruption was in vogue amongst the army of officials who handled the king's revenues at one stage or another, with a result that only a comparatively small proportion of the amount collected became available for legitimate government expenditure. (1934:224)

By restricting control of land, the king prevented the accumulation of capital from trading or usury from being invested in private ownership of the soil, or, more accurately, in agricultural production (1979:179). Land had 'lords'--men who controlled manpower and production--but it was not "private property" as the concept is understood in the West (Tomogugi 1981; Ingram 1971:15).

Western concepts of "land ownership" and "private property" were not introduced in Thailand until later in the nineteenth century. 'Lordship' was based on the idea of sacrality and indicated through the king's distribution of ritual rights. Men's "life chances" (and opportunities to accumulate capital) (Dahrendorf 1979) were indicated in their ritual statuses, portrayed as their "soteriological chances."

These features began to change after the fall of Ayuthaya and the rise of the Cakkri dynasty in the nineteenth century, when the Siamese economy fell under a system of British imperial capitalism.

The Fall of Ayuthaya and the Rise of the Cakkri Dynasty

As related earlier, the relation between the kings of Ayuthaya and the Dutch, British and French was uneasy at best, especially after Europeans involved themselves in succession struggles. By the 1780s, the reaction of Ayuthayan kings to European overtures was so negative and their fear of domination so strong that they refused to grant privileges or sign trade agreements with Europeans (Hall 1964:357-374). By the 1830s this option was no longer open to Siamese kings.

In 1767, Burmese armies totally destroyed the palaces, temples and sacred texts of Ayuthaya. A Thai general, Phya Taksin, established a new capital in Thonburi, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya river, across from the present city of Bangkok. Taksin built a Buddhist

temple, Wat Arun, the famous Temple of the Dawn, and took the monks' annual kathin gift there by royal barge to announce the creation of a new dynastic order.

The tension between warrior-kings and warrior-monks peaked during Taksin's reign. When the old capital fell, a group of dissident monks seized political power in the north. Their leader, Phra Fang, organized the monks in army-style ranks and changed the color of their robes to red. These monks lived as laymen, forsaking the disciplinary rules, and conducted affairs of government (C. Reynolds 1973, chapter 2). The two wheels of the dhamma (the soteriological dynamic between lay and monastic society) had collapsed into one. Observing such signs of disorder in the Sangha, Taksin pacified the north and punished many of the insurgent monks.

Pure and Impure Monks

The following is a version of the story of Taksin and Phra Fang as told by an Isan bureaucrat in the Department of Religious Affairs. This story was handed down to him by his teacher, Somdet Phra Maha Wirawong (Uan), ordained by a monk from Ubon, Phanthumalo (Di), who was ordained by Prince Mongkut. Somdet Uan portrayed the following as a history of the modern Thai polity, and, because of its auspicious origins, the story stands as a semi-official version of those events.

"Because Siam after Ayuthaya was destroyed, Thai people were separated into five groups," the bureaucrat began.

The leader was Phra Fang. He claimed to do miracles and most monks believed in his ability to help fight the Burmese. After the Burmese withdrew, there were five groups. Fang was in Phitsuanalok and the north.

The tradition of warrior-monks was explained thus: "When a monk had to defend his country he teaches to fight by sword, by magic, anything

to make strong and to defend." What kind of magic was used? "There were sacred words to memorize, to make the mind strong to fight the enemy."

The informant characterized the destruction of Ayuthaya as the failure of the Buddhist circle. "The level of discipline (in the Sangha) came down and monks had to kill the enemy."

The next part of the narrative illustrates a recurring historical theme that is the basis of Thai-Buddhist notions of hierarchy: The king's duty is to tell true monks from false.

When Taksin got the power [amnat] to overcome the other four groups, he wanted to purify all monks . . . to tell who is a real monk from the war, to make the Sangha pure tham hai borisut, to make it clean tham hai sa?aat. Taksin let his police call all chief monks and told them to follow the Vinaya. Who is good or bad?

(He then interjected the comment that it was "very difficult" in the country at that time because of the "communicating factor" between North and South.)

Someone told Taksin if a good-real monk is a purified monk he can stay long in water. If he can stay only a short time, he is not a monk. People say, "What is this!" It was the cause of a coup.

The "coup" was Taksin's overthrow by General Cakkri, the founder of the present dynasty.

Having unified the Sangha, at least temporarily, King Taksin began to consolidate his kingdom, and at this point the history of Thai-Chinese relations, the spread of Theravada Buddhism, and the fate of the Laotian peoples of Siam become intertwined.

Taksin: The Sinocization of the Monarchy (1767-1782)

Taksin (Phraya Tak) was a luk cin, born of a Siamese mother and a Chinese father. His father was a Teochiu who had migrated from China to Ayuthaya.

Taksin's father acquired a Siamese nobleman as a patron and Taksin was reared as a nobleman's son, introduced to the court as a royal aide, and eventually appointed governor of Tak. When the Burmese sacked Ayuthaya, Tak fled with his followers to southeast Siam, the site of the largest concentration of Teochiu Chinese. There he rallied opposition to the Burmese, driving them out of Ayuthaya where he was eventually proclaimed king. He established his capital in Thonburi, on the western bank of the Chao Phraya River, across from the present city of Bangkok.

Taksin was not the first Siamese king of direct Chinese descent, however. Uthong, the founder of the Ayuthaya dynasty, was either a direct immigrant from China, or the son of a Chinese immigrant, depending upon which historical source one consults.

Uthong's story is of considerable interest because it indicates what are generally downplayed connections between the flowering of Theravada Buddhism in the central Menam Basin and the influx and assimilation of Chinese immigrants. It indicates how the integration of Chinese is achieved, in part through the enactment of the prophecies and pure action of the Theravada religious tradition and the performance of heroic deeds in the manner of the Hindu epic warrior tradition.

Uthong: The Sinocization of Royal Traditions

As is apparent from most of the above discussion, anthropologists and historians of religion generally look westward, to South Asia and Sri Lanka, to locate sources of legitimation for Theravada Buddhist kings.²⁸ This is to overlook another crucial dynamic and source of legitimation,

²⁸For example, Tambiah describes the evolution in Thai conceptions of the monarchy, from the Rajadhamma to the Dhammaraja, as a change from the court brahmin purifying or investing the warrior-king to one in which the Sangha (or the king as a bodhisatta) performs (or appropriates) this function.

however: the Chinese influence. This influence takes many forms--the Thai king's tributary relationship with the Emperor of China, the influx of Chinese immigration, the China trade.

It is a well-known historical fact that the kings of the Menam River Basin looked first to the Chinese Emperor for recognition of a legitimate succession, a custom that continued until the Fourth Reign of the Cakkri Dynasty. Wealth from the China trade, enabled by such recognition, was a major source of revenue--indirect and direct--for the Buddhist Sangha. This wealth came indirectly, as money transferred from Chinese traders to the king or to Siamese officials in exchange for trade concessions. It came directly, from wealthy Chinese who bought their way into Thai officialdom by becoming Theravada Buddhists. In the nineteenth century, Chinese labor was used to build Buddhist temples and monument.

The dynamics are more subtle than this, however. As A. Thomas Kirsch²⁹ has pointed out, the relationship between 'Siamese' and 'Chinese' peoples has been an exceptionally felicitous throughout most of Thai history, in ideology and in practice. The 'attachment' of Chinese to worldly matters only enhances the 'detachment' of Siamese from the same, reinforcing Theravada ideology while in no way compromising the flow of wealth to the king and the Sangha: all the while reassuring Siamese inhabitants (or earlier waves of immigrants) that the economic power of nouveau (and not so nouveau) Chinese traders was in no way coincident with religious purity.

The history of Thailand is, in large part, a history of the interactions of two populations, the inhabitants of the central Menam basin and waves of immigrants from China. How does this relate to the

²⁹Personal communication.

growth and development of a specifically 'Thai' variant of Theravada Buddhism?

As Weber points out, early Theravada Buddhism received strong support from a growing merchant class in India and Sri Lanka. As Tambiah (1973) points out, the relationship between setakit and सानakit, commercial and religious activities, has generally been a socially and ideologically harmonious one in Theravada societies. As is apparent from the above discussion, the Chinese account for the bulk of the merchant class in Siam/Thailand. Over time, the traditional South Asian-Buddhist categories of setthi and setakit, merchants and commercial activities, became assimilated to the "ethnic" category of Chinese. Or, stated from the reverse perspective, the category of cin or 'Chinese' became predominantly an occupational one in the Thai polities. This category distinguishes 'Chinese' merchants and traders from 'Siamese' officials and farmers and kings.

There is yet another dynamic. Participation in Theravada Buddhist merit-making ceremonies was and remains a passpoint from 'Chinese' to 'Siamese' identities and occupations: from that of trader to official. This dynamic accounts for much of the vitality of Theravada Buddhism: Buddhist merit-making rituals flourished as a mechanism for the mediation of "ethnic" occupational categories. They provided immigrants with a gradual and generally harmonious means of assimilation, at least until the turn of the twentieth century, when a corporate sector began to develop and the leaders of the 1932 coup began to lust after direct control of the export economy.

Now as in the past, support of Theravada Buddhism is the basis of upward mobility for Chinese in Thailand. And, as Skinner (1957:93) points out, Chinese immigrants valued upward mobility (family

advancement) even more than they valued the accumulation of capital: both were an expression of devotion to the lineage and the ancestors. Or, put differently, immigrants in the Siamese kingdoms may have found the adoption of Theravada beliefs to be an appropriate expression of that devotion.

These same themes of transformation, of 'Chinese' to 'Siamese' identities and occupations, that are expressed through the performance of Buddhist rituals are recapitulated in the life of Uthong, the founder of Ayuthaya. It is to the story of Uthong that I will now turn.

Uthong: Stories of the Founding of Ayuthaya

As Charnvit (1976) points out in his innovative work, The Rise of Ayuthya, there is strong evidence to indicate that Uthong was either a Chinese immigrant or a descendant of one. As he also points out, Hindu-Buddhist ideologies to the contrary--that the Buddhist king is of khattiya or warrior class--kingship in the early kingdoms was available to whichever "men of prowess" (cf. Wolters 1982) could garner the manpower and resources necessary to capture the throne and/or build an independent city-state. Charnvit argues from a variety of indigenous sources that kings could be selected from among khattiya, setthi or khahabodi (well-to-do laymen or householders), or Brahmans. Or, they could simply be recognized as phumibun or 'men of merit.' In the twelfth century and beyond, some of the wealth necessary for adventuring may have come from the China trade.

Since all written records were destroyed in the sack of Ayuthaya, the oldest indigenous chronicles detailing the origins and/or career of Uthong were commissioned during the reign of Rama I. In analyzing these and later texts on the Ayuthaya period, Charnvit makes a distinction

between two types of Thai historiography, tamnan and phongsawadan, on the basis of their two distinct thematic orientations. Tamnan is a history of the polity told as a history of Buddhism and phongsawadan is dynastic history, what Charnvit likens more to a "history of the state." As I will demonstrate, the creation of a new historiographic tradition above all represents an exercise of the king's naming prerogatives with regard to categorizations of time. The phongsawadan is an expression of the above-observed historical and cultural movement, the transposition of Hindu ideologies of blood with Theravada ideologies of merit and power.

Tamnan history is based on time commencing with the Buddha's vow to achieve enlightenment. Such early histories, written by Buddhist monks, are replete with miracles, prophecies, etc. that attend stories of the Founder's career. The core episode is related in the fifteenth century northern Thai text, the Jinkalamalipakaranam or 'Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror': The Buddha flew from Indian to the central Menam Basin where he left his footprint and shadow to indicate the location of the capital of a future kingdom. This was to be the center of his religion. A hermit or rusi remained there to foretell the Buddha's prophecy: The city would be named Ayuthaya after the city ruled by Rama in the Ramayana epic (e.g., shooting arrows in the air and having them miraculously return). The miracles performed by its founder would be similar to the feats of warriorly prowess demonstrated by Rama. Most phongsawadan histories as well as the tamnan relate the founding of the kingdom as a fulfillment of at least some of those prophecies.

The phongsawadan tradition was begun in the reign of King Narai (r. 1657-1688), a century which saw the first extensive contact with Europeans. Charnvit relates this more to "real" history as opposed to

one of "myths and legends." Phongsawadan histories usually begin with the founding of a kingdom and then list of the accomplishments of successive kings (1976:9). The above categories are in part analytic, as Charnvit acknowledges the overlap of tamnan themes and styles in phongsawadan histories, a point to which I will return presently.

As a general rule, phongsawadan sources (1976:55-56) describe Uthong as the descendant of a ruling family from the Chiangmai area. Claims to legitimacy derive from the fact that he was the descendant of a ruling family. Through the female line (i.e., leaving open the possibility of Chinese parentage), Uthong could trace his ancestry back 200-400 years before 1351, the date of the founding of Ayuthaya.

In tamnan histories, Uthong's legitimacy derives from his marriage into a ruling family plus the fact that he was seen as following Buddhist prophecies described below (commencing with the discovery of a lake and the meeting of a hermit or rusi). He claimed legitimacy both from being a strong supporter of Buddhism and from his genealogy: traced in the line of Buddhist kings back to King Asoka and the Buddha.

For example, in one of the earliest examples of phongsawadan history, the Culayuddhakaravamsa (1789), the monk-author portrays Uthong as the son of a princess and a commoner who flee the royal capital in disgrace. They found the city of Thepnakhon of which their son, Uthong, became king. Uthong moves his capital to Ayuthaya (1976:56).

The Northern Chronicle (1807) Phongsawadan Nua, written in the tamnan style, and, as Charnvit notes, "full of myths and legends," has Uthong migrating south from the area of Sawankhalok. When he arrived in the Ayuthaya area, "people saw that he was a phumibun they then assembled and agreed to have him as their king" (1976:61). When Uthong decides to build a new city, he sends his men out to locate a propitious site.

They encounter the rusi, supposedly there since the time of the Buddha, and he shows them a site favourable for the building of the new city.

A later version of this chronicle describes Uthong as the son of a Choduk Setthi who married a princess of Ayodya (presumably the forerunner of Aythaya) and became king. He moves south, comes to a lake, meets a rusi who tells him of the prophecy, performs the requisite miracles, etc.

A third version, written in Burma (c. 1767), describes Uthong as the ruling monarch of the city of Phetburi. A plague and food shortage forces him to move his capital; his court sages suggest a certain place once visited by the Buddha. Uthong visits the site mentioned in the prophecy, performs the requisite miracles, and founds the new capital.

The Burmese version in turn overlaps with the Siamese Dynastic Chronicles, Phratchaphongsawadan Krung Sayam (1807), the most complete of the tamnan histories commissioned during the reign of Rama I. It describes Uthong as the son of Choduk Setthi, literally "a rich man who illuminates," who married the princess of a ruling family of Kamphut Prathet. A plague forced him from the city until he reached the site of Lake Nong Sano where he met a rusi who told him of the Buddha's prophecy, etc.

Charnvit notes that Choduk Setthi is not merely a name, however, it is the title of a nobleman. In the late Ayuthaya period and in the early years of Bangkok, this title was often given to leading Chinese by the Thai court. Choduk Setthi was for a long time the title of the leader of the Chinese community in Siam. He acted as the liason between the Chinese population and the Thai court (1976:67).

Of most interest, however, is the van Vliet Chronicle, the oldest of the historical documents regarding the origins of Ayuthaya (1976:59-60).

Compiled in 1640 by an employee of the Dutch East India Company, it was written at the height of the Aythayan period when there was non Western ambivalence about Siamese-Chinese trade connections. Its style suggests that it was based in large part on work with Thai informants and that the author was familiar with tamnan history. Van Vliet relates, for example, that the Thai regarded the Buddha as their first king and the originator of the Thai kingdom.³⁰

The following is a summary of this version:

A Chinese by the name of T'Jaeu ou-e, claiming to be a son of a 'provincial king' in China, was sent into exile in Siam. He and his followers boarded two junks and eventually landed in Pattani. The immigrants made their way up the Malay Peninsula.

T'Jaeu ou-e was very successful in his new career in southern Siam. While in southern Siam, he 'built' many cities and conducted trade between his new home and China and at one time sent luxury goods such as sappanwood to the Chinese Court. In return for his service to the Emperor, he was accorded a royal title and became known as Thaeu Outhongh (Thao Uthong). He was also given a 'princess' in marriage by the Chinese Emperor.

At his last stopping place in Phetburi, Uthong decided to abandon his Chinese religion and become a Thai Buddhist. After his conversion, Uthong moved to an uninhabited site and built Ayudhya.

The text then portrays Uthong as fulfilling the Buddha's prophecies concerning the founding of the city, meeting the rusi, etc. The van Vliet chronicle describes Uthong as having killed a dragon, an incident which is not listed among his miracles in other of the Thai chronicles.

From the above accounts, Charnvit concludes that Uthong was probably of Chinese origin (and of non-royal blood) and further notes that his career is typical of many foreigners in the polity (1976:66-68). The fulfillment of the Buddha's prophecy, which Charnvit, following Eliade (1971), describes as "the imitation of a celestial archetype,"

³⁰The king's name is Phra Thammaikaratchao. He is the leading character in a Isan millenarian drama at the turn of the twentieth century (Keyes 1971).

transforms Uthong evermore from a warrior to a king (or a trader to a king). His offspring thus become members of 'a bloodline of warriors' [sai luat kasat] (chapter 11).

These histories depict a Siamese regional variation of progress on the path of purification, at least insofar as it concern Chinese foreigners. The path begins with the accumulation of wealth, continues with the building of manpower and resources and the conquering or building of cities and culminates with a conversion to Buddhism. This latter event is coincident with the fulfillment of cosmological or religious paradigms: with the perfection of the ten virtues of the Buddhist king (in the model or 'example' of the Buddha) and with the fulfillment of the Buddha's prophecies. This Siamese variant of the fulfillment of Theravada Buddhist prophecy transforms men from membership in a bloodline of traders to that in a bloodline of warriors. It transforms "ethnic" identity--from Chinese to Siamese or Thai. It marks the acquisition of a new occupational status, of new names, new titles, and new wives and signals movement onto a higher plane of commercial possibilities (control over the commerce of others).

In South Asian societies, change in occupation and caste membership is effected through marriage and the performance of Hindu rituals based on the exchange of food and other "coded substances." In Thai-Theravada society, such changes are effected through marriage and the performance of Buddhist rituals, and by ever expanding one's circle of virtuous and renunciatory activities: through conspicuous support of religion, the enactment of celestial paradigms, and the perfection of the ten virtues.

As a final point, I suggest that, rather than accepting Charvut's distinction between tamnan and phongsawadan history as a history of religion versus "dynastic history" in a Western mode, new

historiographic traditions can more productively be seen as the merging of religious with dynastic history--in support of the king's religio-genealogical claims. This is yet another expression of the historical fusion of ideologies of blood and merit, manifest in the creation of 'royal genealogies' which trace the king's lineage back to the Buddha and support the king's bodhisatta claims. This literary tradition represents the continuation of the above-noted historical trends: the king uses his naming prerogatives to designate a new historiographic tradition (and new categories of time) that supports the fusion of his bodhisatta with his genealogical claims.

There is more to this phenomenon, however. The creation of the phonsawadan literary style also represents action in the encompassing mode of the Dhammaraja. Rather than representing a linear progression from "primitive" to "modern" or "sacred" to "secular" forms of historiography as Charnvit (following Eliade) suggests, the phongsawadan style (especially in its later forms) represents a merging of tamnan, dynastic, and Western historiographic traditions in the telling of the religio-dynastic history of Buddhist kings. It is an "amassing" of literary forms, historiographic styles, and concepts of time in the manner of Buddhist royalty--in the manner described by Gesick and Day. Furthermore, there is a structure to this style. The phongsawadan represents a synthesis of Thai and Western historiographic styles into a third, encompassing and more pure 'royal' tradition that is deemed 'appropriate to the cosmic conditions of the moment' (in harmony with nature and with the Western influence). This style of synthesis is often consciously and subconsciously referred to as the creation of a new and transcendent 'middle way': a style evidenced by King Mongkut (or his biographers) with regard to the monastic reforms of the nineteenth century (see below).

Let us return now the King Taksin's reign to examine how these structures appear in actual historical practice.

Taksin's New Kingdom

In the manner of his predecessors, Taksin turned immediately to China for legitimation. He made several attempts to establish tributary relations with the Emperor of China, and in 1781, finally received recognition as the King of Siam under the name Cheng Chao.

The Chinese community grew and prospered during Taksin's reign. According to a French Catholic missionary (cf. Phra Sarasas 1942:116), the rapid rehabilitation of the Siamese economy was made possible by local Chinese, who supplied the gold and silver necessary to rebuild the economy. The king favored members of his own speech group, and the Teochius became known as cin-luang or 'royal Chinese.'

Crawford, one of the first Europeans to visit the kingdom after Taksin had taken the throne, wrote of the extraordinary influx of immigrants from China during this period:

It was through the extraordinary encouragement which he [Taksin] gave to his countrymen that they were induced to resort to the country and settle it in such large numbers. This extraordinary accession of Chinese population constitutes almost the only great and material change which has taken place in the state of the kingdom during many centuries. (1823:103, cited in Skinner 1957:21)

Like the Siamese kings before him, as Taksin's power grew, so did his claims to religious purity. He unified the Sangha only to divide it again by making claims to be a sodaban or "stream winner"³¹ and to possess mystical powers [iddhi].

³¹This is the first of four stages to salvation, the other being once-returner, never-returner, and arahant.

In 1777 the Supreme Patriarch and several other leading monks presented Taksin with some Pali texts dealing with Buddhist meditation. At about the same time, he also received some non-Buddhist (chapter 17) writings in which other forms of meditation were discussed. (He drew on sources of power that were unavailable to Buddhist monks [cf. chapter 17]). According to Butt (1978:38-39), Taksin "became convinced . . . that through his meditation he would eventually be transformed into a divine or divine-like being." He would be able to fly through the air and "his blood would turn white like that of the gods."

Taksin insisted that Buddhist monks bow to him, and then demoted the supreme patriarch and two of the highest-ranking monks in the Sangha for refusing to do so, for refusing to acknowledge a layman's claims of supremacy over the Sangha, sodaban or not (C. Reynolds 1973:34) (somewhat in the spirit of Lithai's inscriptions). More than 500 monks who had resisted Taksin's claims were flogged and sentenced to menial labor at the monastery of the Taksin-appointed patriarch.

Like the warrior-monks who challenged him, Taksin upset the delicate balance between the two wheels of dhamma, the domains of spiritual and temporal power. As in times past and future, this state of affairs was characterized by disputes over the proper boundaries of Buddhist temples and therefore the validity of the kathin ceremonies performed there (C. Reynolds 1973:44). It is more than possible that he violated the equally delicate balance between 'Chinese' and 'Siamese' interests, between the interests members of the old and new nobility, or perhaps he transgressed the delicate balance between Buddhist kingship and commerce.

As was traditional, the tension was reflected in the form of monastic schism, now exacerbated by the European presence. Westerners, who had

designs on the trade concessions covered by the royal monopolies, were more than willing to view his religious claims as a sign of madness, a judgement in which members of the Thai nobility were apparently willing to concur. As indicated in the Isan-Thammayut narrative of these events, handed down from the monks at Wat Bowoniwet (?), Taksin's "madness" became part of the official version of the founding of the Cakkri dynasty.

The narrative resumes at this point: "Then Rama I had a coup," said the informant. Rama I was General Cakkri, the founder of the current dynasty.

The problems were more than this, pure or impure monks. They said Taksin was crazy and because he was against monks, preceptors and students were unhappy. Rama I took over. The reason for telling you this is to explain several factors in the country today.

As Riggs (1966:431), echoing Wood, writes of the Taksin incident: "Taksin imagined that he was developing into a Buddha." Taksin's "craziness" did not stop at his religious claims, however. Far from it. Wood's (1924:270) account of Taksin's "craziness" hints at the close connections between Western perceptions of the king's "despotic" tendencies, i.e., his incipient madness, and his attempts to monopolize the economy. From Wood's account, it seems as if Taksin was losing control over royal economic prerogatives in the face of European interests, and, as he did so, he lost the support of the nobility, a conflict manifest as schism within the Sangha and loss of support for his religious claims. Writes Wood in explanation of Taksin's fall: "As has before been explained, the export trade of Siam was at that time a government monopoly." In his craziness, Taksin

began to suspect everybody of carrying on illicit trade. As he accepted the sworn statement of single persons as conclusive evidence of this, a detestable band of informers soon grew up, who waxed rich on fines extorted from their

victims . . . One of the King's own wives was consigned to the flames on a [false] charge of stealing money from the treasury.

Wood concludes his account, "On every side were heard the lamentations of innocent victims, groaning under the insensate tyranny of a madman."

Taksin abdicated and sought refuge in the Sangha by ordaining as a monk. Despite his privileged status as a monk, he was tried by General Cakkri and put to death. He was put in a velvet sack and beaten to death with sandalwood clubs to avoid spilling the royal blood (Wenk 1968:5-6).

Enter the Cakkris

With the coming of the Western powers and the conquering of neighboring states, the king's warrior function was becoming obsolete. The founders of the early Thai kingdoms were warrior-generals (or trader-warriors) as were the generals Taksin and Cakkri of the early Bangkok period. General Cakkri's son, Rama II (r. 1809-1824), was a poet. His son, Nang Klao (Rama III, r. 1822-1851), was a diplomat and court official and Nang Klao's famous younger half-brother, King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851-1868) was a Buddhist monk for twenty-seven years before ascending the throne. Mongkut's son, Rama V, Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910), was a king turned "head of state", the "father of democracy" in Thailand.

With 'warriors' technically out of the running, merchant-princes and prince-monks were left as the major competitors for the throne. The Sangha became more important than ever as a dynamic in regulating the succession.³²

³²See C. Reynolds (1973:67-68) for a discussion of royal princes in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sangha.

'Royalty' in the Nineteenth Century

Ambiguities about the powers of princes and the powers of monks were built into the vocabulary of things 'royal' [luang] and things 'sacred' [saksit]. By the nineteenth century, several words were commonly used to refer to royalty or 'royal' activities. This vocabulary, much of which has persisted to the present, reflects these ambiguities. The first is the noun kasat, from the Pali khattiya or warrior. The second is the adjective luang which means royal. The king is nai luang, the 'royal lord.' Royal temples are wat luang, royal cities and capitals, muang luang. Luang is also used to refer to 'royal monks,' phra luang, who are royal in the sense that they have received high ecclesiastical rank from the king. In addition, it was and is used as an informal title to indicate respect for a revered monk, luang pa or luang pu, 'royal father' or 'royal grandfather,' meditation monks in particular.

There is further overlap between royal and monastic vocabulary. Phra is a noun meaning 'monk.' The prefix phra, like that of racha, is attached to nouns and verbs to indicate royal activities. (The 'auspicious-royal welfare' extended by the king to his subjects is phrarachanukhra. The 'royal progress across the land' is phrarachadamnoen.) According to the now famous meditation monk, Acaan Man (of humble Isan background), the Thai word phra (from the Pali vara, meaning excellent), "means the model of behavior in words and deeds, and excellence in morality, meditation, wisdom, deliverance, and the insight into deliverance" (Maha Boowa 1976a:218). Thus, in Acaan Man's estimation, the significance of the term derives from its relation to pure action--not to pure blood.

The Sinocization of the Cakkri Bloodline

The Cakkri kings, members of the purest 'bloodline of warriors' in the kingdom, were all of Chinese ancestry, although to what extent is a murky question indeed. According to Mongkut, the father of Rama I "became married with a beautiful daughter of a Chinese richest family at Chinese compound or situation within wall of city and in southeastern corner of Ayudia" (Bowring 1857, I:65-66, cited in Skinner 1957:26), although he does not state outright that he is referring to General Cakkri's mother. Chinese sources indicate that Rama I was Taksin's son-in-law, although some Thai sources maintain the reverse, that Taksin married a daughter of General Cakkri (cf. Chula 1960:68-69). The wife of Rama II (Mongkut's mother), Queen Suriyen, was the daughter of Rama I's sister and a wealthy Chinese father. Thus King Mongkut, perhaps the most pious of Thailand's Buddhist kings, was half Chinese. Through another complex set of intermarriages, his grandsons Wachirawut (Rama VI) and Prachathpok (Rama VII) were also over one-half Chinese by ancestry (cf. Skinner 1957:26-27).

General Cakkri Consolidates His Kingdom

Rama I took the throne as a warrior king. He underwent two coronation ceremonies, the first immediately after Taksin's death (Smith 1947:13) and the second after he had consolidated power. The second was full-scale, replete with bramanical rites. In 1786, after the second or third tributary mission, he received investiture from the Emperor of China under the name Cheng Hua, "son of Cheng Chao" (Taksin) (Skinner 1957:24).

One of General Cakkri's first acts was to move the capital across the river to Bangkok, Krung Thep or the City of Angels, on the site of the

Chinese port and trading center which had developed in the 1770s.

Another was to move the Chinese market from Thonburi, near King Taksin's palace, to the Wat Sampluem area outside the southeast gate of the royal city. The market came to be known as Sampheng, and today the quarter is still the Chinese center of Bangkok.

Rama I constructed the new royal city in the encompassing mode of the Buddhist monarch. He built his capital as a microcosmos of the greater Buddhist macrocosmos, incorporating both the architectural styles of Ayuthaya and Sukhothai. In the manner of the kings of Sukhothai, he assimilated the capital/forest, teaching/meditation distinction of the the Sangha to this cosmological design, and also distinguished between monks of royal and commoner birth.

The city was constructed as concentric circles of earthen walls and canals. 'City dwelling monks' or textual scholars [nagaravasi] resided in the temples of the city while 'forest dwelling monks' who practiced meditation [arranavasi] resided outside the walls in the 'forest' (Griswold 1967:36-37; cf. Gombrich 1971:269-271, 320-321). The royal palace was built at the center as a replica of Mount Kailasa of the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology.

The palace and the city had four gates at the four cardinal points. Monks of noble birth entered the Grand Palace through the Gates of Heaven to beg for alms while monks of common birth entered through the Earthen Gate. As in the kingdom of Sukhothai (Griswold 1967:36-37), the palace and Wat Mahathat, the Temple of the Great Relic, comprised the spiritual center of the kingdom. Wat Mahathat housed its most sacred relics. Wat Mahathat was the foremost teaching temple and Wat Samorai the leading meditation temple. Set 'outside' the city gates near the 'forest,' Wat Samorai was where the king and the royal princes practiced

meditation to gain magical powers (Lingat 1926), to enact the paradigms of the Prince Sidhatta, his renunciation of the throne for the ascetic life.

Rama I sponsored temple construction in the style reminiscent of the old capital of Ayuthaya (Dhani 1971). He built the now-famous Wat Saket and Wat Chetuphon, the latter named after the monastery in India where the Buddha reportedly lived. Wat Chetuphon is commonly referred to as Wat Po (Bodhi tree).

The king continued the custom of the sacred palladia. He built the Royal Chapel next to the Grand Palace and installed the Emerald Buddha, which was and remains the palladium of the Cakkri dynasty and the modern Thai kingdom (cf. Reynolds 1978; Chula 1960:92-93). He commanded his brother to collect bronze Buddha images from the ruins of Ayuthaya, Sukhothai and other cities and had them installed at Wat Po.

One of his first acts was to offer the kathin robes at Wat Arun, signalling the end of Taksin's dynastic pretensions and the beginning of his own. Near the end of his reign, he built splended gilded barges whose prows were carved with the characters of the Ramayana epic in which to carry the kathin gifts there. He sponsored a splendid water procession to the kathin at Wat Arun, in which the royal barges and those the nobility were decorated with living creatures of the water: crocodiles, shells, lobsters, crabs, and all kinds of fish (Chula 1960:112-113). This procession became an issue in the social dramas and antinomy cycles of the twentieth century. Was it a sign of the king's virtue or of his profligacy?

The new king began his reign by purifying the Sangha of monks "unworthy" of high rank, those who had accepted Taksin's religious claims. In a conspicuous departure from the practices of King Taksin,

he made an point of deferring to the Supreme Patriarch on issues of doctrine and sangakamma or 'Sanga action.' He devalued monks who sought and claimed supernatural powers [riddhi] gained through mastery of meditation techniques (although he and his sons studied meditation at Wat Samorai). He sponsored a recension of the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana [ramakhien], the enactment of sequences from which was the mainstay of court theatre (Wyatt 1982a:35). As Wyatt argues, the innovations of Rama I, taken as a whole, represent a "subtle" intellectual revolution. They "involved a change in focus that brought rational man clearly to the center of the stage of history, mentally in control of his own world through the exercise of his critical faculties" (1982:40). Or, perhaps, Western concepts of individualism and rationality were being incorporated into the paradigms and idioms of purification (cf. C. Reynolds 1976). Thus began the rule of the Cakkri dynasty, whose ninth king remains on the throne today.

The Economy: The Merchant Kings

The first two Cakkri kings developed state trading and royal monopolies to an unprecedented degree and are thus sometimes referred to as the "merchant kings." They encouraged the upward trend in immigration from China to increase the production of Siam's exports and provide crews for their royal ships, developed a thriving trade with Chinese junks, and were more than eager to trade with China, sending numerous tributary missions to that effect. In addition to these missions, the Emperor allowed "barbarian merchants" from "countries beyond the seas" to come trade at Canton every summer (Fairbank and Teng 1941:199, 170-173).

General Cakkri's son and grandson, Rama II and Rama III, began the practice of farming out taxes to Chinese as an alternative to royal monopoly of foreign trade, a custom which was begun in part to bring in revenue for the building of religious monuments and support of religion (Chula 1960:150). Rama II and Rama III assigned high-ranking princes to oversee major departments, thus allowing them a greater portion of the revenue of the state--and perhaps bringing them into competition with the members of nobility who were in charge of those departments (cf. Chula 1960:125). High-ranking princes and members of the nobility, what Nidhi (1978a:6) refers to as the bourgeois-official class, had strong connections with members of the Chinese mercantile community (Wyatt 1982:42).

Chinese traders made their way upcountry during the first third of the nineteenth century. Temples to the Hainanese goddess, Shui-wei Niang, are found in the northeastern city of Korat (Skinner 1957:84); at least some of these migrants did not feel compelled to become Theravada Buddhists.

The opium trade was controlled by Chinese secret societies. Chinese traders bought opium grown in India from British merchants and sold it in Siam. As the opium trade grew, so did their power, and Rama III took strong measures to break up these societies (or to gain control of the trade?), resulting, in one instance, of the killing of more than 3,000 Chinese in provinces upcountry (Chula 1960:150). As Prince Chula hastens to add, however, such sporadic conflicts in no way indicated antagonism towards the Chinese as a group.

By 1822 Bangkok was essentially a Chinese trade city with a royal palace at its center. When John Crawfurd arrived that same year to negotiate a treaty for the British, he observed more Chinese than

Siamese people in the capital. Chinese mandarins were identifiable in court by their "distinct costume" (Skinner 1957:101). This state of affairs persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Writing in 1911, Garnier facetiously complained that on arriving in Bangkok "one's first desire is to see the Siamese people, and one's last regret on leaving is that of not having found them"³³ (1911:232, cited in Skinner 1957:88). Graham (1912, I:110), writing a year later, notes that "every other man encountered in the streets of the capital wears a pigtail" (cited in Skinner 1957:88).

The Theme of Cosmic Decline

General Cakkri began his reign in the classical manner, by observing signs of decline in religion which undermined the authority of the Sangha and enhanced his own status as the protector and defender of religion. In 1788, a year after he received investiture from China, he convened a council of monks to examine the Pali canon. Upon being informed that "the extant Lao and Mon and Khom translations were defective and differed from one another," the king directed the council to restore "the original text" of the canon. As Tambiah notes, in so doing,

. . . he was conscious of his effort to stay the progressive decline of the religion in its allotted span of 5000 years as was predicted in the famous prophecy (1976:186)

The council was convened at Wat Mahathat, the Temple of the Great Relic. When the texts were completed, they became part of the 'material aspects of the dhamma, ' wathu-tham, gilded and installed in a mondop or reliquary (cf. chapter 21).

³³Cf. Skinner (1957:87-88) for estimates on the size of the Chinese population.

General Cakkri also commissioned a major recension of the Trai Phum. As Craig Reynolds describes the events leading up to this act, the king was 'worried' about the purity of Buddhist texts.

A year after his accession Rama I addressed certain royal questions to the monks [phraratchaputcha] in an audience composed of ministers, pundits, and all the monks of the Phra Ratchakana class headed by the supreme patriarch. The king apparently questioned the monks on a number of matters including ways of reckoning time, miracles of the Buddha, the destruction and re-creation of the world, and other cosmological issues and discovered that they were insufficiently familiar with the contents of the Trai Phum. (1973:56-57)

As Tambiah (1976:186-187) points out, this was to establish parallels between him and the Indian King Asoka.

When he restored and expanded Wat Chetuphon, Rama I had the walls painted with the characters of the Trai Phum. A Thai prince remarked to the missionary, David Abeel, that "the object of these paintings was to instruct the illiterate, through the medium of their senses" (Abeel 1834:258, cited in C. Reynolds 1973:61). General Cakkri's reforms were in no way limited to strictly "Buddhist" texts, however, as he also commissioned a recension of the Ramayana.

The Monastic Reforms

General Cakkri increasingly directed his energies towards the purification of the Sangha. His Sangha reforms had two general aims: to eliminate once and for all the monk-warrior modality of religious practice, (to eliminate warrior-monks as rival claimants to the throne); and to bring the Sangha under royal authority. He sought to loosen the ties between powerful princes and their temples, to eliminate connections of the sort that in the end may have led to Taksin's downfall. He discouraged the teaching of martial arts and the tradition of Buddhist monks dancing scenes from the Ramayana epic.

In 1801 the king expelled 128 monks from the Buddhist clergy for breaking the precepts of the Buddhist monk: "drinking, wandering about at night, rubbing shoulders with women, using improper language, buying silly things from Chinese junks" (Wenk 1968:39). He required monks to be identified with specific temples and their preceptors [upachaya] to supervise their conduct. Monks were officially required to obtain certificates and register with the Krom Sanghakari and the Krom Thammakan, two government departments charged with administering the Sangha for the king (C. Reynolds 1973:42-43).

Of most importance to this study, Rama I advanced the notion that the purity of Buddhist monks and the Buddhist laity was dependent on the maintenance of monks' distance from their kinsmen. One of his edicts maintained that "the monk who demonstrated detached control over emotional kin ties would receive expression of devotion from men and gods alike." Almsgiving to such a monk would bring merit because "a monk's state (P. bhumi) is a most esteemed state" (C. Reynolds 1973:40-41). The king also called on lay authorities and the relatives of monks to observe their share of this code of conduct. This was to preserve the integrity of the Sangha: one definition of the pure separation of monks and laity. This notion--that distance and/or anonymity between monks and laity is a sign of a pure Sangha--became the ideological cornerstone of capitalist expansion in the Northeast in the 1960s and 1970s (chapters 14 and 15).

The Purification of Legal Texts and Other "Hindu" Elements

Rama I also continued to purify corrupt "Hindu" or animistic elements from the religious repertoire--resituating them within a Buddhist framework. One edict declared that a deva was to be regarded as a good

friend and never to be revered about the Triple Gems of Buddhism. All lingam were to be destroyed by burning (Chula 1960:89) (although the king installed a city pillar or lak muang in the shape of a royal linga in the palace complex and sponsored a ceremony presided over by court brahmins to sacralize it.)

Rama I both purified and renamed the Thammasat. He declared the civil laws corrupt in the same way he had declared Sangha texts corrupt: they did not lead to truly 'just' results and therefore must be flawed. In a departure from tradition, the king used the Pali canon as a charter for civil law, as the source and model of order for lay society, furthering the rejection of the "Hindu" influence. He directed a committee of scholars to examine civil laws with regard to their agreement with the Pali Canon (Wyatt 1982b), and in cases where they did not agree, the laws were to be altered to restore the "original text." The new laws were named the "Code of the Three Seals."

Blood and Merit

Blood/merit and succession issues were never fully resolved in the Bangkok period, any more than they were in the kingdom of Ayuthaya. The crown supposedly devolved on the king's brother or son, but, as Kaempfer wrote in his account of a visit to Siam in 1690 "this rule hath been so often broken through and the Right of Succession brought into such a confusion, that at present upon the death of the King he puts up for the Crown who is the most powerful in the Royal Family . . ." (Kemp 1969:41, cited in Girling 1981:23n.). The kings of Ayuthaya were observed to live their lives in distrust of their nearest relatives, a state of affairs that prevailed throughout most of the nineteenth century. Rama I lived in distrust of his half-brother, the Wang Na or

Front Palace Prince, supposedly his Heir Apparent (Chula 1960:109ff.). Rama II executed Taksin's son (the son of a daughter of Rama I--his nephew) ostensibly for planning a revolt (1960:118). For twenty-seven years Rama III lived in a constant state of tension with his younger half-brother, Prince Mongkut (Rama IV), who, as a Buddhist monk, persistently divided his Sangha, a classical sign of decline of the royal virtue. Mongkut, in turn, lived in a constant state of tension with high-ranking princes, one of whom reportedly put hot rice in his begging bowl at the Grand Palace to destroy Mongkut's aura of monkly detachment.

Pure blood or princely status was universally accepted as the major criterion of a legitimate succession as evidenced by the fact that the leaders of millenarian revolts took great care to represent themselves as past kings reborn or to emphasize the royal aspects of their claimed Metteya status.

Centuries of royal harems had produced large pools of royal offspring, some of whom, as Prince Chula Chakrabongse (1960:79) makes clear, went into the Sangha as a way of establishing their claims to the throne. Or, as occurred in Cambodia in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, princes of the blood could enact regional variations of the Sidhatta paradigm: fleeing to the forests and from there leading revolts against their "nearest relatives," the king (i.e., their fathers, uncles, or half-brothers) and his court. Their royal blood automatically established them as bonified neak mean bon or 'men of merit' (Leclère 1914; Gray 1985).

A highest degree of purity of blood was created through the practice of a king elevating a favorite concubine to the rank of First Queen upon his accession to the throne. This was one way for a king to attempt to designate a successor--or play sons of celestial and non-celestial rank

off against each other. It created a structural anomaly, however, within the brood of royal offspring, violating the rule of subordination of juniors to seniors. Since this prerogative was gained only at the peak of a prince's power, i.e., upon his gaining the throne, a First Queen was not necessarily the wife of the longest standing. Her sons, the celestial or 'royal' princes, the cao fa or 'lords of the skies,' had a host of older brothers of less pure birth but greater experience with which to contend for the throne. As Wyatt (1968) indicates, beginning in the nineteenth century, these princes needed the backing of powerful noble families in order to realize their dhamma (to ascend to the throne).

Thus a second criterion of kingship developed in counterpoint to the first, that of purity of bloodline. This was the criterion of practical 'experience' [prasopakan] that was not necessarily linked to warriorly prowess. In the 1960s and 1970s, this concept became assimilated to Western categories of "practicality" or "practical reason" and produced an unholy alliance of sorts, the concept of a "magical" practicality (chapter 16).

General Cakkri amassed sufficient wealth and resources through control of the port city to have a son succeed him as Rama II. Rama II, despite his artistic bent, received sufficient revenue from royal trade monopolies and tax farms to likewise insure the succession of his line, if not that of his highest-ranked celestial son, Prince Mongkut.

The story of Nang Klao and Prince Mongkut and the story of Prince Mongkut's religious career are extensively documented elsewhere.³⁴ I would emphasize four points. First, in direct opposition to orthodox

³⁴Mongkut's monastic career is described by Lingat (1926, 1931, 1933), Vella (1957), Griswold (1957), Moffat (1961), and C. Reynolds (1973).

Theravada ideologies that cite pure practice as the sole criterion of kingship, the Mongkut/Nang Klao succession drama, at least as told in the present, establishes purity of bloodline as the dominant criterion of a "legitimate" succession.

Second, there is the less known fact that Mongkut's second ordination as a monk (in the manner of the second coronation of kings?) saw the birth of the Isan Thammyut movement. This was the historical point at which a group of Isan monks and their followers began to identify themselves not only as 'Thai' citizens, but as citizens whose interests were implicated in the succession battles of Cakkri kings. One of the wives by which Rama II had celestial children was a Laotian princess of Vientiane (Chula 1960:141). Mongkut's monastic alliances were with monks from the southern part of Isan, from Ubon, near Cambodia.

Today the Isan Sangha is the center of a powerful, royally-sponsored meditation movement which, in some official circles at least, is regarded as the model of an orthodox "Thai" Buddhism. Of equal importance is the fact that the Isan Thammyut monastic network first patronized by King Mongkut comprises the "religious infrastructure" of modern capitalist expansion in the Northeast (chapters 13, 14, 18, 20 and 21)--expansion that is spearheaded by Chinese-owned commercial banks.

Third, Mongkut's religious career and monastic reforms (and his biographers' representations of the same) exhibit the above-noted paradigm of the 'middle way' which is the practical basis of hierarchy. This paradigm in turn became a means of mediating categories of "rationality" and "barbarity" for Thai and Western audiences alike. It was a mode of "purifying" the Sangha in indigenous eyes, of "modernizing" it or making it more "rational" in Western eyes.

Finally, the story of Nang Klao and Mongkut remains of great interest in the kingdom today. Its retelling indicates concern about upcoming succession battles. It indicates as well ambivalence about the relevance of the modern monarchy.

Mongkut and Nang Klao

The tension between blood and merit as competing criteria for succession to the Thai throne is most clearly depicted in the events surrounding Nang Klao's succession to the throne. Rama II had a son, Mongkut, by a first queen. Mongkut was several years younger than another of Rama II's sons, Prince Chesda (King Nang Klao), who was born of a non-royal wife. Nang Klao had the less-pure blood of the two brothers but his succession battle took place when the kingdom was being threatened by the British and the French. He had served for many years as a courtier in his father's court, acting as the 'eyes and the ears' of the monarch (Wilson 1970:218). He had and used the opportunity to amass a large personal fortune. Writes Prince Chula (1960:145) of Prince Chesda (Nang Klao): "He . . . owned many trading ships and was so successful that his father laughingly called him 'The Merchant.'" Thus despite the fact that Rama II constantly emphasized Mongkut's cao fa status in royal rituals, Nang Klao had greater wealth and greater experience in foreign affairs than Mongkut and was therefore elected king upon his father's death in 1824.

Depending on which version of the story one hears, Mongkut had already ordained as a novice and elected to remain in the Sangha or he quickly ordained as a monk to avoid being killed once Nang Klao had ascended the throne. In any event, Mongkut's ordination marked the beginning of of a twenty-seven-year power struggle between himself and

Nang Klao which lasted until Nang Klao's death and Mongkut's succession to the throne in 1851.

The Succession

One of the king's secretaries explained the relationship between Nang Klao and Mongkut by telling the following story. "Nang Klao didn't intend to have his line continued," he explained (although this is not substantiated by other historical accounts [cf. Cady 1964:354]). "He had no right to the throne. Mongkut read an omen that he should not try to be king but Nang Klao did not want Mongkut included in the monkhood." Why was this? "Mongkut had royal blood in him. Mi luat kasat nai phra ong.³⁵ Mongkut had the feeling he was descended from a bloodline of warriors, sai luat kasat. Nang Klao had no bloodline." As a true prince of the blood who had 'renounced' the throne (or at least a royal lifestyle) for the ascetic life, Mongkut could make powerful bodhisatta claims that could far outstrip those of the king.

The following version of the same story was told by the Isan bureaucrat quoted earlier: "King Rama IV was to be a monk. Rama II was king and wanted him to become a monk for three months" (i.e., Mongkut ordained out of respect for his father, not out of fear). "Then Rama III seized power" and the antagonism surfaced. From this telling of the incident, the "antagonism" was much worse than is portrayed in the history books.

Rama III did not allow monks to come out of the temple when he seized power. He sent in food, but made sure there were no weapons. Nang Klao surrounded the wat because the royal family expected Mongkut to become king.

³⁵Literally, he 'had the blood of warriors in his sacred-self.'

The Creation of the Thammayut Reform Order

The struggle for supremacy between Nang Klao and Mongkut took place in the context of serious negotiations between Siam, Britain and France over trade rights that eventually resulted in the partition of the Southeast Asian kingdoms into protectorates, colonies, or, in the case of Siam, a Western-dominated kingdom-state.

Mongkut's reaction to loss of the throne was to create schism within the Sangha, an index of the king's loss of virtue. He did this in part by playing on Western criticisms of the "superstitious" and "useless" aspects of Thai kingship and religion. He established a "modern" reform movement called the Thammayut-nikai, the order [nikai] of monks 'Adhering to the Dhamma.' The traditional (more "superstitious") order--that patronized by the king--was eventually named, by default, the Maha-nikai or the 'Great Order' of monks. The name Thammayut implies that Mongkut's order adhered 'more closely' to the law than did the monks of the Mahanikai.

Mongkut was first ordained at Wat Mahathat, the kingdom's foremost teaching temple. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, he went to Wat Samorai to study meditation techniques, meantime seeking knowledge from "all" famed meditation masters in the kingdom in the manner of the virtuoso (cf. chapter 17). He returned to Wat Mahathat to begin a course of textual studies, where his rapid advancement as a Pali scholar was blocked by rival claimants to the throne³⁶ (cf. chapter 8, the career of Phra Phimonlatham).

³⁶Nang Klao in his role of Righteous Ruler personally attended Mongkut's Pali exams. Another monk, backed by a rival prince, protested that favoritism was being shown Mongkut--implying that he was 'attached' to worldly concerns--the pursuit of high ecclesiastical rank. Mongkut said he was only there at the 'invitation' of the king, and the exams were discontinued, signalling the end of his rapid progress in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Having been blocked on the path of purification, Mongkut experienced doubt or a 'disturbed heart' about the purity of the existing religious order. In a crisis of faith, he returned to the 'forest,' to Wat Samorai, to consider the (soteriological) significance of his experiences at Wat Mahathat--symbolically renouncing the capital and the existing moral order in the manner of Sidhatta. In a famous incident, Mongkut vowed to disrobe unless he received evidence of the Buddha's 'true' lineage. As tradition would have it, 'soon after' he had taken this vow, a Mon (Southern Burmese) monk 'appeared' and Mongkut became convinced of the greater purity of the Mon religious practice. This was to ally himself, at least temporarily, with the traditional enemies of the Thai (cf. C. Reynolds 1973:79).

Mongkut then broke with his preceptor at Wat Mahathat and sought reordination. The agents for this reordination were eighteen monks ordained at the site of the Kalyani inscriptions of the Mon King Dhammacetti (r. 1460-1491). In the manner of a king (rather than of a monk-subordinate), Mongkut 'invited' these monks to perform the ceremony.

Having absorbed (or perfected) the teachings of the two major temples in the capital, Wat Samorai and Wat Mahathat, having mastered the vocations of the teaching and meditation monks and become "his own teacher," Mongkut then established a third, synthetic religious practice which incorporated and transcended the teachings of both in a new 'royal' style. As his biographers make clear, he accepted and rejected aspects of both traditions, and created from them a new 'middle way' in the paradigm of the virtuoso (cf. Lingat 1926). There was little Nang Klao could do to prevent Mongkut from assuming 'royal' prerogatives of Sangha purification since his bloodlines and religious practice were more pure than the king's.

The following is the Isan regional variation of this event in which the narrator establishes equivalences between Mongkut's religious career and that of the monk Phanthumalo (Di) from Ubon. The event was described as lineage history, as an opposition between monastic 'unity' [khwam samakhi] and disunity--the 'breakage' [khat] or 'poisoning' [phit] of the line of the Buddha's teachings and practice. In this narrative, the values of unity and disunity are portrayed, somewhat quixotically, in the metaphor of the game of takro. In the story below, the game of takro indicates unity within the lay world and the pleasures of lay existence. It indicates disunity within the Sangha, the breaking of vinaya rules prohibiting monks from eating after noon.

"Takro is Thai soccer," the informant began.

This is racial instinct. It is played by eight to ten people, up to fifteen. The object of the game is to keep the ball in the air, to do their best. It is a game of unity.

He then attributed Mongkut's break from the Mahanikai to the fact that monks at Wat Mahathat were playing takro there while Mongkut was trying to study. The story begins:

Mongkut thought, "If I am to become a monk I have to be of some use," so he spent time studying. He studied the Vinaya and did not play takro like laymen.

Mongkut's studies were disturbed by the takro games, however. "Monks at other temples were playing takro also," the informant added as an aside.

Mongkut asked the abbot of Wat Mahathat, "Why do this?" The abbot said, "After the Buddha passed away 2,000 years, by the present time, religion varies.³⁷ It changes according to time and place." [Religion was in decline.]

³⁷Relics have become dispersed and teachings have divided.

As to the significance of this, "The temple did not control monks," the informant said in a concerned tone of voice. "When monks play, they have to eat [after noon]" (i.e., to break the most basic of vinaya rules). "Mongkut had no power to do anything." Of note in this version of what is still an extraordinarily sensitive story is that Mongkut's preceptor, probably the most powerful royal monk in the kingdom, agreed that religion was lax and in need of reform!

Mongkut left Wat Mahathat and returned to Samorai. Because of his uncertainty about what constituted pure vinaya practice,

Mongkut sought a good monk as an example. He went to all monks in the kingdom [seeking knowledge]. After he completed texts, he practiced vipassana. Then he said one day if he can serve Buddhism to prosperity, so monks are with full devotion, he will remain a monk and not disrobe from the Sangha. He prayed to see if this was possible.

The auspicious outcome of this incident is indicated by use of the propitious odd numbers three, five, and seven. "Five to seven days later a Mon monk appeared," the informant continued.

Mon monks came from Pegu. Three to five monks came to Thailand and they acted differently from Thai monks. Mongkut asked them about knowledge. After one week, he was satisfied and asked for ordination from the Mon priest.

When Mongkut changed, others followed. About twenty monks and Phantuloo (Phanthumalo) followed him from Wat Mahathat to Wat Samorai and were reordained with him.

The reordination took place on a raft on the river outside Wat Samorai; the raft was 'pure space' unowned and untainted by lay (royal) influence. The ordination was called the dalhikamma or '(act of) strengthening' (C. Reynolds 1973:82). This was for Mongkut to liken himself to the Mon King Dhammaceti, who, on ascending the throne, had ordered fresh ordinations for all the monks in the Mon kingdom (C. Reynolds 1973:102). Mongkut was carrying out Rama I's exhortation to Buddhist monks to remain 'distant from their kinsmen' with a vengeance.

Mongkut's reordination cast doubt on the validity of all ordinations in the land. In 1833, after close scrutiny of religious texts, he reset the boundary [sima] stones of Wat Samorai, an act which cast doubt on the validity of all temple boundaries in the land and therefore of all 'Sangha action' performed within those boundaries, kathin included. This was along the lines of a national scandal.

The following is what the informant called 'The Story of Phanthumalo at Wat Mahathat' in which Phanthumalo's career is portrayed as a parallel of Prince Mongkut's.

Phanthumalo had gone from Ubon to Wat Mahathat to study. Monks played takro, the sport of unity, at Wat Mahathat. Malo tried to study but the takro ball kept hitting him and monks asked him to throw it back [to play with them and thus violate the vinaya rules].

Phanthumalo then followed Mongkut to Wat Samorai, where he, too, was reordained on the river raft. "Some monks fought to be Mongkut's pupil," the informant explained (but not Phanthumalo?). (A memorial volume on Phanthumalo's life indicates that his contact with Mongkut may have been limited to a chance encounter in the gardens of Wat Bowoniwet, well after the first dalhikamma ordinations.)

The White Cloth

Mongkut began to take on the prerogatives of kings--to purify the Sangha. He accepted the robes offered by the king in the kathin ceremony only to unravel and resew them in one day as prescribed by Pali scripture (C. Reynolds 1973:90). He (later?) insisted that Thammayut monks accept white cloth in the kathin ceremony, then cut, sew, dye and dedicate a complete ciwon before dawn of the following day. This was to perform the ceremony in the 'more pure' way, as done in the time of the Buddha (before readymade British manufactured cloth was available).

This ritual change, in which Buddhist monks "remake" the gift of the laity, further increased the distance between monks and laity. It was in the letter if not the spirit of Rama I's reforms.

This custom created bitter and generally unpublicized disputes within the Sangha, especially at Wat Mahathat (chapter 7). The controversy continued well into the twentieth century, until it finally became moot, as intensive capitalist development and new patterns of monastic support forever changed the face of monastic schism in the Northeast (chapters 19 and 20).

Nang Klao as a Bodhisatta

Nang Klao in no way accepted Mongkut's right to purify the Sangha. He built and restored temples in the manner of the great Dhamma King. He involved himself directly in Sangha affairs, personally making the appointments of the abbots of major temples. He used the powers of royalty to subtly advance his own bodhisatta claims. Nang Klao had two Buddha statues cast, crowned, and dressed in royal garments. He had them placed below the Emerald Buddha in the Royal Chapel, naming them after his father and grandfather: Phra Buddha Yot Fa and Phra Buddha Loet La 'The Buddha Atop the Heavens' and 'The Buddha Below the Skies' (Chula 1960:154). This was to establish his place in a line of bodhisattas (cf. chapter 18).

Mongkut's Travels

Nang Klao left his palace only once a year, to perform the annual kathin ceremony at royal temples (Moffat 1961:27). In contrast, Mongkut began to travel extensively throughout the countryside as a monk, undoubtedly drawing hordes of people to his side and reinforcing his own bodhisatta claims: He was a prince who had renounced the world to

pursue the ascetic life. (According to Prince Parawet's biography, Mongkut's trips to the countryside brought rain [Wilson 1970:217]). He traveled to Sukhothai where he reportedly discovered King Ramkhamhaeng's preaching throne. He brought the throne back to Wat Samorai, where he sat to preach the dhamma, not, however, at royal invitation. As king, he continued to travel extensively.

Mongkut used his time in the Sangha to acquaint himself with Western customs. He studied Christianity, Latin, English, astronomy, mathematics, geography, physics and chemistry. He also had access to a printing press, and was one of the first people in the kingdom to realize its potential.

Mongkut had extensive contact with Catholic and Protestant missionaries. From their diaries, it is apparent that he began to utilize the rhetoric of virtuosity, that of the 'middle way,' as a defense against and adaptation to complaints about the "backward" and "superstitious" nature of Siamese customs and religious practices. As Boon (1982) notes, cultures are intrinsically comparative. In situations of colonial contact, this dynamic is turned outwards, towards a ceaseless comparison of indigenous and exogenous categories and customs (cf. C. Reynolds 1976).

For example, Mongkut's discussions with missionaries exhibited a distinct pattern. He would first consider the "superstitious" aspects of Buddhism as pointed out by his missionary contacts and then locate their equivalent in Christian ideology. Comparing the superstitions of the Mahanikai Order with those of different Christian sects, he would then point out how Thammaiyut practice, by exactly conforming to the teachings of the Buddha, incorporated the insights of both while eschewing their superstitions.

As the Reverend Jesse Caswell, an American missionary in Siam from 1839 to 1848, notes in his private journal that "If there are any in Siam capable of raising plausible objections against the Christian religion, are C F [Cao Fa or Mongkut] and those of his party. The others are too lazy to think." He continued:

I have today an illustration of the justness of these views. C F was speaking respecting the spherical form of the earth. He remarked that the Evangelists probably believed the earth to be flat, for they say that Jesus was taken to a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the earth. Now, such an objection, if not met, might work immense harm. (1931:29)

Caswell also wrote that "From conversation recently with Chau Fa and one of his head priests, I infer that there is a strong tendency to rank atheistical views."

In one passage, Caswell reports an "interesting conversation" with Mongkut "respecting the false and pretended miracles so common among the heathen and R. Catholic." Mongkut told a story about the superstitious practices of a Peguan king who, when monks could not ascertain the correct pronunciation of Pali, ordered them to chant their versions on four floating houses (river rafts), one for each class of priest. The chapter whose boat moved upstream during the chanting instead of down would determine the true pronunciation. Later on, it was determined that the miracle was a trick (the house was pulled by underwater ropes). Mongkut then notes that this reminded him of what he had heard the "R C" say of the way of ascertaining which of the three crosses upon which the Savior was crucified, "and remarked that the two cases were precisely similar" (1931:29).

Finally, when Caswell informed Mongkut that men of the "vilest class" embraced atheistic (meaning "heathen" Roman Catholic views) in Christian countries, Mongkut said it was not so in Siam. ". . . the great body

of the priesthood" (i.e., the Mahanikai, that patronized by the king) were "constantly filching the people of the little they own by telling them that giving to the priests will merit heaven, while not giving exposes them to hell."

Complaints about Mongkut's schismatic activities and too-close connections with foreigners eventually reached the ears of the king. After ten years in the Sangha, Mongkut had reached a dangerous point. He had attained the status of elder or thera and thus could ordain monks--in the Mon style. Nang Klao responded by bringing Mongkut 'closer' to the palace and by bringing the new movement under royal patronage. He bestowed a high ecclesiastical rank on Mongkut and installed him as abbot of Wat Bowoniwet, located near the Royal Parade Grounds (now the foremost royal temple in Thailand). When Mongkut transferred his residence from Wat Samorai to Wat Bowoniwet, the procession resembled that of the heir apparent to the throne, that of a 'Front Palace' or Wang Na prince. This reception, sponsored by the king and in apparent support of Mongkut's claims to the throne, immediately threw Mongkut into competition with other high-ranking and ambitious princes of the blood.

The battle between Thammayut and Mahanikai, Mongkut and the king, intensified during the 1830s and 1840s. In the 1830s, Mongkut sought to lead a group of monks to Ceylon on a textual exchange. Nang Klao granted permission for the exchange but forbade Mongkut to lead it, thus reasserting his supremacy over the Sangha as Dhammaraja and maintaining control over the pilgrimage paradigm (C. Reynolds 1973:92ff.).

Mongkut's Temple Network

Mongkut created a network of Thammayut temples in Bangkok whose ordination lines extended throughout the major capitals of the Northeast. Wat Bowoniwet, 'The Most Auspicious Temple,' became the headquarters for his movement. A sister temple, Wat Boromniwat, 'The Second Most Auspicious Temple' located near the outer walls of the city and reportedly maintained by Mongkut as a refuge if life near the Grand Palace became too dangerous (C. Reynolds 1973:74n., 85). Wat Samorai, renamed 'The Temple of the Royal Abode' by Mongkut's son and successor, King Chulalongkorn, was part of this network, as was Wat Thepsarin, 'The Abode of the Angels,' built in the Fifth Reign. Wat Thepsarin became a stronghold of Isan Thammayut monks.

It was at this historical point, in the 1830s and 1840s, that traditional problems of death and the classical successions and tension between a king and his Sangha were exacerbated by another--the antinomy problem. It is to this problem I will now turn.

The Colonial Experience: Purity as Chaos

The balance of power began to shift during Nang Klao's reign. In 1826 the British conquered the lower half of Burma. In 1868, at the end of Mongkut's reign, Cambodia became a protectorat of the French. In 1885, during the reign of Mongkut's son, Chulalongkorn, the British annexed the remainder of the Burmese territories and brought the Alaungpaya dynasty to an end (Hall 1968:601).

The message was clear. If they so desired, Western nations could dominate trade, capture port cities, and take over whole kingdoms. In Siam, a royal tradition that was five centuries in the making was threatened with extinction in the space of ten. The linguistic and

interpretive balance of power changed--with disastrous results for the monarchy.

For perhaps the first time, the Siamese kings found themselves seriously confronted by the problem of inverted ideologies, with the antinomy problem. The king's embodiment of indigenous ideals automatically transgressed the ideals of Western society and vice versa. Or, the same behavior was subject not just to different inferences, but to mutually-negating inferences. Attempts on the king's part to portray work or practicality--activity in the rajanacak or "secular" activity--as a virtue (a form of detachment?) were proof that he was no Dhammaraja. Attempts to convince Westerners of his righteousness and power through resplendent ritual displays were destined to failure: proof, rather, that he was a profligate and irrational despot whose removal was justified on moral grounds. Buddhist kings found themselves in a double bind.

The point I wish to make is that, given the systematic differences between Buddhist and Western cultural systems, indigenous ideologies and practices were not merely assigned different meanings in the colonial period; with the shift in the balance of power, they were assigned opposite meanings. Contradictory inferences were built into the cultural system: The king's "legitimizing" activities were delegitimizing and vice versa.

For many centuries, kings, princes, and monks had been battling over the propriety of different types and styles of religious practice, but these dialogues were new. The whole cosmological design came under attack. The value of entire practices and whole institutions was challenged, as were indigenous idea of efficacy. An entire system of indexical meanings was thrown into confusion.

As the kingdom was threatened with colonization, preexisting contradictions, small ideological fissures--between ideologies of blood and merit, or between the king's duty to provide labor for the building of great monuments as opposed to his duty to provide for the welfare of his subjects--became great cracks. "At the conquering of the Damilas this people was oppressed by me," notes the great Sinhalese king, Dutthagamani. "It is not possible to levy a tax; yet if without a tax I build the Great Thupa how shall I be able to have the bricks duly made?" (Geiger 1964:187; Mahavamsa XXVIII 4-5). Likewise, the wise Sinhalese Ruler, Parakkambahu I, laments the flooding of the Sangha with "unscrupulous bhikkhus whose sole task is the filling of their bellies--(that Order) which though five thousand years have not yet passed, is in a state of decay," and asks how it may "once more attain stability" (Geiger 1953:1; Culavamsa II 5-6). The Buddhist king asks how to build the Great Thupa, not whether he should build it. He questions the purity of particular monks in the Sangha, not the desirability of having a pure Sangha.

As the competition between the British and the French over Siamese territories and trade intensified, so did their ideological attacks against the Buddhist monarch and religious institutions. Siamese kings could not longer ignore such criticisms, or substitute one set of trading partners for another. The differences had to be confronted and successfully mediated.

As noted above, in the 1820s and 1830s high-ranking dignitaries from Nang Klao's court and high-ranking Buddhist monks, led by Prince Mongkut, began to engage in extended dialogues with Western missionaries and traders. These dialogues were themselves part of a fierce competition among ranking elite to gain access to Western ideas and

technology. The men who engaged in such dialogues walked a thin line, between treason and patriotism, between accomodating or appearing to accomodate Western interests and avoiding charges that they had insulted the king or religion (cf. Moffat 1961:21).

Time and Virtue

The antinomy problem, the double bind in which all modern Buddhist rulers have found themselves, derives from the fact that Theravada Buddhist and Western cultural systems differ in systematic ways--in ways that prompted Weber to question whether Buddhism could provide the impetus for capitalist development as occurred in the West. These cultural systems are based on disharmonic cosmologies and on radically different notions of time.

In the nineteenth century as in the present, Buddhist ideologies and practices were grounded in ideas of cyclical time, of the ever-degenerating kalpas. They were based on the idea that cosmic process and social deline were stilled, at least temporarily, by the pure ritual practice of great kings, the effects of which then generated outwards, spreading like light throughout the kingdom and cosmos.

Christian ideologies were based on linear concepts of time, regardless of whether the perceived endpoint was the second coming of Christ, the Armageddon, or of an infinite technological "progress." Virtue was defined in terms of a Christian work ethic--in terms of activities which were "progressive" rather than "retrograde" or "backward" on the temporal scale.

In the Buddhist cosmology, order is derived from the maintenance of propriety [khwam riap roi] and of order in the celestial hierarchy. As Stcherbatsky (1923) points out, Buddhist cosmology is process rather

than person oriented. In contrast, Christianity espouses an ideology of egalitarianism, a world whose focal point is the Rational Individual of the post-Enlightenment period. Order derives from men's practical mastery of the environment, measured by standards of practical utility. Thus, by Western standards, the Thai did not just believe in "superstitions," they believed in "useless" superstitions (cf. Chula 1960:14).

In both cultural systems, the adjectives of good and evil have powerful temporal components. From Crawford's (1915:141) journal we see the practices of the Siamese judged in terms of oppositions on a linear temporal scale, as "progressive," "stationary," or "retrograde." Westerners who came to Bangkok to negotiate trade treaties in the mid-nineteenth century spoke of the lack of "machines to make haste" in these negotiations (Lord 1969:188-189). The Siamese are described as "modern" or "barbaric," "energetic" or "lazy." In the diaries of Christian missionaries, Siamese practices are judged in terms of oppositions of "Christian" versus "heathen," "diligent" versus "lazy," "rational" versus "mad" or "barbaric."

In Buddhist ideology, the good is formulated with reference to the recreation of the pure past, the 'time of the Buddha.' Things virtuous are things 'detached' [dana], 'pure' [borisut], orderly (from high to low) and proper [riap roi]. Idioms of virtue relate to the observance of proper (ranked) duty [dhamma or na thi]. Such constructions relate to metaphors of the 'flowering of the lotus of the law.' Those practices which are represented as going mindlessly "forward" signify degeneracy, decline, and 'distance from the time of the Buddha.' Progress without purification connotes moral decline; it is reminiscent of 'spoilage' [khwan sia], of things 'broken' and divided [khat]. These latter terms

are the building blocks of metaphorical constructs that signal darkness and the loss of knowledge of virtue.

Th systematic cultural difference resulted in an anomaly of sorts. Forward movement in Christian time--practical and progressive practices--were forward but morally retrograde in the Buddhist moral framework.

As I shall demonstrate, the pressure points on the Siamese cultural system were systematic. Although not identical, the criticisms of missionaries, diplomats, and traders were aimed at those ideologies and practices that appeared to "block" capitalist development--or rather, to impede the furthering of Western economic interests.

This is how the situation arose in which the pure activities of Buddhist kings were assigned a second and contradictory set of values and lexical set. The king was criticized simultaneously by dual and contradictory standards: for promoting progress and democracy, and for destroying the cosmic order and vice versa.

The major antinomy issue was never articulated, however. This concerns the "direction of influence" problem: Thai leaders, at least within earshot of their subjects, had to represent prosperity as a function of religious purity. Resplendence in the cosmic order had to be portrayed as that 'flowing' from the purity of the Sangha and the virtue of the king, that which 'spreads' [phrae] from the monastic to the lay world and not the reverse. This principle constitutes the most fundamental parameters of a "legitimate" discourse. Cases in which the Sangha appeared to be influenced by "secular" ideals (e.g., democracy or a work ethic) were viewed as signs of decline, as the destruction of the pure separation of lay and monastic orders.

The second and third kings of the Cakkri dynasty were subject to a barrage of such criticism, although, apparently, not to their faces. Upon Crawford's leaving, for example, the king was able to send Prince Chesda (Nang Klao) to convey his "regrets for not being able to grant him an audience for leave taking owing to yet another Court mourning . . ." (Chula 1960:137). Mongkut, on the other hand, had twenty-seven years as a monk in which to gain an understanding of several varieties of Western thought. He used that time to develop a version of Buddhism that looked pure to the Siamese and "rational" to Western critics. In conversations with missionaries, he was able to reject the "supersititious" aspects of existing traditions, which he conveniently identified with the Khmer influence, with the Mahanikai and even went so far as to reject the Trai Phum (Lingat 1933).

Once Mongkut became king, however, he became the target of such attacks (of the type he had gently urged Western visitors to level against Nang Klao and the Mahankai). He had to fulfill the ritual obligations of the Dhammaraja in the manner of his predecessors to gain and maintain his throne. Almost overnight he went from being an "enlightened" and rational monk to a "despotic" and potentially mad king as he began to struggle to save his throne and his kingdom. Because they had the most extensive personal contact with Westerners, Mongkut and his son, Chulalongkorn, bore the brunt of Western charges of "capriciousness" (cf. Chevillard 1889:180ff.). Meanwhile, Mongkut's brother, the Second King, took on the role as the more rational, less temperamental, and more "democratic" of the two rulers (Blofeld 1972:43).

The King's Veracity

In the process of mediating the two systems of thought, something almost unheard of occurred. Accusations arose, not just that the king was mad, but that he was a liar. A centuries-long tradition of the royal veracity--one based in the king's "multifarious sacrifices" (i.e., on the virtues of Sibi)--was challenged by another: that the king's veracity depended on his expounding identical views and values in all circumstances, with all audiences. This veracity issue was compounded by the arrival of the printing press in 1835, and the enforced institution of a "free press," at least insofar as it applied to the increasingly unwelcome Western visitors. A centuries-old system of sacred discourse, one that centered around beliefs concerning the purity of the royal blood, was threatened with extinction, along with a related system of body taboos.

There were points of intersection, however. These concern what can be termed Janus or "two-faced" (chapter 5) ideologies and practices, those which appear to embody the ideals of both Western and Thai audiences while having totally different meanings for both. This situation is analagous to that of Captain Cook's coming to Hawaii: The native population interpreted his visit as the promised coming of the god Lono (Sahlins 1985); Cook interpreted his enthusiastic reception as one befitting a representative of the great British Empire.

In some cases Buddhist feats of linguistic virtuosity coincided with Western ideologies of speech as a "practical tool" for communication and persuasion. As Moffat (1961:19) notes of one of Mongkut's monastic reforms (that of having monks preach in Thai rather than Pali): "Prior to this it was customary for a priest to paraphrase some Pali text and recite this as a rite; Mongkut, instead, undertook to deliver sermons in

Siamese, seeking always to convince his hearers rather than merely to announce the truth." 'Discernment in the use of language'--the ability to communicate with all beasts and beings in the cosmos in the appropriate manner--is one of the 'four fluencies' of the arahant. Even Crawford, that most hostile of critics, came up with some felicitous misinterpretations of indigenous practices. His initial (1967[1828]:135) interpretation of the First Ploughing Ceremony was that the king's participation was an example of "agricultural industry" to his subjects.

Such felicitous interpretations were on the whole rare among those persons who were sent to negotiate treaties in the 1850s. The more general orientation is more aptly summed up in the irate words of Townsend Harris, a merchant from New York sent to negotiate a treaty with Siam. Upon the completion of the extremely complex negotiations, he wrote "My mind is greatly relieved and I hope this is the end of my troubles with the false, base and cowardly people. To lie here is the rule from the kings downward. Truth is never used when they can avoid it." When disputes arose about the veracity of Mongkut as compared to Reverend Mattoon, Harris' interpreter, Harris writes that the latter was of "unquestioned veracity" (Harris 1930:151).

The Disavowal of the Cosmic Connection

The first line of attack was the Trai Phum cosmology. As Prince Dhani (1947:38) writes of "old" conceptions of the monarchy, belief in the king's ability to manipulate nature makes him "liable to be blamed by his filial subjects on occasions of natural as well as personal calamities even including crop failure." Beginning in the 1830s, the elite (Alabaster 1871) thus began quickly to distance themselves from the Trai Phum, if not from the system of indexical meanings and rhetoric

of purification that attended it. As Wyatt (1982) and C. Reynolds (1976) indicate, Western concepts of person, if not of efficacy, may have already begun to make an appearance in Rama I's 'purification' of the Trai Phum.

A second, related line of attack was the idea that the king's performance of ritual was a corrective for disease. In 1824 a cholera plague swept Bangkok and Nang Klao had a protective cordon of white thread erected around the palace. Writes Feltus (echoing the opinions of the American missionary, Daniel Beach Bradley), "with such preventatives as the sole protector against the cholera it is no wonder that the plague spread like wildfire" (1964:78-79). In 1849, during another such plague, Nang Klao had the Emerald Buddha taken from the Royal Chapel and carried around the city three times to end it. One missionary commented that this was "nonsense"; the king should get the proper medicine.

In some cases, conflicting points of view led to confrontations. Nang Klao became so angered by French missionaries' refusal to donate funds to make merit at the end of the plague that he banished eight of them from the kingdom (Vella 1957:36-37).

A third line of attack was the harem, and with it, the king's veracity.

The Free Press and the 'Mad' King

As Feltus (1924:107) writes of Dr. Bradley's life in Bangkok, "Much was made of Mongkut's harem," an understatement in the extreme. Reports of its size were wildly exaggerated (Lord 1969:58). When told that there were 3,000 women in the Inner Palace (Smith 1909:37-40), even Bowring admitted that this was nonsense.

The harem became an antinomy problem par excellence. Was it a sign of prestige or debauchery? According to Bradley, Mongkut agreed, at least in one conversation, that polygamy was a "sin" (Lord 1969:179) and pointed out that his harem was less than that of his predecessor (cf. Blofeld 1972:48, 67), a statement which Bradley took to indicate that Mongkut was the more refined of the two. Such criticisms were not unrelated to the delicate trade negotiations that were being carried on at the time (see below).

These were the types of situations that compromised the king's veracity and, in some cases, ended up with him being branded as a liar. In Bradley's opinion, this "pernicious custom kept Siam beyond the pale of civilization" (Lord 1969:180). Bradley attacked the institution of polygamy in his newspaper, the Bangkok Recorder. This and other of the missionaries' articles (like that accusing the French representative, Aubaret, of insulting the king) placed the king in a quandry. If he acknowledged the truth of such allegations and did not punish the men who made them, he was no true Dhammaraja. If he denied it, he was a liar. If he closed down the newspaper he was a "despot," and, as events in Cochin China (Blofeld 1972:78) were to make clear, persecution of missionaries was a ready pretext for colonization.

What apparently "maddened" the king most were newspaper articles criticizing him in public the loss of royal trading prerogatives. In 1856 Mongkut reportedly became enraged when he heard of the unauthorized negotiations by which an English merchant received a ninety-nine year lease to some Thai property. He ordered ninety-nine lashes given to the Chinese who witnessed the agreement--"one for each year of the lease"--which resulted in the man's death (Lord 1969:173; cf. Crawford 1967[1828]:136). This event was reported in English newspapers.

Mongkut's reaction ("rage") to the loss of economic prerogatives was somewhat along the order of Taksin's. In Mongkut's case, the incident resulted in a diplomatic crisis, warning to the king that he had better tread lightly if he was to avoid King Taksin's fate. Mongkut apologized, made reparations, and built a monument (in the manner of King Asoka?) indicating his great remorse over the incident.

Diplomacy and the Breaking of the Taboos on the King's Person

Another factor contributing to reports of the king's "madness" was the breaking of ancient body taboos. The introduction of Western concepts of person and diplomacy marked the end of a tradition whose roots are found in the Purusha myth, in the ideology of the Mahapurusa or the Great Man with the thirty-two auspicious marks on his body (in the Buddhist tradition, the mark of future Buddhas and future Wheel-Rolling Monarchs). The king's status as a sacred being and as a deity was compromised by the breaking of such taboos. A Buddhist king is to be seen, not touched, by his subjects. If he is touched, he initiates the touching as a royal gift. One such incident occurred when a Western dentist offered to make Mongkut a new pair of false teeth. Mongkut "furiously" reprimanded him for insisting upon touching his face to make an impression (Lord 1969:176).

Another incident concerned the custom of the king shaking hands with representatives of foreign nations. Samuel House Reynolds reports that Mongkut apologized to missionaries at a dinner party celebrating his accession to the throne for not shaking hands with his guests (Feltus 1924:107). Lord (1969:176-177) reports that later in his reign, the king would descend from his throne during a royal audience to shake hands with Western visitors. These incidents were of the type that

exacerbated jealousy among missionaries and led to challenges to the king's veracity: he had "lied" when he said he could not do so.

Crawfurd: Antinomy and the Colonial Agenda

Missionary attacks on barbaric Siamese customs articulated with those of Western diplomats, sent to negotiate trade treaties. One Western diplomat, for example, attributed treaty delays to the king's "licentiousness" and "waste of time" with his harem (Griswold 1961:79-80).

Somewhat ironically, almost every major antinomy issue was presaged in a letter of Dr. John Crawfurd to his superior, the Governor General of India. The letter reported on the results of his mission to establish commercial relations between the British and Siam in 1823. Ominous from the viewpoint of the Siamese, Crawfurd completed a detailed survey of the natural resources of the kingdom--its soil conditions, resources of tin, teak, sappanwood, rice, sugar, pepper, etc.--and of the waterways that service it, and concluded with a thumbnail sketch of the military requirements necessary for an invasion "Should the arrogance of the Siamese embarrass us in the manner I have pointed out as probable" (1915:151, cf. 149). The report sounds like nothing so much as a man surveying his dinner before eating it.

Crawfurd found the celestial symbolism of the monarchy absurd. As he wrote of his first royal audience: "We had no sooner arrived at this spot than a loud flourish of wind instruments was heard, accompanied by a wild shout or yell, which announced, as we afterwards found, the arrival of his Majesty" (1967[1828]:92). Of the court presentation of the king as a deity, he writes, ". . . the situation of the King, and

the silence which prevailed . . . reminded us much more of a temple crowded with votaries engaged in the performance of some solemn rite of religion, than the audience-chamber of a temporal monarch" (1967[1828]:94)). As for the Emerald Buddha, Crawford found it "dull and opaque" and judged it probably not emerald at all (Crawford 1967[1828]:99).

In the audience that followed, Mongkut observed that perhaps the British had not appointed a governor of Ceylon "because Ceylon was holy ground!", a suggestion that Crawford found absurd. When Crawford explained that that no governor was appointed because the island's revenues were insufficient to maintain a colonial administration, Mongkut asked why the British had conquered it in the first place. Wrote Crawford:

We endeavoured to explain, that during the wars in which we were lately engaged with our European enemies who occupied the coast of the island, they harassed our commerce from its ports, and therefore, in self-defence, there was a necessity for taking possession of it. (1967[1828]:145-145)

Crawford was crystal clear about the major instance of Siamese despotism: royal trading prerogatives.

I may begin by distinctly stating that the great obstacle to the extension of European commerce is not directly the arbitrary characters of the Government itself [for the property of strangers is as secure from positive depredation in the Menan as in the Hooghly] . . . but always entirely from the injurious people of the Government interfering in commercial matters, and appearing itself as the chief trader in all the most valuable productions of the country, as well as exercising a monopoly over much of what is imported by strangers. (1915:153)

He found the Government "as complete an example of despotic power vested in one man as can well be imagined. Its influence pervades the whole frame of society, and the effects of its mischievous interference are everywhere discoverable." This was not solely because of the king's

control over trade, however, it was because he held the dual positions of head of the Sangha and head of the lay community: the definition of a Dhammaraja. This, among other things, was what made the Siamese state "backwards" and accounted for ridiculous speech prohibitions regarding the use of the king's name.

The King is not only the head of the State, but also of the church. There is no hereditary nobility nor hereditary priesthood, nor indeed any other check whatever to his arbitrary will. The superstition of his subjects has clothed his person with supernatural attributes. Matters relating to himself or to his Government are spoken of by them only mysteriously or in whispers. Thus his name is, for example, never mentioned, and it is pretended is unknown, except to a few favourite courtiers. (1915:121)

As for tax monopolies, and patron-client and tributary relations in general, they were nothing short of corruption.

The servants of the state of all ranks, with a few exceptions, instead of receiving regular salaries, are left in a measure to prey upon the people . . . The pernicious influence of this system is so extensive at the capital that there exists no such thing as free labor . . . (1915:135)

Corvée was an unenlightened custom, not because it was morally reprehensible, but because it prevented Crawford from accurately assessing the cost of labour in cash terms (1967[1828]:139) and because it was deleterious to the inculcation of a true work ethic.

The most mischievous ingenuity, indeed, could hardly devise a scheme more destructive of industrious habits and adverse to public prosperity than a system which devotes, as this virtually does, to the arbitrary, prodigal and capricious will of the servants of Government, one third portion of the manhood of almost all its subjects. (1915:127)

What labor the corvée did not take, the Buddhist Sangha did.

As for the China trade, its pursuit was mercenary (?) to the extreme (Crawford's opinions serving advance notice to Siamese kings as to the judiciousness of a rapid disassociation from things Chinese).

The King of Siam, although the circumstance be not generally known, acknowledged himself a tributary of the Emperor of China. His doing so does not arise from any political

necessity or consideration, or out of any actual dependence of Siam upon China, but altogether from this mercenary motive, that the vessels which carry the ambassadors may, under pretext of their doing so, be exempted from the payment of all imposts . . . They carry the Chinese Emperor a golden flower in token of tribute, but receive in return gifts to a far greater value. The vanity of one Court and the rapacity of the other have long rendered this intercourse a permanent one. (1915:148)

Bowring and Crawford regarded the Chinese as major enemies, threats to their domination of the Siamese economy, and Crawford characterizes their insincere religious habits thus:

The Chinese especially, whatever be their religious creed, profess themselves Buddhists as soon as they come into the country, intermarry with the Siamese, give alms to the priests, frequent the temples, occasionally become priests themselves, and sacrificing the practice of burying their dead and erecting costly monuments over them (1915:137)

There was no doubt in his mind, however, that Buddhism was at the root of most of this evil. Crawford found the "detached action" of Buddhist monks haughty; they were uncaring to the extreme. The music of Buddhist rituals was "loud but not harmonious" and the prayers "being in the Bali language, must have been unintelligible" to most of the laity (1967 [1828]:151-152). His opinions about Buddhism blocking capitalist development resonate somewhat eerily with the theories of Max Weber. The institution of the Sangha was an unmitigated waste of labour and capital.

There is no country, it appears to me, in which religion forms so much the business of life as in Siam . . . These priests live in monasteries, are condemned to celibacy, and forbid to labor. These monasteries, which are by far the most splendid building in the kingdom, are not endowed with lands or any fixed revenue . . . The priests therefore, live in a degree of comfort which is unknown among the people.

This, coupled with the strong connections between "church and state," accounted for the worst of Siamese despotism:

The Government names all the priesthood, contributes in a great degree to their support, and being in this state of dependence, and destitute of hereditary privileges to

property, the effect of their institution is to enhance the arbitrary power of the Government, and I make little question but that it is mainly contributive to the formation of the exquisite and unparalleled system of despotism which prevails in Siam. (1915:137)

Speech prohibitions concerning royalty (recognized as a function of the purity of the royal blood) bordered on the uncivil.

Not knowing of her [a young princess's death] death, and thinking it an act of civility, I sent a messenger to inquire after her health. The person to whom it was delivered . . . returned for an answer, that the subject was one which he dared not even speak of. All the other Siamese to whom I introduced the subject, spoke of it in the same mysterious manner, as if persons of the royal blood were exempted from the common law of mortality, or that at least it did not belong to the vulgar to imagine otherwise. (1967[1828]:149)

Somewhat ironically, Crawford admits that the Buddhist kingship and the waste of life and labor represented by the Sangha (1967[1828]:141) were not impeding the pursuit of profit of the Siamese, only for the British. His survey of population growth concludes that the Siamese population was, in fact, "progressive" and not "retrograde" or "stationary" and the (laboring) population would continue to increase if "tranquility" were maintained.

The Response

By the 1880s members of the Thai nobility had fully articulated Western strategems of colonization, a fact that is evidenced in a petition presented to King Chulalongkorn by high-ranking princes (his half-brothers) proposing a parliamentary system of government. One of its authors was an Oxford-educated lawyer. According to these princes, the Western powers believed that Siam was a weak nation, but that, despite their aggressive intentions, the European countries would not seize a weaker nation without some "pretext." The petition listed these pretexts: First, there was "the pretext of humanitarianism"--the

invader would assert that its aim was to bring happiness and advancement to all men equally. Second, there was the pretext that the "backwardness of Asian countries would somehow hinder the European countries in their own advancement" (emphasis mine), the pretext that certain "ineffective Asian governments" were incapable of protecting the persons and property of European nations. Third, there was "the pretext of commerce"--the European countries could assure their own development and prosperity by using the Asian countries as markets and as source of valuable raw materials. As Engel writes,

The petitioners compared the logic of the Europeans to a familiar rule of Thai law; when a person who owned a rice field failed to put it to productive use, an outsider might be permitted to take over the field in the hope that they would prove more worthy of possession. (1975:12)

The process of comparing and merging two systems of values had intensified. The above approximation of Thai and Western customs is ironic in that the Thai custom of land usage, so disdained by Westerners as a sign of despotism, represented for the Siamese the reality of colonial domination.

Conclusion

The Buddhist king could not justify sovereignty to Westerners on grounds of religious purity but he certainly could not justify sovereignty to his subjects on the basis of his practical or direct mastery of the environment. The very act of a king justifying his rule to his subjects violated the divine order of the flow of information. It was this "divine order" that ultimately was at stake in the confrontations with the West.

As Lithai notes in the Trai Phum, a righteous king "should not speak too much" when he sits with his courtiers to engage in debate and

argument (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:152). He certainly does not "argue" for the validity of his actions with his subjects. Rather, he issues edicts in a voice that "reverberates like the roar of a lion" (Seni 1958). He does not argue with Buddhist monks, but, faced with "angry and quarreling monks," sits quietly and resolves their disputes (C. Reynolds 1973:232). What he does do is incorporate new ideologies into his exemplary religious practice.

The encompassing strategy itself became a veracity-antinomy issue. From the Western perspective, if the king kept changing his "position" on an issue, if he could not "rationalize" his position or select one principle or ideology to which he would consistently adhere, he was a liar at worst and "insincere" or a dilettante at best. If he 'stuck' (clung) to a single principle without constantly purifying social practice, he was not a true Dhammaraja in the eyes of his subjects.

Thus even the encompassing strategy was challenged, interpreted as a sign of the king's weak-mindedness. As Townsend Harris wrote after a private audience with Mongkut upon the conclusion of a trade treaty in 1855:

I was now delayed over an hour by the most frivolous and pedantic conversation I ever listened to, and satisfied me he was quite as weak-minded as pedantic. He enumerated all the languages he could speak--the various sciences has has a small smattering of--the learned societies of which he was a member, and the various individuals he corresponded with in various parts of the world It was now half-past twelve and I was most anxious to get away. But no--I must wait while he wrote a gossipy letter to Sir John Bowring (cited in Moffat 1961:83-84).

Harris was not "charmed by his discourse" as one should be by that of a bodhisatta (Wray 1972:51). Protests Trevor-Roper in his introduction to Prince Chula's (1960:15) history of the Cakkri rulers, Lords of Life, "These rulers were not dilettanti."

The blood/merit tension--the idea of a father-son succession--did not become a full-blown antinomy issue until the turn of the century and the onslaught of the world depression when the monarchy as it had existed for the five hundred years finally collapsed. The next issue of contention was that of the royal treasury, which became linked to the king's "waste" of state funds on "useless" ceremonial.

CHAPTER 5

SIAM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE WESTERN INFLUENCE

Until 1892 the administration of Thailand's finances was confused and badly organized. There was no budget, little or no audit, and no separation of the king's personal finances from the general revenues of the country. In 1892 the financial system was renovated as part of a general reorganization of government initiated by King Chulalongkorn. A budget system with a regular audit was introduced; the king's personal expenditures were separated from the ordinary state expenditures; and improvements were made in the collection of taxes. No doubt Campbell was right when he scoffed at the statement that the king had given up control over his personal finances; no such surrender was intended in 1892. The king was still an absolute monarch. (James C. Ingram, Economic Change in Thailand: 1850-1970)

Introduction

Ingram's statement perfectly sums up the confusions and paradoxes surrounding the Thai monarchy by the late nineteenth century. The French and the British had begun to dominate the kingdoms of Southeast Asia and the state had embarked on an enforced modernization program. The ancient tradition of kingship had begun to erode, and Cakkri kings began to lose control of that most crucial of royal prerogatives, the right to have their personal affairs shielded from public eyes.

As the economy was restructured, they began to lose other prerogatives as well. The practical utility of the ritual system was challenged at the same time that a distinction was made between the state's and the king's "personal" finances. As the Cakkri kings lost control of economic and ritual privileges, they began to lose control over the linguistic and interpretive prerogatives that were traditionally viewed as a function their pure blood and religious practice.

This is the historical point at which the East-West antinomy issue began to manifest itself in a serious way. Western and Thai political ideologies did not share common cosmological and historical roots as did the Buddhist and Brahmanic. They were actively disjunctive and, in many cases, mutually negating. As increasing numbers of Thai elite became Westernized, the disjunction became a powerful historical force, one that governed the transformation of the ritual system. It threatened to undercut the ritual system, the divine kingship, and the Buddhist Sangha.

I suggest that the antinomy problem was the specific dynamic behind what Tambiah (1976:5) calls the "continuities and transformations" in the modern polity. This issue determined how the purification process was 'named' or characterized. It determined which traditions were discarded, retained and/or renamed. I further suggest that traditional beliefs and practices were not merely "discarded" in the clear light of Western science and rationality as most Thai and Western scholarly accounts have argued. Rather, some were renounced and renamed so they could be retained as the basis of sovereignty. The same question applies to the putative purification of "superstitious" Brahmanic from the ritual system as to questions about the separation of the king's finances: had King Chulalongkorn genuinely separated his personal expenditures from those of the state or had he merely declared (i.e. 'named') this to be the case?

Nang Klao on His Deathbed

Nang Klao presaged the issues that would divide the Sangha and plague his descendants on his deathbed. First he left one-quarter of the funds in his treasury to the Sangha, to be used for the building and

restoration of temples (not for his successor) (Chula 1960:176). He criticized the various princes who might succeed him, noting that Mongkut was the most able but professing 'worry' that if he ascended the throne he would force all monks in the kingdom to wear their robes in the 'foreign' Mon (Burmese) manner. Mongkut promised he would not and became king.

The question remained: How were Thai kings--or prime ministers--to merge the nikai that Mongkut had split? If the king cannot keep order in the Sangha, how can Buddhist monks preach and practice the dhamma? Struggles between Thammayut and Mahanikai were the focal point of political struggles for the next hundred years.

There was a difference between the struggles of the Mahanikai and the Thammayut and innumerable such sectarian struggles in the past, however. They occurred in the midst of rapidly changing economic circumstances, at a time when Siam's economy was forcibly linked and later made dependent on the world market system. Monastic disputes reflected "economic" issues; the Sangha was the theatre in which new and alien values were measured against the teachings of the Buddha. Which practices were "superstitious"? Should monks "work," and, if so, how? The 'Isan' regional identity was born in the midst of these ideological struggles.

In this chapter I will discuss the four interrelated issues of economy, polity, ritual and antinomy as they emerged in the Fourth and Fifth Reigns of the Cakkri dynasty and as they touched on the history of 'Isan.'

The Crocodile and the Whale: Mongkut's Legacy

Mongkut's reign marked a major economic turning point for the Thai kingdom. Before Mongkut ascended the throne, Siam's economy was voluntarily linked to a world economy, to a regional trading network. During his reign, the kingdom was forced to engage in world trade on terms set by the British (i.e., a system of "British imperial capitalism" prevailed). By the turn of the century, the Thai economy was heavily dependent on the world market system.

The loss of economic and political autonomy began in 1822 when Nang Klao signed a treaty with Britain governing trade and diplomatic relations; the treaty limited his government's ability to impose taxes and duties on British subjects. In 1833 Nang Klao signed a treaty with the United States, but this treaty contained no clauses limiting his sovereignty.

Immediately after Mongkut took the throne, however, he was forced to sign a new treaty with the British, literally at gunboat-point. In 1855, the British, no longer willing to accept delays because of the king's time-consuming involvement with court ceremonial, sent gunboats up the Chao Phraya and soon after Mongkut signed the Bowring Treaty (Hall 1968:667-669). According to the terms of this treaty, royal trade monopolies were discontinued in the interests of "free trade" ("free," at least, from the British viewpoint).

During the Fourth Reign, rice production in the Central Plains was increased for export (Elliot 1978:25) and the first rice mill was built in Bangkok for purposes of export. The re-monetarization of the Thai economy began: Mongkut had flat silver coins made to replace the bullet-shaped ticals and cowrie shells previously used in trade.

Mongkut's assessment of his own and the kingdom's position was that they were caught "between the whale and the crocodile" (Moffat 1961:124). Prevented from swimming either upstream or down, from escaping the expansionist desires of the British or the French, the kingdom had to sign away its legal and economic rights to avoid colonization. The king began to lose control over the economic and political functions of the state, over the "ax" and the "plow." This meant that he also began to lose control of the "libation cup," religion and the ritual process, the major source of his symbolic and cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1977:183-184). Other prerogatives began to erode as well: those of naming and interpretation, the basis of the king's linguistic domination of the polity.

Mongkut viewed domination by the British and the French in traditional cosmological terms; it forced Siam down in the celestial hierarchy and out from the center of civilization to its forests. "The British and the French can entertain no other feeling for each other than mutual esteem as fellow human beings," he wrote to his embassy in Paris, "whereas the likes of us who are wild and savage, can only be regarded by them as animals" (Moffat 1961:119, 122).

Mongkut defined his relationship to his subjects in similar cosmological and hierarchical terms. Writing to his ministers of Lord John Hay's firing on the sultan of Tregganu and British warnings to merchants in Bangkok, Mongkut stated "These wild whispers put the more weak-minded part of the population on the verge of panic, but the situation was not so serious, since I remained firm" (1961:105-112).

Loss of revenue for the royal treasury curtailed the king's ability to offer gifts to the Sangha and to build magnificent temples

commemorating his ancestors. Although both Mongkut and his successor, Chulalongkorn, were temporarily able to recoup their losses by setting a tax on opium and alcohol (on the Chinese community), the precedent had been set; the king's right to control trade monopolies had been challenged.

Western diplomats shared the opinion that the purpose of a modern and civilized state was to promote commerce and that the state should be "rationally" administered to that end. Missionaries thought the king's harem, the basis of his control over tributary states, was repugnant, yet another sign of his "barbarism." Questions about the purity of a particular monarch had arisen in previous regimes, but not about the validity of the monarchy itself. Similarly, connections between prosperity and the king's virtue, between his precise performance of rituals and his veracity, had heretofore met no serious challenge. Rather, questions about the king's legitimacy concerned the precision with which he performed these rituals, and their appropriateness to the cosmic era.

The Bowring Treaty seriously eroded the king's control of legal and economic functions. Royal trade monopolies and fines were replaced by low fixed import and export duties. Immediately after taking the throne, Mongkut was faced with Western "suspicion of the competence and justice" of his administration. This suspicion conveniently resulted in the extension of privileges of extraterritoriality to European nationals as part of the new treaty arrangements. The trade treaties signed during the Fourth reign thus resulted in what Wilson characterizes as "total revolution in all the financial machinery of the government" (1962:4), although the most far-reaching changes occurred in the following reign.

In Thai and Western historiographic traditions, Mongkut's subsequent legal and ritual reforms are generally represented as: (1) the purification of "superstitious" Hindu elements from the legal and codes; and (2) progress on a linear, evolutionary Western timescale. Rather, I suggest that Western symbols of rationality, "practical reason" (Sahlins 1976), time, and virtue were incorporated into Buddhist paradigms of purification.

Lingat's evaluation of Mongkut's legal reforms reveals a typical and persistent analytic error made by Western scholars: He mistakes the content of an act of purification for its essence. He sees the king's purification of law and ritual practice literally, either as the permanent rejection of old beliefs or as the permanent adoption of new ones. I suggest an alternative interpretation: that what is of primary significance to Western scholars, the content or referential meaning of these acts (see chapter 18)--is of but secondary significance to the indigenous audience, concerned with the wider issues of purification and the king's bodhisatta status (with the indexical or autotelic meanings of these actions). The most significant aspect of an act of purification concerns its place in a series of such acts--what it says about the king's progress on the path of purification.

As Lingat writes,

King Mongkut was a progressive minded monarch. He ridiculed the Manu the rishi story [supernatural inspiration of Manu, the lawgiver], and did not feel bound at all by old provisions of law whenever they appeared to him no longer suitable for modern times. With him, and still more with his son and successor King Chulalongkorn, the Law of Manu was over. Many provisions of the old code were repealed and replaced by new enactments relying upon the royal will only. (1950:30)

This ignores that fact that Rama I had already supposedly purified the law of its 'Hindu' elements. It also fails to account for the fact that

one of the Buddhist king's most exclusive prerogatives is that of naming and renaming social practice--making (and remaking) "the great classifications of social life." Previous kings had purified the law just as vigorously as did Mongkut, in the process likewise deciding which practices and elements were to be called "Hindu" or "Buddhist" or even "Western." The most important questions are never asked: which of these laws were actually enforced, how, and against whom?

The Bowring treaty and its successors opened up the country to Western enterprise and to Chinese merchants who traded in Western goods (Ingram 1971:33-35). The Chinese were able to trade freely because, unlike Thai commoners, they were exempt from residence regulations and registration under the nobility. As Bowring observed,

The greater activity of the multitudinous Chinese and their roving and adventurous spirit have made them the principal channels of trading operations in all parts of the country: there are no districts too remote to be explored by them, no object of traffic too small to escape their notice. They are awake to everything which is to leave lucre in their hands. (1969, I:242)

After 1855, the Chinese began moving into the countryside to trade in greater numbers. Chinese middlemen (many of whom owned the new rice mills), began to settle in rural villages and act as money lenders to peasant farmers (cf. Tomosugi 1980:118).

Mongkut faced the usual allegations that the French and the British leveled against Southeast Asian Dhammarajas (cf. Cady 1960:77; Butt 1978:50): that he was an "oriental despot," prone to irrational and superstitious behavior. New issues about the king's virtue (or the virtues of kingship) arose in conjunction with the "modernization" of the state. Could Buddhist notions of purity be reconciled with Protestant-derived notions of parsimony in the "management" of the state? Could a Dhammaraja on the public payroll still represent himself

as a Dhammaraja? With the ideological separation of the state's from the king's "personal" finances, the king's performance of court ceremonies became the dominant antinomy issue.

Mongkut ruled for seventeen years, until his death in 1868. These issues dominated his reign. Most of the seventeen years were spent mediating Thai-Buddhist and Western values--by making changes, I suggest, in the ritual system. Mongkut's ritual reforms established a common pattern of response to Western influence, one that can still be seen in the polity today.

The Antinomy Issue and Ritual Change

During Mongkut's reign and beyond, Western questions about the king's sanity, legitimacy, and wealth began to center on his performance of state rituals. Was all wealth in the kingdom legitimately that of a king, a single Individual? How was he spending (or wasting) this money--and was it not really the money of the state?

Lingat (1950), Griswold (1961), Wilson (1962), Riggs (1966), and Kirsch (1978) advance similar theses in regard to questions of change--that Mongkut was a reform-minded king whose ritual changes were part of the process of "modernizing" and "secularizing" the Thai kingdom. Tambiah (1976:227) correctly qualifies these interpretations with the argument that Mongkut's reforms reflect traditional purification patterns and that they enhanced his soteriological claims. Nonetheless, the Western scholarly interpretations are of interest because they were eventually incorporated into the indigenous ritual system. Some of Siam's new rituals were like mirrors; they reflected Western ideals back to a Western audience.

For example, Mongkut is praised by his Western admirers for rejecting Brahmanic rituals and ideologies of kingship and for promoting a more "egalitarian" ideology of kingship. Scholars, missionaries, and diplomats identified the Hindu devaraja or 'god-king' concept with megalomania (of a type that often obstructed business enterprises), with the king's deluded belief that he was "a god and not a man." They not only viewed Buddhism as a more "rational" religion, as a philosophy even (an impression that Mongkut and his advisors took great pains to reinforce), they identified the Dhammaraja ideology with egalitarianism. The king's proximity to his subjects was invariably seen by Westerners as evidence that he believed he was "a man and not a god." In addition, the king's the strategy of ritual enclosure, of encompassing Brahmanic within Buddhist rituals¹ was also viewed as a form of modernization.

As Wales (1931) notes, the bodhisatta claims of a Buddhist king are far more powerful than those identifying him with a single Hindu deity. The Future Buddha's virtue transcends and incorporates that of minor deities, who are but servants or guardians of the Buddha in the Buddhist pantheon.

As Seneviratne (1978) and others have noted, the Buddha has a dual nature as a man and as a deity, and so, as I argue, do Thai Buddhist kings. This duality accounts for the peculiar flexibility of Siamese kings in dealing with change. It lends an adaptable "Janus-like" ambiguity to their actions which, in some cases, manages to satisfy the ideological demands of indigeneous and Western audiences alike: what looks like rational or "enlightened" behavior from the Western perspective can look like the perfect and encompassing behavior of a religious virtuoso from the Thai, or like the activities of a deity,

¹I.e., of making them "intratexts" (cf. chapter 18).

momentarily descended to earth. For example, Mongkut's travels as a monk were attended by a host of miracle stories of the type that are found in the life of the Buddha (cf. Blofeld 1972:25-26). Mongkut's sermons sent men "flocking" to hear him (Lingat 1933:85,87). Finally, as Reynolds (1982) notes, there is a powerful cosmological strand of Theravada Buddhism which endows the Buddha with powers of cosmic generation. He is a "cosmocractor" who can introduce whatever practices are deemed necessary to maintain the congruence between the social and the cosmic orders.

I suggest that the "secularizing" interpretation of Mongkut's behavior is contradicted by Western scholars' own data and by their lack of understanding of bodhisatta paradigms: paradigms which, if understood in their entirety, would equally support the impression that Mongkut's behavior was truly "irrational."

Based on textual and ethnographic evidence (parts IV and V), I argue that encompassment is the sign par excellence of the Dhammaraja and that Western scholars have emphasized those practices that are familiar in Western societies, in so doing imputing a false teleology to the development of the Thai state. The king's purification of all social practices, his performance of all rituals, his patronage of all religions, and his embodiment of all virtues (the democratic included) are encompassing modes of action particular to the Dhammaraja. They are, as well, modes of appropriation and domination. This is the structure of the Jataka collection and the central theme of the contemporary monarchy (see chapter 17). The pattern is indicated by the verbs munwian, to 'circle' or circumambulate (in time, space, religious practice, or virtue), and tham hai sombun, to 'perfect' or 'complete' an

action according to a kammic model.² Steady incorporation of this sort, through the king's pure practice, is the principle underlying the Thai-Buddhist theory of hierarchy. Hindu deities are "multi-form," but the personalities of Buddhist saints are multidimensional. The metaphor for the personality of the virtuoso is the diamond (Mongkut's name as a monk): each facet shines forth, a virtue perfected.

As noted previously, the king's practice may incorporate opposites, especially in the paradigm of the "middle way" (see below), and not necessarily those of the pure and the impure. He may perfect all salient principles of the cosmic (or political) moment in sequence--perfecting one and moving on to the next in the pattern of the Jataka collection. Thus what appeared to Western observers as hopeful signs of rationality on the part of the king were beginning to worry his closest advisors as incipient signs of megalomania; was he making claims to be a fully realized Buddha?

I also argue that the changes or transformations in the Thai ritual system acquired a distinct style or structure in Mongkut's time, one that has persisted to the present. Then as now the Buddhist king had to communicate with audiences which subscribed to mutually-negating belief systems: with Westerners (diplomats, missionaries, and traders) and with his more "superstitious" rural subjects. In addition there was yet a third audience, the indigenous elite, who shared portions of each belief system, and who eventually began playing them off against the king as part of their efforts to take control of the state. Thus when the British and the French began threatening the autonomy of the Siamese kingdom, royal rituals and activities were (unconsciously?) divided

²A pure action is motivated by pure intentions, performed with proper methods, and generates auspicious results.

into three categories: (1) those which were appropriate for Western audiences only; (2) those which were appropriate for Thai audiences only; and (3) those which were appropriate for both.

Egalitarian Rituals

The first category of rituals--what might be called "egalitarian rituals"--embody Western ideals and Western concepts of person. In these rituals, the king's head is the same height as the men with whom he is interacting. They automatically violate taboos on the royal person. Egalitarian rituals include a new class of "diplomatic rituals," the birth of which was celebrated in Rodger's and Hammerstein's The King and I (still banned in Thailand), including dinner parties and royal intermingling with diplomats in the prescribed Western manner. These diplomatic rituals represent a total break from previous diplomatic traditions, which centered on the exchange of relics or sacred texts or on the performance of cremation ceremonies.³

Private or Hierarchical Rituals

The second category of rituals--what can be called "private" or "hierarchical" rituals--are those kept from the eyes of foreigners. These rituals involve customs like prostration, worship of tutelary spirits, or worship of Buddhist saints believed to be arahants and to have magical powers.

³The relationship between the Siamese and Cambodian kingdoms, for example, was traditionally mediated in monastic or relic exchanges, or in cremation and coronation ceremonies. The spatial arrangements within the rituals or the relations of gift-givers to gift-receivers reflected the relative status of the participants. Even today, court protocol specifies that representatives of foreign nations must remain outside the circle of the king's immediate presence. Pictures of the king's more egalitarian interactions with Westerners are banned from the Thai press. a 1980 issue of Newsweek in which a picture of the prime minister had inadvertently been placed higher than that of the king was taken off newstands.

Equalitarian and hierarchical rituals tend to lose their tabooed status once interacting populations can accept each other's customs with greater equanimity, or they are no longer needed as a pretext for domination. For example, Buddhist meditation is now popular with Americans, who conveniently ignore its more "superstitious" aspects. The sight of the Buddhist king interacting on an equal basis with Western visitors has less shock value for his subjects in the present than it had in the past--although such pictures are not generally found in the provinces. In 1985 American network news carried film footage of the elaborate cremation ceremony of Queen Ramphai, the consort of King Prajatipok (Rama VII); it was heralded as a quaint Siamese custom, part of the Thai "cultural" tradition.

Janus Rituals

There is yet a third, intermediary set of rituals I will call "Janus rituals." Janus rituals can be read positively by both Thai and Western audiences. They appear to embody the ideals of both, or at least they do not automatically transgress the ideals of either society. Janus, the god with two faces, is the god of transitions in Greek mythology who appears on gateways and entranceways. Janus rituals are likewise a transitional phenomenon, often used to initiate an intercultural dialogue.

For the most part, both Western and Thai historiographic traditions reflect the modernization and secularization theories cited above. These theories are based on the premise that the king's close proximity to his subjects is a sign of incipient egalitarianism and explicitly related to his embodiment of the Ramkhamhaeng ideal (cf. Office of the Prime Minister 1979:20). These same historiographic traditions make

much of the king's seclusion from his subjects during the Ayuthaya period, when the king's subjects were forbidden to cast their eyes upon the monarch (or these opportunities were more closely rationed as part of the system of power).

Mongkut began to break with the custom of royal seclusion by going out among his subjects, first as a monk and later as king (deity?). This was a Janus ritual of sorts. Westerners interpreted his going out among his subjects as a sign of his democratic tendencies. Writes the Office of the Prime Minister in 1979:

Mongkut travelled extensively as a monk. His personal contact with common folk--denied prior Thai monarchs whose secluded lives precluded such contact--was a humbling experience. It made him regard himself as an ordinary human being and coloured his innovative reign, which was distinguished by an open, humane attitude towards his subjects. (1979:34)

Given the symbolic values that are encoded in ancient royal and cosmological traditions and ethnographic data from the modern kathin (part iv), however, I suggest that his subjects may have been seeing a god, a Buddhist deity descending from the Buddhist heavens. Or, as the miracle stories attending his travels as a monk would indicate, at least some of his subjects believed him capable of performing the feats of an arahant, if not of a fully realized Buddha.

The theme of the "descent of the gods" has its roots in the earliest Buddhist tradition; the Buddha supposedly descended from the heavens to preach to his mother before attaining final rebirth as a buddha. The extreme potency of the descent is derived from the idea that the king, like a portable Hindu deity, is an 'eye delight' [P. nayana] for all who behold him (cf. Babb 1982; chapter 11). The magical quality of his descent from the heavens derives from beliefs about the potency of the sight of pure persons (gods) and pure actions in the Buddhist tradition;

the sight of the king exercises a powerful sensory (visual) effect on his hot-hearted subjects, inclining them towards the dhamma. Like Rama I's paintings on the walls of Wat Chetuphorn, the king's presence is believed to be a way of teaching the illiterate 'by means of the senses.'

I suggest that this emphasis on the transformative powers of auspicious sights--of seeing and being seen by the deity-virtuoso, or of casting one's eyes on auspicious objects--is one of the most important heterodox aspects of the modern Thai Theravada tradition. I further suggest that Hindu beliefs about the purifying powers of auspicious sights or visual interactions were transferred from objects and deities to the pure practice of the virtuoso in the Buddhist tradition.

Such beliefs, about the magical influence of the king on his subjects, form the basis of the government's present policy towards the king. The royal activities of the past are the precursors to national development programs which are designed to eliminate the last vestiges of a pre-capitalist economy.

The Ritual Wars of the Fourth Reign

Mongkut's reign began with the British challenging the practical utility of Nang Klao's cremation ceremony--the ceremony that marked Nang Klao's passage to the Buddhist heavens, reinforcing the Cakkri dynasty's claims to membership in the lineage of the Buddha. Mongkut wrote the following to an English correspondent with regard to the cremation:

Large sums of money are always sacrificed on such occasions from the royal treasury. It costs much labour and time and strength to all classes of the subjects of the kingdom. It appears indeed to be a custom the observance of which is not followed by any advantage.

However, he concluded with the following:

But it is a very old custom of the kingdom, and by all her tributaries well known and revered. And if it should be not disregarded, passing it by with ceremonies only such as are really needed, all the head provinces and tributary kingdoms would find fault and attribute it to base motives. (Riggs 1966:99)

This was an antinomy issue. If the king did not perform lavish ceremonies of state, he could not maintain his position as Righteous Ruler throughout the kingdom. If he did, he would be accused of being an oriental despot or a "wastral." Mongkut performed the cremation with traditional pomp and ceremony.

Additional controversy surrounded Mongkut's coronation ceremony. Riggs (1966:99), following Griswold, writes the following of Mongkut's coronation.

. . . in regard to his own coronation, Mongkut faithfully complied with tradition; but, at least according to Griswold, he viewed it as a secular matter. "As there is no Buddhist substitute for the Brahmin ceremony," he [Griswold] writes, "the most that King Mongkut could do was to revise the ceremony slightly, so as to reinforce the Buddhist elements that had been introduced into it, and add a human touch.

Once ascended to the throne, Mongkut began to purify the entire ritual system. He changed the First Ploughing Ceremony to emphasize both its "Buddhist" elements and his superior status as a world renouncer: He alone was the protector and defender of Buddhism, the center of ordinative process. Prior to the Fourth Reign, the First Ploughing Ceremony, the Phraratchaphiti Chot Phranangkhan, was a purely Brahmanical ceremony. The purpose of the ritual was to predict rainfall, decide which crops to plant, and insure a good harvest. During the ceremony, a court Brahman was designated as a substitute king. He blindly chose a phanung or sarong-like garment, the length of which determined the prediction for rainfall (Wales 1931). Monkgut added a Buddhist component to the ceremony, and initiated an elaborate

public spectacle in which Buddhist monks chanted blessings on the monarch called the phrarachaphithi phutamongkhon. Mongkut not only made the phrarachapithi mongkhon a dominant part of the ceremony, he sent four of his queens to accompany the substitute king to listen to the chanting.

In the second year of his reign Mongkut installed a new City Pillar [lak kan muang] in the Royal Chapel, supposedly because his horoscope was at variance with that of the existing lak kan muang (Tambiah 1976:227). This was a private ceremony, presided over by court Brahmins and little remarked upon by Westerners. It has its roots in the Hindu and Cambodian deva-raja traditions and in indigenous traditions associated with the "gods of the soil." This new pillar signified Mongkut's taking possession of the city. The king, exercising the royal naming and interpretive prerogatives, designated the pillar as representing 'The Guardians of the Kingdom of Siam'--angels who were reincarnations of past Buddhist kings. Mongkut then venerated both the new and the ancient lak muang.

During Mongkut's reign the kathin ritual attained the status of Janus ritual par excellence, a status it still enjoys today. It was one of the few rituals in the royal repertoire in which the people were allowed a glimpse of the king. (Mongkut allowed his subjects to watch royal processions, although not necessarily to glance upon his face.)

According to Riggs, Mongkut reduced emphasis on royal coronation and cremation ceremonies because they were expressions "primarily of the old cult of the divine king" (1966:100). Instead, he emphasized the Buddhist kathin ceremony, the ceremony in which the king's subjects were allowed to see their monarch as the royal barges proceeded upriver to offer the kathin robes at Wat Arun. Mongkut built a splendid

seven-headed naga boat to add to the royal barges used in this procession. According to Riggs, the kathin became touted as a "national festival of exalted significance" in the Fourth Reign. Following Wales, he writes that "By leading the way in the kathin, the king does not separate himself from the people, but projects his role into the midst of those activities which are most sacred to them" (1966:101).

Another possible explanation of the king's going public concerns the loss of economic prerogatives: members of the ruling elite had begun to make independent trade agreements with Western nations. Having lost control of his nobles through loss of major trade monopolies, the king may have begun to turn directly to his more humble subjects to reinforce his Dhammaraja claims, building a constituency among those who would be most likely to accept them.

The "modernizing" interpretation of Mongkut's reforms is expressed in the following statement by Riggs:

In effect, then, the reforms of Mongkut, from the perspective of the people rather than of the European observer, may have had their greatest significance in gradually changing the public image of the monarch from that of a divine king, apotheosized by the magical and supernatural rites of the Brahman priests, to that of the leading human defender and patron of the Buddhist Church. (1966:101)

Mongkut created other Janus rituals, what Riggs calls new "secular ceremonies." For example, he initiated a nationwide celebration of the King's Birthday and Coronation Anniversary, supposedly in imitation of European royal customs. A "modernizing" tendency in European eyes, it was a bodhisatta claim of a rather extraordinary nature: In the past, Thai state ceremonies celebrated anniversaries of events in the life of the Buddha, not in the life of a king.

Mongkut also began attending public ceremonies in which royal titles and honours were awarded to Buddhist monks. What seemed to Westerners

to be "awards of merit" were in fact royal favours, phrarachathan, alms to the king's subjects. The awards were made sacred by the touch of the king. They were named after points in the celestial hierarchy and signified the degrees of religious purity of the recipients. The new awards ritual was part of an encompassment strategy: As Riggs also notes (and despite Mongkut's supposed rejection of superstitious "Hindu" elements in the religious system) the "Brahman pundits . . . were not neglected, and secular officials were (also) granted promotions" (1966:105). Mongkut's creation of new awards of merit was, above all, a reflection of his powerful ordinative status, an announcement that he remained the central source of order in the kingdom.

These data indicate that three features of the ancient royal tradition that have persisted to the present. First, 'ritual action' [pithi kan] remained at the center of the ruling process. Second, ritual action was integral to the king's successful response to domination by Western nations. Third, changes in the ritual system indexed the king's great knowledge, his powers of encompassment: The transformation (purification) of the ritual system remained as an index of the royal perfection (see chapter 17). Thus the events that Western scholars tend to interpret as an expression of the king's belief in Western values (his patronage of "democratic" social practices, for example), are most likely acts which signify his perfection of virtue and his powers of encompassment. This is the distinguishing feature of the Dhammaraja.

Mongkut: Sectarian Issues in the Fourth Reign and the Thammayut

Mongkut continued to patronize Thammayut temples throughout his reign, although the Thammayut did not gain official recognition as a

separate nikai until 1893. Once he became king, Thammayut monks began to disrobe and take up civil positions. This aroused the ire of members of the nobility, some of whom were competing for the same positions.

Either Mongkut or Nang Klao renamed the kings of the Cakkri dynasty to indicate their bodhisatta status as another way of strengthening lineage claims.⁴ In the rather extreme manner of King Lithai of Sukhothai, Mongkut had Buddha statues cast with the facial characteristics (in the 'shape') of previous kings. Jayavarman II cast Siva statues associated with (with the facial characteristics?) his father and maternal grandfather but 'named' them after Hindu deities. This act designated his ancestors as the "subtle substance" of those deities, which he could then share through ritual veneration of the statues.

Mongkut cast Buddha statues with the physical characteristics [rup] of his ancestors and treated them (or "called" them) Buddha statues. By thus changing the 'material aspects of dhamma' [wathu-tham] into the physical shape of his ancestors, then worshipping these statues, he venerated the Buddha and his ancestors in a single act in a specifically "Cakkri" version of the transformation of nama into rupa, the 'essence' of the Buddha's teachings into a distinct historical-physical form.

Mongkut may have convinced the representatives of Western nations that he was not interested in divine status, but ethnographic evidence suggests that his bodhisatta claims were considered extreme by members of his own court. For example, as was traditional, Mongkut built a temple to commemorate his succession to the throne. Instead of naming it after one of his ancestors or naming it in a way that would

⁴Wales (1931:39) reports contra Vella (1957) that Mongkut gave posthumous bodhisatta titles to his three predecessors. (Cf. Tambiah 1976:226.)

commemorate the Buddha, he issued a 'naming order' [nam banyat] naming it after himself (chapter 10). Was he a fully realized Buddhist saint?

According to one ritual specialist in the Grand Palace, the naming order created a stir among Mongkut's advisors who were 'not willing' to agree with the order. Mongkut's temple-building activities, which accelerated his claims to superior religious status, were perhaps the equivalent of Taksin's more exuberant claims to religious purity, signifying that the king had become a streamwinner in this life rather than in the next. The temple is known today as Wat Makut Kasat or 'Mongkut the Warrior'; it is the only first-class royal temple that is named after a king.

Naming Prerogatives

There is evidence to suggest that the king's linguistic prerogatives, his naming and interpretive prerogatives, began to erode during the Fourth Reign, that Mongkut began to lose control over public discourse. For example, Moffat (1961:33) writes that Mongkut issued an edict ordering everyone to use more proper terms for the ubiquitous fish sauces kapi and nampla. Shortly thereafter Mongkut repealed this edict, regretfully admitting that the majority of people in the capital still used the old words.

Such linguistic prerogatives are closely connected to officials' powers to collect revenues in the forms of fines. "Worse still," Mongkut wrote in the new order,

advantage is being taken by some rogues who, by impersonating the Nay Amphur, have, on many and increasing occasions, extorted money from the people [for not using the new terms]. Be it, therefore, declared that from now on the people may continue to use the words kapi and nampla as they have been used to do so from the time immemorial.

In a similar vein, Mongkut also issued several proclamations explaining the meaning of wat names in an effort to correct "improper" popularizations. In one instance, he set a fine for those who persisted in the use and concluded his point by declaring that those who wished to ignore this rule could be "hung or poisoned until dead and departed from the kingdom of men, and they could say what they wished in the kingdom of spirits" (Moffat 1961:113-117, 191-192)

The Death of a King

Mongkut's creation of a quintessential Janus ritual is what eventually led to his death. In 1868 he invited members of his court and representatives of European nations to the south to witness an eclipse. Playing at once the roles of "rational scientist," court astrologer, and omniscient being, he predicted the eclipse to the minute by using the knowledge of astronomy he had gained from his studies with missionaries and Buddhist monks (Moffat 1961:170-172). This superior confirmed his grasp of "scientific principle" to the Western audience and further convinced his subjects (who believed eclipses occurred when the giant, Rahu, swallowed the moon) of his omniscience.

The French were duly impressed by Mongkut's prediction as it reportedly beat their own by two seconds, but court Brahmins were angered at this usurption of their traditional role. Not only did they think his predictions would be wrong, they predicted that the eclipse augured disaster.

The "disaster" was Mongkut's death, of malaria contracted on the journey. Typically, Mongkut entered the race to interpret the future, supposedly predicting the day of his death in the manner of a Buddha. (His death was near enough his birth date to support this bodhisatta claim.)

Mongkut on His Deathbed

From the Pramote brothers' translation of the official account of Mongkut's final hours, it appears that even his death was a quintessential Janus ritual that confirmed his status both as rational administrator and Buddhist saint. Like the Buddha, Mongkut issued final instructions to the Sangha on his deathbed. He also issued instructions about his cremation ceremony in which he emphasized the distinction between the king's property and the crown property:

A 9 o'clock in the morning, the King saw Phraya Rajkosha, the master of the Robes, and gave him final instructions as to how his body should be dressed after death. The King was very particular that only the gold and jewel ornaments belonging to him personally should be used. On no account must the jewels belonging to the Crown be taken for the purpose. It was one of His Majesty's wishes that his cremation ceremony should be performed with strict economy.

As he neared death, Mongkut spoke several languages, indicating that he was, like the Buddha, dying "unconfused."

8 o'clock and 50 minutes in the evening. The King called for his chamber, and having passed water he turned his face towards the East and said "I am about to die this very moment." Then he turned towards the West and again said "I am dying now." In this position His Majesty remained, slowly but distinctly calling out the sacred name "Araham Samma Sambuddho." (Seni 1964:29)

The Reign of King Chulalongkorn: 1868-1910

Mongkut had done everything possible to insure that his eldest son by a First Queen, Chulalongkorn, would succeed him as king. He arranged an elaborate tonsure ceremony in which he played the role of Siva and to which he imputed new meaning--the elevation of Chulalongkorn to the status of Heir Apparent (Gerini 1895).

Despite these precautions, Chulalongkorn was in a precarious position for at least the first twenty years of his reign. He took the throne in 1868 at the age of fifteen, sick from malaria contracted on the trip to

the south with his father. He ruled under the control of a regent until 1873; a group of powerful nobles made major decisions for the polity.

In 1873 Chulalongkorn came of age and received a second coronation ceremony. He received the same title as his predecessors, as Prince Chula (his grandson) notes, with emphasis on "born of royal parents on both sides" and the "somewhat contrasting one" of "elected by all the people" (1960:226). His first proclamation as king was to abolish the custom of prostration before royalty and high officials (Engel 1975:16). These and other "democratic" reforms created instant controversy and imperiled the monarchy. As time passed and members of the old guard passed away, however, Chulalongkorn was able to make maximum use of hereditary prerogatives to consolidate his power and he eventually became one of Thailand's most powerful kings. I suggest that the success of his reign can be attributed in part to the skill with which he handled the antinomy issue.

Chulalongkorn's Harem

Chulalongkorn built his harem in the manner of his predecessors, accepting the daughters of nobility as minor wives. Part of his harem consisted of half-sisters, of whom he was guardian. He took some of them to wife and raised them to the rank of Queen, placing them higher than his earlier wives of noble birth. As Prince Chula (1960:20) writes of this custom: "While this practice is admittedly shocking to the Western mind, it was based on the old Hindu system of keeping royal blood pure for the succession," a point to which I will return presently.

Democracy and the Near Demolishment of the Monarchy

Chulalongkorn's first serious attempts to exercise royal prerogatives occurred in 1874. He proposed a "democratic" reorganization of his advisory councils in which he would act as President and the members would be encouraged to practice free speech. The older members of the nobility correctly perceived these edicts as an attack on their influence, and the younger and more Westernized princes thought the reforms were not radical enough. Chulalongkorn was caught in an antinomy bind.

One result is known as the "Front Palace Incident" (the Front Palace being that of the Second King, Chulalongkorn's half-brother). Foreign consuls, allied with different of the high-ranking nobles, proposed a partition of the country into three sections, to be ruled respectively by the king, his younger brother, and the former regent. The partition never occurred, but it set Chulalongkorn's reforms back for many years and demonstrated both the essential fragility of the monarch and of the monarchy. Twelve years later, in 1887, three of Chulalongkorn's brothers petitioned the king for a national parliament but Chulalongkorn refused (Engel 1975:11).

The situation changed as a result of the Anglo-French agreement of 1896. The British and the French agreed to maintain Siam as a buffer state between British-ruled Burma and the French protectorates of Laos and Cambodia. This meant that the external security of the Thai state was guaranteed by the imperial powers and the king could turn his attention to economic matters (cf. Anderson 1979). The agreement released much wealth for local investment that had been withheld owing to the uncertainty of the situation (Girling 1981:49). By the 1890s many powerful members of the old nobility had died, and Chulalongkorn,

along with talented members of the aristocracy, began to make serious changes in government.

The Economy

King Chulalongkorn is credited with the political modernization of the Thai polity and with beginning Siam's fullscale participation in the world market system. His reign saw an increase in agricultural production, mainly of rice. The kingdom produced agricultural raw materials and minerals for a world market and received Western manufactured goods in return. Trade doubled between 1894 and 1904.

The commercialization of the economy occurred first in the central plain, which contains the most fertile and easily accessible riceland. The British then pushed hard to build a railway system into the north, where rich teak forests were located. The northeast remained 'wild' territory, less fertile than the central plains or the north. Aggressive commercialization of the Isan economy did not occur until the 1960s.

The Purification of the Law and the New Economy

Rama I had purified the laws of the land by recodifying and renaming the Thammasat. Chulalongkorn likewise purified the Thammasat. In addition, he renamed the procedure of purification or "adding" to the law (i.e., the creation of the Rachasat), representing himself as a "legislator" who was "making" the law. He instituted these reforms in 1874 after a trip abroad, from which he "brought back new ideas" (Sarasas 1960:130).

Chulalongkorn prefaced his reforms by suggesting the abolishment of the royal title 'Lord of Life,' pointing out that it was misleading; the king did not exercise such "absolute powers" over his subjects (without

good cause). He then created and renamed advisory councils in such a way as to conform to Western concepts of law-making.

On 8 May 1874 the king proclaimed the establishment of two advisory councils to consult with him on important matters of state and to assist in the enactment of laws. The advisory bodies were called the "council of state" and the "privy council." The king was to act as the president of the new council, free to attend meetings or not, as he pleased. "The members would be free to disagree frankly with the views of the king and need not fear any punishment for expressing their disapproval of his ideas" (Engel 1975:33ff.).

Vella (1955) argues that Chulalongkorn thus changed the king's traditional duty from that of adhering to the Thammasat and executing traditional law to that of legislator, with unlimited powers to change the government and social life. I suggest instead that, in the traditional manner of the Dhammaraja, he merely added a new "modern" role to the royal repertoire, that of the great "legislator." Siamese kings have always had the power to change or 'purify' government and social life.

Chulalongkorn's new laws reflected the principles if not the realities modern capitalist development. They were oriented towards the "rational administration" of the state and had somewhat portentous consequences for the status of the polity as a soteriological state (or for the articulation of that status).

As Chulalongkorn wrote to Prince Damrong in 1895,

We will administer the country well if we foster opportunities for the people to earn livings so that they are benefited by the government. Then they will pay the taxes which are the economic foundation of the government. Consequently, an effective administration and a fostering of the ways of providing for the livelihood of the people are the most important, the final purposes of the kingdom. (Engel 1975:25-26)

The "final purpose" of the kingdom was no longer to promote the salvation of its people?

Chulalongkorn is referred to as the "Father of Democracy" in Thailand because he abolished the custom of prostration before the monarch (which is still practiced in private today). He allowed his subjects to look upon his face, and "freed the slaves."

Freed slaves meant that the power of the nobility and the king could no longer be based on the corvee or control of manpower. With the steady immigration of Chinese, the population grew and manpower was no longer a great problem. Land began to be treated as a commodity, and issues of law arose over its taxation.

New laws about labor and land changed further the economic circumstances of the nobility. As Dicock writes:

When slavery or servitude was abolished, the aristocracy were left with all of their lands but without sufficient labor to work them. This made it necessary for them to sell or lease land that was particularly fertile or situated not far from markets or which lay along canals. As for other land that did not have any of these favorable conditions, however, they requested the state to rescind their ownership. Lands which could no be sold nor leased, thus, were returned to the state. (1907:96-97, cited in Tomosugi 1980:125)

Contact with Western powers in the 1890s had a paradoxical effect on the monarchy. It expanded Siam's economic capacity, weakened the nobility, and provided King Chulalongkorn with greater power. The expanding economy and the king's control of the new centralized administrative apparatus enabled him to consolidate power internally and strengthen his authority against external powers. On the other hand, the king's emphasis on democracy and the "rational" administration of the state had the cumulative effect of undermining the institution of the monarchy.

The Purification of the Bureaucracy

King Chulalongkorn was determined to establish a rationalized and effective government in order to provide for the public well-being and thus ensure the longevity of the administration itself. (David Engel, Law and Kingship in Thailand During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn)

Under Chulalongkorn, the Siamese government was totally restructured along colonial lines. It became more centralized and, at least in theory, more "functionally differentiated," but remained under the sole control of the monarch. Beginning in the 1890s, foreign experts were brought in at the highest levels of government as advisors. Europeans, especially the British, directed or advised ministries or departments of finance, customs, internal revenue, survey, forests and mines and police. King Chulalongkorn and members of the Thai nobility headed this "patrimonial bureaucracy" whose explicit and primary aim was to integrate the local economy into the international capitalist system.

What was the actual import of these changes insofar as they concerned changes in the means and modes of production? As the above statements and quotes indicate, Chulalongkorn's "reforms" created new contradictions and new mythologies about the kingship and the "modern" Thai state, e.g., that of the "democratic" king who exercises ironclad control over his polity. As the work of Riggs (1966) and more recently of Likhit (1978) make clear, the modern Thai bureaucracy is still run according to traditional patron/client principles. The theory of the "modernization" or "Westernization" of the state is most clearly contradicted insofar as it relates to the realities of power in the Northeast during the Fifth Reign (Bunnag 1977; see below).

I suggest an alternative interpretation of the changes made in the Fifth Reign. As Engel writes, "The reorganization of the government

bureaucracy was for King Chulalongkorn the reform upon which all further progress depended" (1975:20). As he also writes (echoing Chulalongkorn):

The reformation of the bureaucracy, like King Chulalongkorn's decree abolishing prostration, was evidence that the purpose of government was not merely to exist but to function, and to function in a way that would prove beneficial to the people. (1975:25)

I suggest that Chulalongkorn elevated the concept of the "practical function" of the bureaucracy to the level of a Buddhist virtue or principle of purification. He shifts, from an elaborate public emphasis on the purification of ritual to an equally elaborate emphasis on the purification of the bureaucracy, the institution designated by Westerners as the source of fiscal and moral order in "modern" states. The king, exercising ancient royal prerogatives, then 'purified' the bureaucracy much as he did the Buddhist ritual system by renaming bureaucratic relationships and activities to conform to Western ideologies and "enritualizing" some democratic practices. The process of purification was also renamed--as "modernization" (David Wyatt 1969).

The guiding principles of purification were "efficiency," "practical utility," and "accurate budgets." Taxation or budgeting (as opposed to traditional gift-giving obligations binding patrons, clients, and relatives) were foregrounded as the new principles of order--as having a magical efficacy or moral generativity in their own right. The new system of patronage was called "making one's living in the new way."

Chulalongkorn's modernization of the polity followed an encompassing strategy of the Dhammaraja. (This corresponds to what Tambiah [1976:226] refers to as the magnification of kingship in the Fourth and Fifth Reigns prior to a change in the contours of the polity.) The king did not merely reform the bureaucracy, as his economic base expanded, he

purified the entire polity as befits a Dhammaraja: the legal system, the ritual system, the temple system--activities which, taken as a whole, indexed his virtue as a Dhammaraja.

Finally, I suggest that Chulalongkorn's "Westernization" of the bureaucracy and legal system was a new form of "Janus activity" if not a new Janus ritual. What looked like rationality and modernization to Western observers was 'purification' to his indigenous constituency. As Tambiah points out, neither Mongkut nor Chulalongkorn ceased active participation in Brahmanic ceremonies, they merely withheld them from the Western gaze. Chulalongkorn's activities as a modern administrator not only effected a radical redistribution of patronage among new elite, one in harmony with the realities of modern times (a system of British imperial capitalism), it helped deflect Western attention from the king's merit-making and monument-building activities--which were lavish to the extreme. Although the king was not yet publicly accountable to his ordinary subjects for the efficient expenditure of "state" funds, he was accountable to his increasingly critical advisors, many of whom had strong links to colonial powers.

As the years passed, Chulalongkorn became skilled at playing antinomy issues off to his advantage. He invoked the virtues of "democratic" practice against members of the old guard, his statements carrying authority because of the colonial presence. As for his critical half-brothers, potential rivals for the throne, the king's renaming of activities and creation of new 'democratic' rituals (his "enritualization" of democracy) nipped murmurings about the powers of "absolute monarchs" in the bud. Since his closest advisors were clearly of less pure blood and less auspicious religious practice than he, they could not publicly challenge his exercise of naming prerogatives.

Furthermore, they themselves lacked the barami necessary to make the "great classifications" of Thai social life.

Thus in the 1890s, as the old nobility was dying out, the king began to revamp the entire bureaucracy according to new principles of order: hard work, efficiency, and "accurate budgets." Writes Engel of Chulalongkorn's later reforms:

Because the lines of administration had become so blurred and disorganized through the years, the king announced it would be necessary to reform the entire bureaucracy. A new system would be established in which one person had overall responsibility for each governmental function. In addition, accurate budgets would be prepared with expenditures appropriate to the work actually performed. (1975:24)

This was well within traditional patterns of purification. Engel's statement resonates with the following statement concerning Mongkut's religious reforms: ". . . Makuto Bhikkhu was deeply shocked to discover that even the senior monks in one of the kingdom's leading monasteries were so ignorant that they could make no clear distinction between the Teachings of the Buddha on the one hand and Brahmanist or animist accretions on the other" (Blofeld 1972:17). The king purified the bureaucracy--clarified the "blurred" lines of administration--according to a new, more "modern" set of classificatory principles--those which promised order through the proper division of the state into units with separate practical functions. This "purification" entailed the redistribution of the polity's resources (the income not derived from foreign trade) among a new consortium of elite--members of the royal family, the nobility, and powerful Chinese merchants.

In actuality, modes of production and relations of production (the structures of production) changed very little. The British dominated export trade and Chulalongkorn dominated the domestic economy as a

Dhammaraja cum colonial administrator. He appointed his close relatives and trained administrators as the new 'lords' of the Northeast (albeit under new titles). They extracted surplus from the peasantry by inserting themselves into the exchange process as middlemen and by collecting taxes on sales of commodities.

Evidence concerning the administration of the Northeast suggests that positions of 'absolute' power were retitled according to the new principles of order and functional differentiation while the old overlords of the region--members of the Laotian nobility (Vickery 1970)--were replaced by new ones. The new administrative units, however, were still run according to the same broad-spectrum principles that govern patron-client relationships (and which still pertain in the polity today [cf. Likhit 1978]).

The Purification of Ritual and the Sangha

Chulalongkorn transformed the entire state ritual system as part of his taking possession of the state. He wrote a book entitled The Ceremonies of the Twelve Months specifying the correct rituals to be performed throughout the year. The book emphasizes Buddhist ceremonies such as the wisakahbucha and deemphasizes Brahmanic ceremonies (cf. chapter 20).

He also exercised increasing control over the Sangha--personal control (cf. Reynolds 1972; O'Connor 1979)--as his reign progressed. In 1893 he officially recognized the Thammayut as a separate nikai but was left with the problem of his successors: how to merge the two orders, or how to downplay the schisms between them. His personal loyalties were clear: he ordained as a Buddhist monk at Wat Bowoniwet as did the highest-ranking princes in the Fifth Reign and beyond.

Chulalongkorn could not insist that all temples in the land follow Thammayut practice, but he did try to influence the religious practice of the most important monks in the kingdom through the distribution of royal patronage. If he showed undue favoritism towards the Thammayut he could be accused of partiality, of not distributing royal patronage 'indifferently' in the manner of a great king but rather in an 'attached' manner, to temples whose abbots were his blood relatives.

Chulalongkorn built two famous temples, Wat Benchamobophit and Wat Thepsirin. Wat Benchamobophit, known to tourists as The Marble Temple, was formally designated as a Mahanikai temple but its monks followed Thammayut practice. Wat Thepsirin, The Abode of the Angels, became a stronghold for Isan Thammayut monks (Klausner 1973; chapter 18).

The abbot of Wat Thepsirin, the original narrator of the previously-cited stories concerning the Isan Thammayut movement, eventually attained the rank of Somdet Phra Mahanwirawongse (Uan). He wrote numerous books on 'Isan' culture. Uan and his legendary 'older brother' Ubali (Can) were both ordained by the monk Phanthumalo. Both were to play crucial roles in future social and religious dramas affecting the Northeast, in the Fifth Reign and beyond.

The Purification of the Sangha: The Utility of Monks

During the Fifth Reign the criticisms of the Sangha that were voiced privately by Crawford in his despatches were voiced publicly, by Westerners and members of the Thai elite. Monks were criticized from a Western utilitarian perspective for not "working." Since they did not perform physical labour, they did not make material contributions to the state. From the indigenous perspective, if they did work, they were involved in worldly affairs; they were not 'true monks' and they had no credibility.

This utility issue was the theme of the religious crisis experienced by King Chulalongkorn's half-brother, the Prince Patriarch Wachirayan, while still a young monk. Wachirayan writes the following of the 'doubts' he had in the 1870s about remaining in the Sangha as a career monk.

At the time young Siamese were inclined to say that to be ordained as a monk performed no useful service to the kingdom. Monks were lazy. They ate and went to sleep. It was a waste for the kingdom to support them. (C. Reynolds 1979b:37)

As noted previously, doubt or a 'disturbed heart' usually precedes an act of purification or renunciation on the part of religious virtuosi. It often triggers political and social dramas. After Wachirayan's period of doubt--similar to that experienced by Sidhattha before embarking on his quest for knowledge and by Mongkut before creating the schismatic Thammayut order--Wachirayan decided to remain in the Sangha for life. As he explains his decision,

. . . I did not really deny the idea that monks were of no use whatsoever to the kingdom. I did not yet have the insight to take the broader view that monks performed very useful functions indeed. For example, they instructed people in proper conduct and took on the tasks of educating the children of the people. What is important is that they provided a tight binding between the government and the people. (C. Reynolds 1979b:37)

Mongkut's religious crisis was triggered by doubts that the Sangha was sufficiently pure--i.e., separate from lay influence--for monks to 'serve with full devotion.' Wachirayan's was triggered by doubts about whether the Sangha was of sufficient utility to the state for him to serve 'with full devotion.'

Unlike Mongkut, Wachirayan was close to his half-brother, the king. Once he decided to remain a monk, Wachirayan dedicated his career to the goals of Sangha reform set forth by his brother. Of even greater importance here is that his religious crisis and its resolution

profoundly affected the religious cum political history of Isan. It is to this subject I will now turn.

The Administration of the Northeast

The period from 1900 to 1910 was a difficult one for the inhabitants of the northeastern Laotian states. They were barbarians both from an indigenous perspective (they had imperfect knowledge of dhamma), and from a Western perspective--they had imperfect knowledge of capitalist practices (undeveloped markets).

One of the first things that happened as the nation modernized was they lost their traditional 'name.' Chulalongkorn's government, located in Bangkok (called the 'central part' [phak klang] of the kingdom), used the Pali-Sanskrit term Isan to refer to the Northeast. Isuan is the Sanskrit term for Siva, the regent of the north-east quarter of the world; Isan is its Pali equivalent.

In the 1880s the Laotian provinces were tributary states ruled by High Commissioners called kha-luang yai, Great Royal Slaves. In 1891, when hostility to the French was at its peak, Chulalongkorn appointed his half-brothers Prince Prachak Sinlapakhom, Prince Sanphasittiprasong, and Prince Phichit Prichakhon as High Commissioners of the northeastern provinces of Nongkhai, Bassac and Nakhon Ratchasima.

These members of the ruling class (Damrong in particular) 'looked down upon' the northeastern Lao populations living at the edges of the kingdom. They saw them as 'animals' or men who were barbarians, barely able to observe the minimal five precepts of Buddhism.

At first the High Commissioners followed what the American missionary, McGilvary, called "the English plan of governing through the

native rulers" (Bunnag⁵ 1977:65). The new commissioners were wary of alienating local rulers because of the nearness of the French. Nevertheless, they all made names for themselves by "overawing the local nobility" with military power and royal authority. This was deemed necessary if they were to centralize provincial administration (1977:64).

Some members of the local nobility were compensated for the loss of power and prestige by being taken into government service. In 1891, for example, Prince Phichit Prichakhon, the High Commissioner of Bassac, sent three Isan noblemen to act as supervisory commissioners in the minor northeastern provinces of Roi-et, Suwannaphum and Yatsothorn. This was part of a new policy: Isan men governed Isan provinces, but not their natal provinces. The same principle was later applied in the Isan Sangha (cf. chapter 20). Prince Prachak, the High Commissioner of Nongkhai, took members of the local nobility into government service, giving them military training in the hope that they would help defend the eastern frontier more effectively.

Prince Sanphasitthiprasong used his power to punish "corrupt" officials, having them flogged, fined or imprisoned (1977:74). He also tried to apply the village administration system of British Burma to the villages around his province. Although he was not successful, this system became the prototype for village administration in later periods.

The new commissioners took over what can charitably be called the "financial administration" of the outer provinces--or, in Bunnag's words, they "took great liberties with the financial administration of the outer provinces." In 1892, for example,

⁵Bunnag (1977) is the most comprehensive work in English or Thai on the administrative history of Isan. I therefore quote extensively from it.

Prince Phichit Prichakon, the High Commissioner of Bassac, took over the opium tax-farm of Ubonratchathani. In the same year, Prince Prachak Sinlapakhom more or less extinguished the financial autonomy of Nongkhai when he took over the liquor, tobacco, salt and pig-slaughter tax-farms. (1977:71)

It is difficult to ascertain the principle of "functional differentiation" at work in the activities of these and other royal commissioners. It appears, rather, that they found themselves in competition with Chinese for control of local tax farms.

The Thetsaphiban System

The Franco-Siamese treaty of 1893 established permanent national boundaries, bringing the northeast plateau within the formal boundaries of the Thai kingdom. Beginning in the 1890s, railroads were built extending from Bangkok to all regions of the kingdom, Isan included.

The creation of permanent boundaries meant that the Lao-Thai of the northeast officially became the Siamese nation's largest ethnic minority. Then as now, there were more Laotians in the northeast than there were in Laos. The old kingdoms of Laos (Luang Prabang, Wiangchan and Campassak) became a single French protectorate.

After the treaty, Chulalongkorn began serious attempts to bring the Laotian population under control of the centralized bureaucracy. He was assisted in this endeavor by two of his most able brothers: Prince Damrong, originally Minister of the Interior, and the monk-prince Wachirayan, who became abbot of Wat Bowoniwet and later Supreme Patriarch.

King Chulalongkorn's court implemented a plan of centralized provincial administration called the thetsaphiban. Under this system of government tight central administrative control was established by dividing the country into a small number of administrative units called

monthon or 'circles.' Each monthon coordinated several princes under the supervision of a royal commissioner.

Prince Damrong explained that the administrative changes were necessary because the old system of administration had

. . . become obsolete, and would have harmed the Kingdom if it had been maintained. The King therefore initiated the reform of the system, changed it to that of a unified Thai "Kingdom," abolished the tradition whereby the tributary states had presented him with Gold and Silver Trees, changed the names . . . and abolished the nomenclature of Lao for the people of those three monthons. (Bunnag 1977:146)

Under the new program, commissioners were directly responsible to the minister of the interior, Prince Damrong. Each commissioner was assisted by a legal official and a treasurer. The treasurer was responsible for collecting taxes, previously the preserve of the local aristocracy, and for paying out salaries to local officials. In time, separate branches of the Ministries of Justice and Finance were established (Girling 1981:53).

During the initial phases of the thetsaphiban program King Chulalongkorn appointed men closely related to the traditional ruling families of Nakhon Ratchasima as superintendent commissioners. The first three commissioners of that circle under the new plan were Phraya Singhaseni (Sa-ad Singhaseni), Phraya Kamhaneg Songkhram (Kat Singhaseni), and Phraya Siriyadet Wisetrit (Chan Intharakamhaeng). These men, some of whom were descendents of Mongkut and Taksin, built new royal temples in northeastern provinces. They and their wives became supporters of Isan monks residing in Bangkok (at Wat Thepsirin and Wat Boromniwat, for example). In 1863 Mongkut's harem reportedly consisted of at least twenty Lao wives and his brother, the Second King, was reportedly swamped with offers of daughters from the Laotian nobility (Moffat 1961:135). This meant that there was a corresponding

Laotian branch of the royal family in Bangkok, potential supporters of the Thammayut Isan movement.

The expansion of central control and the replacement (or bypassing) of the provincial nobility was carried out most rapidly and drastically in the Central region and the Northeast. In the Northeast in particular, the local elite were almost universally excluded from high office. Prince Damrong was strongly prejudiced with regard to "Lao" nationalism, going so far as to forbid the use of the word Lao in official census reports (Girling 1981:54).

The thetsaphiban plan stipulated that village elders be elected to keep records and keep the peace. Since their services as headmen were mostly voluntary, many felt the little pay they received was not worth the antagonism they aroused locally as quasi-government agents. Some village elders, for example, "resigned or asked for leave to be ordained into the monkhood after only one year of service" (Bunnag 1977:189). In 1896, many superintendent commissioners of the new monthon followed the lead of the princes Prachak and Phichit and "nationalized" tax-farms in their 'circles': gambling, liquor, opium, sweets sale, chicken, duck and pig-slaughter farms (1977:117).

One of the king's powers is that of naming places and persons, i.e., making the "great classifications" of social life and the great geographical divisions of the kingdom. In 1899 King Chulalongkorn changed the names of the Northwestern Lao Province, the Dry-Rice-Cultivating Lao Province, and the White Lao Province to the North-Western Circle, Udon Circle and Isan Circle respectively. The Northeast was eventually redivided into the four circles of Nakhon Rachasima (Korat), Ubonratchathani, Roi-et, and Udonthani.

Around 1899 Prince Wachirayan selected Isan monks of the Thammayut line to carry books into the northeast and help reform the educational system. Uan and Ubali, the Thammayut monks of Phanthumalo's line, were chosen for this task.

The reforms were aimed at promoting loyalty to the Thai king and eliminating Laotian variants of the Theravada tradition. Since there was no formal school system in the northeast beyond the network of Buddhist monasteries, the monasteries became the focal points of educational reform and national integration. By 1902, probably because their activities clashed with those of the central government, Wachirayan and his monks withdrew from participation in the educational programs (Wyatt 1969; cf. Tambiah 1976:219-225).

The Uprisings

In 1902 there were massive uprisings against the Princes Watthana of Udon Circle and Sanphasitthiprasong of Isan Circle. The uprisings were a response both to their brutality and to their domination of the local economy (cf. Keyes 1971).

The uprisings were led by men called phu mi bun, 'persons with merit,' and phu wiset, 'men with extraordinary [magical] powers.' The phu mi bun predicted that the end of the world was at hand; gold and silver would turn to pebbles and stones, and a Royal Lord of the Holy Law [thao thammikkarat] would appear to turn pebbles and stones into silver and gold.

Prince Sanphasitthiprasong ordered the arrest of the Holy Men on the grounds "they were swindling the people of their their money, silver and gold in exchange for specious blessings against the effects of doomsday." More men rallied to their side and attacked the authorities.

Prince Sanphasitthiprasong later wrote that some of the Holy Men were the provincial "petty nobility and those people who had no power but wished to make a living in the old ways." The head abbot of the Isan Circle, Phra Yanrakkhit (Chan), later explained to the prince that "the people had spontaneously supported the holy Men because they resented the corruption of the new administration" (1977:151). The rebellion spread and was brutally suppressed, but the government had learned its lesson. Holy Men made powerful religious claims to be the maitreya or the embryonic Buddha. Their claims represented a direct challenge to the divinity of the Thai king in Bangkok, who was also representing himself as a potential bodhisattva, and the Isan Sangha had best be brought under tighter control.

The Sangha Reform Act of 1902

In 1902 the king instituted a Sangha Reform Act which covered every aspect of Sangha organization (C. Reynolds 1973:253-254) and which brought monks under control of civil law. An ecclesiastical order was established that left the powers of the Supreme Patriarch (appointed by the king) vague but spelled out the exact relation of the Sangha to the civil authority (i.e., the king).

The act recognized three categories of monasteries, Royal Monasteries [wat luang], Commoner Monasteries [wat rat], and Ecclesiastical Abodes Yet to be Consecrated. Those monasteries situated in Bangkok and provincial capitals were ranked superior to those in rural areas. The act also recognized three categories of monastic property and ruled on the disposition of this property.

Under the provisions of this new act, the king personally controlled the appointment of ecclesiastical officers in Bangkok and in important

royal temples. Temple committees had to seek royal permission to build new temples or to change an Ecclesiastical Abode into a monastery. The eight monks who were on the Council of Elders, the Mahathera, and who were in charge of the four divisions of the Sangha (North, Northeast, South, and Thammayut) were designated as 'advisors' to the king on religious matters. Their decisions were made 'under his Majesty's grace' (cf. Tambiah 1976:233-241). In addition, secular governors had to counter-sign regional monk-officials' appointments of (ecclesiastical) district governors.

The new monk-officials referred to 'Isan' rather than to 'Lao' culture in their reports. As Craig Reynolds (1973:253n.) notes, regional monk-directors wrote reports with little or no reference to regional variations of religious practice. Instead, they wrote their reports to emphasize those practices and ceremonies which Bangkok officials wanted to see emphasized such as annual performances of Visakha Bucha, i.e., those emphasized by Chulalongkorn in his Ceremonies of the Twelve Months.

1905: The Polite and Quick-witted Men of the Northeast

In 1905 the king tried a new integration strategy. He ordered the governors of Isan provinces to "consciously look for polite, quick-witted, clever men" in government schools and monasteries to be educated for government service in Bangkok (Girling 1981:56). The consensus was that these monks were necessary to 'bind' the government and the people, something the High Commissioners had been notably unsuccessful at doing. The regional commissioners had built royal temples in Isan capitals and many of these 'quick-witted' monks eventually returned to Isan to become their abbots. This is where the monks Uan and Ubali enter the picture.

Uan and Ubali

Uan and Ubali were active participants in Wachirayan's and Prince Damrong's educational reforms of the Northeast. They were either heroes or traitors to the Isan people, depending upon with whom one talks (i.e., whether the speaker is affiliate with the Thammayut or Mahanikai orders of Isan). The following is their lineage story as told by a former pupil of Somdet Uan's. The hidden agenda of the story was an explanation of why Uan, the junior (and less pure) monk was elevated over his elder brother, Can, to the rank of Somdet. In addition, it contains allusions to conflicts within the early Isan Thammayut line, possibly over teaching monks' close affiliation with unpopular central Thai governors.

Their story is the following: Uan and Ubali were ordained as novices by Phanthumalo in Ubon. They were sent to Wat Thepsirin and Wat Bowoniwet for further study, and later returned to Ubon (as ecclesiastical officials?). Ubali eventually received the rank of Chaokhun Phra Ubali, second to Somdet. "Uan was younger but still became Chaokhun Monthon Ubon [The Lord of the Ubon Circle]" the informant explained.

Ubol and Korat became the new centers of education in the Northeast. Uan and Ubali accompanied Phanthumalo there to 'take books' to Isan (books written in central Thai rather than Lao script). They traveled many days by cart, as there were no railway lines connecting the towns of the Northeast at that time, resting at royal Thammayut temples in Isan capitals: Wat Suthacinda in Korat, Wat Sundaram in Ubol, and Wat Phootisamphan in Udorn (cf. chapter 19). These monks and their followers grew close to the ranking nobility. As the informant said (defensively?), Uan's pupils "went anywhere, to the governors of provinces."

Phanthumalo's line eventually split into a line of teaching and meditation monks, perhaps over the issue of subordination to the central authority. The latter are the founders of the currently popular line of Isan meditation monks or 'supposed saints' (Tambiah 1984).

As the informant explained the distinction, some monks "have books and teachings" and others have vipassana thura or "the duty to meditate." Forest monks

are separate from worldly things. They go deep into teachings only. They do not have anything, harm anything. The aim of respected monks is to be free in a peaceful place. Their duty is meditation.

There was evidently some tension over the split. "Uan and Can assisted Phanthumalo as he became old, trying to broaden education to different provinces," the informant reiterated. At first teaching and meditation were combined--"The three taught vipassana", he said, but

Phanthurloo had two followers of meditation, Phra Acaan Man and Phra Acaan San. Phra Acaan Sing was their pupil. Man [and a fourth monk] Sao are pupils of Phanthurlo who separated to vipassana.

Man and Sao⁶ eventually "separated from Phanthulo (Di) and went to meditate, to go find a peaceful place and teach," stressing that these monks all came from the line of Phanthumalo.

Phanthumalo was ordained by Mongkut when Mongkut separated from Wat Mahathat. Afterwards . . . Phanthulo was busy with teaching and training pupils. Uan and Ubali taught pupils and gave sermons. The monks with the duty to meditate set up meditation temples in the Northeast.

Speaking of these meditation masters, "They come to the village by invitation," he emphasized--a statement which had profound political significance in the 1970s (chapter 18).

⁶There was evidently some tension between Acaan Man and Acaan Sao, who was the elder (cf. Maha Boowa 1976a:10ff.).

Administrative monks go with Nai Amphur (District Headmen) and government officials. Vipassana monks don't care. They seek the forest and teach people how to do good. They do not teach as much, oral teaching.

Acaan Sao was the elder in the line, which included the now famous Acaans Man and Sing. Maha Boowa (1976) indicates that there may have been tension between Man and Sing as well (after a certain point, Sing, although the elder, could no longer teach Man in his meditation practice). These monks traveled throughout the Northeast and eventually branched out into the North. Like the Buddha's disciples, each was credited with special abilities. Man had "special teaching ability" and Acaan Khamdi, another famous member of the line, had special powers of insight--"he could see into the future," said the informant. Ubali (Can), however, was the rebel.

Stories told by Isan people about Uan's and Ubali's careers reveal deep-seated ambivalence felt by Isan monks and their followers towards the central Thai authority. They also reveal the equally deep-seated ambivalence felt by some members of the nobility, Prince Damrong in particular, towards "uppity" Isan monks; they were forced to support these monks in order to gain the cooperation of Isan people in their administrative reforms. Ubali, "the rebel," brought these issues to a head.

Ubali, the Rebel

Ubali was believed by many to have been a sodaban or 'stream winner.' Many of Bangkok's contemporary power elite are familiar with saint stories about this monk. One informant, a high-ranking bureaucrat, said "bad feelings went away" when Ubali preached. He supposedly had to say "just one word" for his audience to understand his point.

A former prime minister told the story of Ubali's 'perfect sermon.' At the age of seventy-five Ubali reportedly broke his leg while ascending the pulpit to preach a sermon. He said nothing about his injury, but gave a perfect sermon while sitting on the preaching throne with a broken leg. Afterwards his followers wanted to take him to a hospital but he refused. The leg healed itself "by the power of his mind" the informant concluded.

Another Isan informant, a former school teacher, told a story about how Ubali had offended the ruler of the Ubol circle. This story explained some of the Isan narrator's sensitivity to Uan's rise in the Sangha hierarchy. One day the ruler of the Isan circle told Ubali (who was probably Chaokhun Monthon Ubon at the time) that he "disliked monks who disrobed to take up government positions." Ubali replied that he "disliked old men who took up the yellow robes to become Buddhist monks." Soon afterwards, Ubali was reassigned to Bangkok and Uan took over his duties in Isan.

Ubali became the abbot of Wat Boromniwat and eventually gathered a powerful lay following. Prince Damrong's son indicated in a 1980 interview that his father had disliked Ubali intensely. Damrong felt that Ubali was manipulative and he was irritated over what he felt were the monk's false religious claims, particularly since Ubali had 'tricked' his wife into making large donations to his temple. Did men like Damrong not believe in saints or did they just not believe in Isan saints?

Uan, the Mediator

Uan's student called him the more tactful of the 'brothers.' Uan rose higher in the ecclesiastical hierarchy than any Isan monk had done

before or has done since. "Uan always said his brother Can is a very good tactician. He can react to you in advance, with no delay (he had great mental acuity, a sign of religious purity)," the informant said. Nonetheless, "Somdet Uan must go his own way."

The following is Uan's (i.e., the official Thammayut) version of his rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The Supreme Patriarch wrote many books on dhamma. He was always writing. Uan came from Ubon and asked "May I stay here for the royal ceremony and then rest at Wat Bowoniwet?" The Prince Patriarch gave his permission. That evening, members of the royal family [the Isan branch] requested that Uan preach a sermon. When the Northeast monks came they were invited to visit to gossip and tell the news from home. Before Uan left the temple to preach, he had to get permission from the Supreme Patriarch who was typewriting. Uan said, "I beg permission to go preach." The Patriarch replied, "Oh, Uan, are you a great preacher?" [sarcastically] because he bothered the Patriarch when he was working. Uan replied, "They invite me not as a great preacher, sir, but because they pity me because I come from the country far away. They say something to pity me." The Patriarch smiled and says, "Okay." Then Uan was given permission to go anytime.

The moral of the story was "When the Supreme Patriarch not satisfied"--when he was irritated--"it is better to answer in the tender way." "Then Uan was promoted to Sanganayok (the Ecclesiastical Council) very quickly by the king and cabinet over Can, who was the elder."

As the informant concluded, "After Uan became abbot of Wat Boromniwat, then he became strong in spirit, strong in mind." Uan was famous for a saying, 'To act stupid is not stupid'--wisdom perhaps gleaned from his many years of dealing with Bangkok royalty.

Wachirayan's Interpretation of the Kathin Rule

What was the Prince-Patriarch typewriting? He was codifying Mongkut's monastic practice into a single orthodox 'Siamese' version of the Vinaya. Wachirayan's texts (1916, 1921) are the basis of the contemporary elementary monastic exams which must be taken by both Thammayut and Mahanikai monks.

Wachirayan points out in his (1916) introduction that he wrote the text because he was 'troubled' by impurities and inconsistencies in existing texts (i.e., those enshrined at Wat Mahathat, the rival temple to Wat Bowoniwet). He comments extensively on the custom of monks accepting white cloth in the kathin ceremony, of their cutting, dyeing, and sewing it in a single night, and points out that this practice "dates back to the time of the Buddha" and suggests that the Buddha prescribed the rule because it promoted unity among monks (1921:85). Wachirayan makes no final pronouncement on the propriety of monks' accepting the robe readymade, concluding only that he must "search further" before he could make a definitive judgement.

The Chinese

What of the Chinese during the Fourth and Fifth Reigns? With Western nations squeezing off the king's income from external trade, how was he to maintain the flow of wealth to the royal treasury?

As Skinner (1957:125) makes clear, the major source of royal revenue came from the Chinese community, directly or indirectly. Half of the government's revenue came from Chinese tax farms or from a tax on opium, alcohol, poll tax, gambling and lottery--from activities run or patronized by the Chinese. One of Mongkut's major wives was the daughter of a wealthy Chinese merchant. Mongkut elevated her to the position of First Queen; she was the mother of Chulalongkorn.

Bowring, like Crawford, regarded the Chinese as enemies. In the Fourth and Fifth Reigns, an accommodation was reached between Europeans and the Chinese, and with it a new division of labor. The British and the Germans controlled rice export to Europe until 1909. They and other Western nations had the capital to finance trade in Siam, but they

lacked the skills necessary to advance their position. The Chinese, because of their intimate knowledge of local market conditions, were therefore retained as compradores. Such men received a small salary but heavy sales commissions. They had the right to hire and fire local workers, most of whom were Chinese. By the end of the Fifth Reign, the compradores of the large Western firms, along with Chinese owners of rice mills, were among the most powerful Chinese in the kingdom (Skinner 1957:102-103).

By 1900 the Chinese were ubiquitous in the interior. They bought paddy and local produce. They advanced credit and supplies, lent money, collected taxes, sold imported goods, and transported merchandise in both directions (cf. Skinner 1957:108ff.; Ingram 1971:71-72) An occupational separation was maintained between the 'Thai' and the 'Chinese.' The Thai preferred agriculture, government service, and self-employment. The Chinese preferred commercial activities, industry, finance, mining and wage labor in general. The Chinese became indispensable in the skilled trades as well: carpentry, brick baking, pottery making, coppersmithing, rope manufacture, etc. (cf. Werner 1873:268).

Between 1810 and 1910 the Chinese greatly expanded their position in the kingdom. Between 1880 and 1903, labor was in short supply and the Chakkri kings continued to encourage immigration. Chinese "coolie" labor built temples, roads, public monuments, and railroads and wage labor was recognized as being more efficient than conscripted labor. Mongkut and Chulalongkorn encouraged the use of Chinese instead of Thai labor and represented it as a "benevolence to the people." They continued to assign negative values to manual labor. In an edict of 1873, Chulalongkorn "was graciously pleased to give of his personal funds

enough to pay Chinese workmen" for the work on a canal in order to avoid the "vexation, misery and compulsion" of impressing Thai labor (Skinner 1957:114).

The Emergence of the Commercial Banking System

Chinese and Western interests also converged in the creation of a commercial banking system. The growth of European business in Siam led to the establishment of branches of three European banks in Bangkok between 1888 and 1897. These banks were founded to finance Western foreign trade and provide foreign exchange, but they soon found it expedient and profitable to deal extensively with Chinese merchants as well. They soon found they had to deal with the Chinese compradores of Western commercial houses, and were themselves forced to employ Chinese compradores. The system was similar to that already employed by their branches in Hong Kong, Singapore, and in the Chinese treaty ports. The compradore solicited the banking business of Chinese merchants (and to some extent of foreign firms), and guaranteed loans made on their recommendations by depositing large sums with the bank. The compradore hired the bank clerks, was responsible for their honesty, and guaranteed the cash balance at the end of each day. He received a nominal salary but liberal commissions. Three solely Chinese banks were established in Bangkok during the twentieth first decade of the century (Skinner 1957:108).

In A Suspended State

The Chinese were suspended between two polities and two cultural systems. They maintained strong home and kin ties, adhering to a Protestant-like ethic emphasizing thrift and hard work (the accumulation of capital and prestige) for the lineage and ancestors. Chinese

immigrants did not bring their wives to the new land and sent remittances home regularly.

There was no middle ground between identification as 'Thai' or 'Chinese' for the offspring of mixed marriages. One chose either the "costume" of the Mandarin and wore a pigtail, or the costume of the Thai, cutting the pigtail. Male descendants of Chinese immigrant had to identify themselves clearly as Chinese or Thai. Chinese men were subject to the triennial tax and exempt from corvee and personal service, while Thai males had to be attached to a patron or government master (Skinner 1957:128ff.). One son might be 'Thai' in order to enter officialdom, while another might be 'Chinese' to advance the family's commercial interests.

Skinner notes that Chinese society was badly divided vertically and by linguistic and regional groups. Benevolent and mutual-aid societies were restricted to single speech groups and there was no community-wide leadership.

Thai and Chinese religious ethics were interactive and complementary but not identical. The Thai favored maxims like "Do not long for more than your own share," "Sacrifice wealth rather than honor," and "Love thyself more than treasures," some of what were attributed to Phra Ruang or King Ramkhamhaeng! (Gerini 1904:19). Theravada Buddhist merit-making was done primarily to improve one's own rebirth situation; the merit made was usually shared at the end of the ceremony with one's parents. There was no virtue [barami] in physical labor or in the accumulation of capital.

The Chinese, on the other hand, emphasized work for the ancestors and lineage. Merit-making of the Theravada kind was not considered a potent form of devotion to the gods and the ancestors. As Skinner emphasizes,

"the aim of the Chinese laborer was to make and save money, either to return to China and raise his family's status there or to begin business on a small capital in Siam in hopes of further gain" (1957:116).

Current among immigrants from Nan-yang were proverbs like "Money can do all things," "Wealth begets wealth," and "Money makes possible communion with the Gods." As Chinese benevolent societies became more prevalent at the turn of the century, donations to these societies, for the good of (Chinese) society, were seen as a virtue and as a sign of a worthy leader. As Skinner comments, somewhat cynically, a Chinese rice miller

who might show signs of apoplexy at the thought of increasing the daily wages of his mill "coolies" by two satang, would in all mellowness contribute to the annual total of such an increase to a Chinese hospital or benevolent society. Chinese society warmly rewarded charity, but deprecated softness, or what in other times and places has been called enlightenment, in business. (1957:256)

Stereotypes developed around these ethnic-occupational identities. Nineteenth century writers characterized Chinese immigrants and their descendants as displaying extreme industriousness. They were willing to labor long and hard. They had steadiness of purpose, ambition, desire for wealth and economic advancement, innovativeness, venturesomeness, and independence. In comparison, the Thai were said to be indolent, unwilling to labor for more than immediate needs, contented with their lot, uninterested in money or economic advancement, etc. (Skinner 1957:91-92). As the the Chinese grew more powerful, negative stereotypes developed as well: that they were "greedy" and grasping, that their activities were the very essence of upadana or of unhealthy attachment to worldly things and material possessions.

By 1910 'Thai' people were beginning to fear the economic influence of the Chinese, a fear that was realized by a labor strike which paralyzed Bangkok, but Chulalongkorn remained steadfast in their support.

Western commentators were beginning to speak of the "Yellow Peril," however, in Siam as elsewhere. H. Warington Smyth (1898 I:286,321), a British Director of the Royal Department of Mines, wrote in 1898 that "The Chinese . . . are the Jews of Siam . . ." a somewhat ominous portent of things to come. In 1903 a Western geographer predicted: "One day will see the Siamese race no longer in existence and the Menam valley peopled only by Chinese" (Mury 1903:58, cited in Skinner 1957:161)). J. G. D. Campbell, an educational advisor to the Thai government, warned that the Chinese "are more than likely before many years to be the dominating people of Siam . . . and either to swamp the indolent and lethargic natives, or transform them by fusion and intermarriage till they are past recognition" (1902:12-13, cited in Skinner 1957:161).

The King's Wealth and the King's Rituals

Chulalongkorn was a master at staving off the complaints about ritual that plagued King Mongkut, but these issues remained nonetheless. Men were beginning to ask on what basis even a Dhammaraja "earned" his keep. The king had contributed to this problem by building up his image as a super-administrator. Revitalizing, perhaps, the tradition of King Asoka's 'Dhamma tours' of his kingdom, Chulalongkorn made personal trips to the provinces to oversee administration there, and reported himself shocked at the corruption of local officials "earning their living in the old way."

The king's building of temples and monuments touched on a host of related issues. How was he obtaining the funds to make merit on this scale? From taxes? Should he increase his land holdings (for which he now lacked a free supply of labor) as a way of increasing his income?

Land ownership itself became an antinomy issue. The king could no longer 'circulate' land among members of the nobility as a royal gift, especially in the areas around Bangkok, where it was in great demand by foreigners. If he "owned" too much land, Westerners would criticize him for being a "despot." On the other hand, members of the nobility, using a dual standard of criticism, could attack him for both failing to circulate land as a reward to his followers (a traditional act of royal generosity) and for blocking free enterprise by doing the same--for making his living "in the old way." "Ownership" and 'lordship' were not synonymous.

The "New" System of Royal Temples

From data taken from interviews conducted in the Grand Palace from 1978 to 1980 I suggest that Chulalongkorn made two subtle and little-known changes in the ritual and royal temple system to counteract this problem. A retired palace official, an expert on ancient ritual, one day volunteered the statement that "King Chulalongkorn was the first king to have wat luang" or royal temples. What did he mean, as there had always been royal temples in the land? He meant that Chulalongkorn had devised a new three-tiered royal temple system in which royal temples were assigned first, second, and third class status. According to this official, first class temples were those with 'history,' like Wat Arun; or they were temples built and restored by kings and containing the relics of their ancestors or those of past kings. Second class temples were built by other members of the royal family, lineal descendant of kings, members of the 'royal family' [phrarachatrakun]. Third class temples were built by commoners and offered to the king. His acceptance of these temples for royal patronage was khong

phrarachathan, a royal gift to the donors. These temples then became boriwen nai luang or 'royal space' and the king controlled their relics and rights to their kathin ceremonies (cf. O'Connor 1978; chapter 10).

If current royal traditions are any example, the conferral of third-class royal status may have been preceded and/or followed by donations to the temple or to the royal treasuries. This stopped the drain on the royal treasury by allowing others to foot the expense of building and maintaining new 'royal' temples. In addition, it may have been a way for the king to reward his new business allies. As O'Connor (1978:169) writes, ". . . when the king granted a prosperous wat royal status, they (the nobles) converted their money to social recognition and manpower," and, although the evidence is sparse on this point, at least some of the men whose wat received royal recognition were Chinese (O'Connor 1978).

The same informant also said that King Chulalongkorn was the first king to have kathin ton or 'private kathin.' These are kathin performed in a 'private' capacity, suan tua or 'on his own' (lit., with 'his own body') at commoner temples. The kathin ton may also have been preceded by contributions to the royal purse, or (less likely in the Fifth Reign), temple supporters may have added to the king's kathin gift as is done in the present.

Both customs were a masterful response to the antinomy problem in that they allowed King Chulalongkorn to avoid being castigated as a "rich king" in a morally negative sense from the Western perspective, as one who was wasting the public's money on expensive ceremonial, and at the same time allowing him to fulfill his duties as a Dhammaraja. He could control the 'circulation' of wealth without being identified as its "owner."

The kathin ton marks a turning point in the kingdom's history in that it implicitly acknowledges that the king had two ritual bodies, a public and a private one. Before the Bowring Treaty, the king "was" the state. Afterwards, when the royal monopoly over trade rights was broken, the possibility was raised that he was but one individual among many, that he had a 'private' capacity as well as a public one, and that his personal expenditures were separate from those of the state.

There was a final possible benefit to private kathin and to the third-class temple system. As a result of the policies of the Cakkri kings, both Western-educated princes and powerful members of the nobility had begun to lust after high administrative positions. Having been educated abroad, some were not necessarily impressed by the king's claims to religiosity, nor were they necessarily enamoured of the idea that his more pure blood endowed the king with innate abilities to rule the polity (with its attendant trade and taxation privileges). Kathin ton may have been one way for the king to begin building a new constitutency, possibly among the rising Chinese merchant class, as a way of staving off challenges to power from princes or members of the nobility.

The King's New Allies

The redistribution of ritual privileges reflects the system of royal alliances and the balance of power within the kingdom. Competition among princes was a major cause of the fall of Ayuthaya, a situation which was not unfamiliar to Chulalongkorn and other Cakkri kings. Rama I and Rama II responded by allying themselves with members of the nobility, whom they appointed as krom (government) officials (Hanks 1972; Tambiah 1976:192), thus depriving some royal princes at least of a

share of the revenue of the state. By the end of the Third Reign this strategy was beginning to backfire and members of the nobility were becoming a threat to the monarchy. Rama III counteracted the problem by distributing tax privileges to Chinese tax-farmers, thus bypassing the hereditary nobility (Hanks 1972).

Chulalongkorn turned to powerful noblemen and select princes for support in his modernization programs, but he may also have turned to aspiring members of the Chinese merchant class as a counter-constituency. He may have begun exchanging hereditary ritual privileges (i.e., rights to perform rituals at 'royal' temples) for economic privileges.

Chinese merchants were increasingly active after the Bowring Treaty and sought the favor of the king. King Chulalongkorn built two palaces, one of which, that at Ban Pa-In, contains a "two-storeyed Chinese villa of intricate wood carving and Chinese furniture presented to the king by the Chinese community of Bangkok" (Dhani 1971:33-34). Somewhat ironically, Isan monks may have used a similar strategy, bypassing hostile members of the central Thai nobility and turning to Chinese merchants for financial support, to those men most anxious to integrate themselves into 'Thai' society. Wat Boromniwat is situated near a Chinese market. Its colors, architectural motifs, and art objects are predominantly Chinese, as are those at many first-class royal temples.

Chulalongkorn's actions may have represented a break from tradition in that he may have begun exchanging ritual for economic prerogatives without taking the daughters of the middle merchantry as concubines. The institution of the harem was abolished in the following reign. This meant that ritual ties were becoming separate from blood ties. A new class of meritorious capitalists was in the making.

Transformations

In the forty-two years of Chulalongkorn's reign labour became "free," property became "owned," and the king acquired two statuses: as a public person, "the head of state," and as a private person--although which was the man and which was the deity was hard to ascertain. There was still no distinction between 'royal ceremonies,' phra-racha-pithi, and 'state ceremonies,' phra-rat-pithi. The selling of royal ritual prerogatives to men outside the royal family had begun.

By the end of the Fifth Reign, Brahmanic rituals were well enclosed within Buddhist in the process of encompassment or "buddhacization." The gods of the Hindu pantheon had been designated as mere guardians in the Buddhist cosmos.

The Hindu-derived pradaksina or circumambulation of the sacred altar had become identified with the practice of the munwian, the ritual circumambulation of the city, temple and/or kingdom; each circuit was an act of respect to the Triple Gems. I suggest that the munwian had become less oriented towards specific values (the paying of respect to the gods of the Four Quarters, for example, or to the Triple Gems) and instead was becoming a master symbol of encompassment. The significance of this statement will become clear as we examine capitalist development of the 1960s and 1970s.

The sacred pillars of the kingdom, the lak muang, shaped like the linga of Khmer siva-linga cults (the perhaps portable palladia in Cambodia), were stationary in the Thai kingdom. Mongkut had renamed the City Pillar to represent the Guardians of the Kingdom of Siam, angels who were reincarnations of past kings (see chapter 10). Buddha statues were the kingdom's major symbols of victory, its magical portable palladia. This, too, has significance with regard to modern capitalist expansion.

Cakkri kings asserted the purity of their lineage not by identifying themselves with Hindu deities (by 'naming' and then worshipping siva-lingas to indicate that they shared a 'portion' of those gods), but by building Buddha statues and naming them after their ancestors, or by building Buddhist temples with names like 'The Temple of the Great Relic' and enshrining the relics of their ancestors with those of the Buddha. Such acts indicated that they shared both the pure blood and the pure action of the Buddha. With the practice of going out more among their subjects, Cakkri kings (as deity-beings) then shared the invisible essence [nama] of the dhamma through their perfection of the ten virtues, by transforming the invisible aspects of dhamma into a visible presence or form [rupa], the sight of which would then purify their hearts and minds of their subjects. The acts of Buddhist kings 'recalled' moments in the life of the Buddha; they did not share the 'subtle substance' of Hindu deities.

Cakkri kings could be warriors, monks, astrologer-scientists, rational administrators, economists, colonial governors--and Buddhist saints--serially. This linear perfection of virtues (the Western included) was not contradictory from the indigenous perspective; rather, it could be construed as a sign of virtuosity, the king's mastery of all virtues, according to the same structural principles that underly the Buddhist Jataka collection. The king's behavior incorporates all positive principles of action, principles which can then be 'renounced' or 'purified' should the occasion warrant, should cosmic 'conditions' change and a new set of virtues become more appropriate. (Ergo the reappearance of formerly 'purified' or "superstitious" customs.)

The paradigm of the 'middle way,' a dominant feature of Mongkut's religious career, may have also become a dominant structural principle

of order and adaptation to Western customs. I suggest that the following as a paradigm of Buddhist kingship in the late nineteenth century: The Dhamma King examines first one existing set of practices (the indigenous), scrutinizes their antithesis (the Western), and arrives at a synthetic middle way for example, dhammocracy (Koson 1973; chapter 18). This synthesis signifies his omniscience and virtuosity. This principle is expressed also in Janus rituals which incorporate the strands of opposed traditions into an apparently synthetic 'middle way.'

In sum, like the bodhisattva in the Jataka tales, the Buddhist king could embody (opposed) virtues in a linear progression, perfecting, incorporating, and transcending them in the different stages of his reign. Thus what looked like modernization and then, perhaps, perfidy to Westerners (as the king backsliding on his promises) could look like acts of purification to his subjects.

The End of an Era

By 1910, the year Chulalongkorn died, the king may have been the sole ordinative 'center' [sung-klang] of the kingdom but not necessarily so the monarchy. The royal prerogatives were slipping away and the kingship no longer had total control over the three functions of state: military-judicial, economic and religious. The bureaucracy was assuming some of these functions (the judicial-economic), the Europeans powers others (the military-economic). The significance of the king's khattiya or warrior status was changing. With the enemy states of Burma, Cambodia, and Laos colonized, wherein lay the heroics in leading the Thai army?

The king had acquired a new dual nature, as a public and private person, although no one was exactly sure where one ended and the other

began. The idea of an ambiguous duality (or multiplicity) of natures was already central to the royal tradition, as Reynolds (1972) and Tambiah's (1976) works have demonstrated. The state was acquiring a new financial structure, in which there was a putative separation between the royal purse and the state budget--although, again, no one knew for sure where one ended and the other began. Chulalongkorn represented himself as the Father of Democracy, a principle which, in the hands of the nobility, became a new expression of the principle of hierarchy. In the opinion of one informant, himself of royal blood, it was only rural villagers (i.e., the barbarians) who had trouble understanding this principle: They persisted in believing that some men had magical powers, in showing undue respect for members of the (lesser) nobility, and even the king: believing that he "was a god, not a man."

A dominant theme of Mongkut's reign was that of the king's close proximity to his subjects--perhaps a custom that is similar to King Asoka's Dhamma tours of his kingdom, but explicitly identified with the Ramkhamhaeng ideal. This theme was expanded upon in Chulalongkorn's reign. Not only did Chulalongkorn venture forth from the capital to inspect his own kingdom, he began an era of international pilgrimages. He took several trips abroad, and then tried to use the knowledge gained from these trips to establish his authority in making his early reforms (Phra Sarasas 1960:130; cf. chapter 12). Like Mongkut, Chulalongkorn sent his sons to Europe to study. Eventually they returned, and began agitating for democratic reform (for more power). This policy was continued in the Sixth Reign, when King Wachirawut, Chulalongkorn's son and successor, sent the kingdoms "best and brightest" young men abroad for study, regardless of birth. This policy backfired in the Seventh Reign, that of Wachirawut's successor and younger brother, King

Prajadipok. These men returned and overthrew the monarchy in the interests of democracy.

The emphasis on democracy began to exacerbate preexisting tensions between merit (pure practice) and blood (lineage substance), contradictions that had been present in the Thai royal tradition for many centuries. A crucial question had been raised in Chulalongkorn's reign: Was a Buddhist monarchy necessary or even desirable? Was it, by the standards Chulalongkorn himself had set, efficient and democratic? If the raison d'être of the modern state was the creation of a strong economy, of what practical utility was the Buddhist king or Buddhist rituals?

Mongkut and Chulalongkorn encountered the blood versus merit issue but they were talented if not brilliant individuals, and the Siamese economy had yet to become dependent on the world economy. The issue came to a head during the reigns of Wachirawut and Prajadipok, during the world depression. Not only were these kings less talented than their predecessors, having been educated abroad, they themselves had serious doubts about the relevancy of the Buddhist monarchy.

They scorned "superstitious" practices and beliefs which connected monastic and ritual practice to atmospheric phenomenon, at least to their Western audiences. "My subjects would blame me even if the rain did not fall" complained Prajadipok during the world depression. They and other-western educated elite questioned the centuries-old ideological linkages between wealth, nobility [khon ariya], and merit, the connection between the king's abilities and his pure blood. The new elite, led by the king, emphasized connections between wealth and work, and between work and merit--the former when they were challenging the throne--but they discriminated against the Chinese, whose activities

exemplified at least some of these ideals. In the next chapter I will discuss the reigns of Wachirawut and Prajadipok. Their reigns marked the end of the "absolute monarchy" as it had existed in Siam for over five centuries.

The Denial of the "Hindu" Past

As noted previously, there is much scholarly discussion of the "Indian" influence on the early Southeast Asian kingdoms. This issue is gradually dropped in studies of the fourteenth century onwards, after Theravada Buddhism became the official state religion. The rejection of Hindu and Khmer "impurities," especially insofar as they apply to ritual activities, is a persistent theme in both Thai and Western historiographic traditions, one that obscures a more crucial historical dynamic. This concerns the more important "Hindu" strand of the Thai royal tradition concerning beliefs about the nature of the king's blood, its relationship to his divine status, and the powers that are believed to be a function of that status. This persistent "Hindu" belief is at the heart of contradictions that plague the modern polity, contradictions that inhibited capitalist expansion until the return of the present king.

CHAPTER 6

THE DECLINE OF THE MONARCHY: 1910-1935

I'm only a soldier, how can I understand such things as the Gold Standard? (King Prajadhipok)

Introduction

King Chulalongkorn was more successful than his successors at promoting democracy and building his barami simultaneously. During the Fifth Reign democratic ideals were not so widespread that Thai commoners or the press dared criticize the king. Western ideologies emphasizing the "rational" administration of the state did not prevent the king from building great temples--the merit from which helped him overcome the contradictions entailed by his attempts to strengthen the monarchy and promote Western values simultaneously. Even today King Chulalongkorn is remembered as "The Father of Thai Democracy." His birthday is celebrated when hundreds of schoolchildren prostrate themselves at the foot of his statue in front of the National Parliament.

Chulalongkorn's sons and successors King Wachirawut (r. 1910-1925) and King Prajadhipok (r. 1925-1935) were less fortunate. The press became more vocal during their reigns, judging how enlightened they were by the extent to which they allowed freedom of the press (cf. Siam Observer 7 May 1912). Siam's economy became more firmly tied to the world economy and the "new men" returned from abroad began vying for power; the contradictions between Western and Thai-Buddhist cultural systems surfaced with a vengeance. In this chapter I will illustrate how this occurred and sketch in the dilemmas that led to the revolution of 1932.

King Wachirawut

Wachirawut's reign appears to be riddled with contradictions. Vella's Chaiyo! (1978), the most complete English language work on the Sixth Reign, recapitulates the conventional academic wisdom about the "Westernization" of the polity during his reign. Vella writes that Wachirawut was more "Westernized" than his predecessors, that his goal was to "modernize" the nation, and that he overcame the paradox of modernizing and "Thaiizing" the kingdom by developing a program of Thai nationalism (1978:xiv). As Vella notes elsewhere (1978:66), however, that meant rejecting Western customs. Vella also writes that, with the exception of the Brahmanic coronation ceremony, which was necessary to install Wachirawut as king,¹ Wachirawut followed the example first set by King Mongkut in purifying court ceremonial of its "Hindu" components. Wachirawut's reforms furthered the trend of "bringing the crown close to the people" (1978:24).

The evidence suggests rather that King Wachirawut was judicious in his exercise of naming prerogatives and that he was acting in the encompassing mode of the Dhammaraja. The king designated some practices as being "Hindu" and then purified them from the ritual repertoire. Of greater import is that he began to identify his purification of the polity (including the ritual system) as a form of administrative "efficiency," an instance in which he demonstrated his fiscal responsibility towards the Thai nation. Vella's data also suggest that Wachirawut was more than a little skilled at carrying on a simultaneous dialogue with at least three potentially hostile audiences--Western diplomats, members of the Thai elite, and his more "superstitious" subjects.

¹"The Thai are not Hindus but Buddhists," Wachirawut insisted at the time of his coronation.

Wachirawut the Warrior

This could only mean that the Lord Buddha, who was himself a prince of the warrior caste, fully appreciated the necessity of national defense. (9 August 1914, King Wachirawut)

Wachirawut was more Westernized than his predecessors in a literal sense. He spent nine years in Britain, where he attended Sandhurst Military Academy, and later became a law student at Oxford. His military training had an effect on the monarchy. Once Wachirawut became king, he played heavily on his (modern) khattiya status. He promoted Thai nationalism and militant Buddhism simultaneously, emphasizing that "the Siamese were a nation of warriors." His militant nationalism drew from several traditions, the Western European included, but initially from the South Asian, from the Ramayana. It was heavily anti-Chinese in its orientation.

Once returned home, Wachirawut turned first to the west, to the South Asian epic tradition, to legitimate himself. His reign began with auguries and with the discovery of ancient bronze pieces: a flag standard bearing designs of a monkey and a garuda and a bow and some arrows (formerly used in Brahmanic ceremonies, as speculation went) Wachirawut 'named' the bow and arrows The Bow and Arrows of Rama's Strength and interpreted them as "sure manifestations that warriors had not yet ceased to exist in the land of the Thai" (1978:15-16).

Wachirawut made much of the presumed association between these weapons and Rama and even went so far as to appropriate Rama's name for himself and for other kings of the Cakkri dynasty, naming them Rama I, II, III, etc. He also made much of the fact that one of the arrows was a trident [wachira or vajira], a symbol which the king favoured because

it was part of his name. "It is almost as if it was made for me," he commented, "and so all the more pleasing" (1978:16).

The king's enthusiastic support of the arts and his nationalistic projects eventually became problematic. In the final analysis, Wachirawut is remembered for his "excessive royal expenditures--amounting to more than 10 percent of the national budget" (Batson 1974:3). In fact, such criticisms were often motivated by the decline of the world economy and the fierce competition among elite for control of the local economy (minus the British-dominated export trade).

The trouble began, not surprisingly, over the coronation ceremony. At first a successful Janus ritual, it later took on the status of an insurmountable antinomy issue.

The Coronation: Grinding Pepper Sauce in the River

Like the most august of his predecessors, Wachirawut had two coronations. The first occurred before he had consolidated power and did not include the ritual circumambulation of the capital, the act by which the king takes possession of the kingdom. The second cost almost two million dollars and did include the ritual of circumambulation.

Wachirawut invited representatives from foreign countries to the second coronation and the event was highly successful from a public relations perspective. As the local English-language paper editorialized: "Siam does well to be proud of the position she has attained, and of the sympathy and friendship shown her by all the other nations with which she has relations" (Vella 1978:20).

As the decades passed, however, and the state of the world economy worsened, the coronation was later cited as an example of the king's profligacy. As this particular social drama unfolded, it became

apparent that the press had begun to take a central role in the affairs of the kingdom--and that the royal ritual system was not just becoming quietly imperiled, questions about its utility were coming under the national spotlight. Writes Vella, "In the view of many commentators writing long after the event, such a huge outlay of money for a showy spectacle was a waste, the kind of waste of public money characteristic of Siam's most extravagant, most prodigal king" (1978:25). Wachirawut had failed to be parsimonious in his reorganization of the state.

Although such criticisms were not made directly to his face--"for no one speaks out loudly enough to reach my ears"--the king was well aware of their existence. "I admit we certainly did spend a lot of money," Wachirawut wrote in his diary, but, as Vella notes, the king reasoned that, far from being a waste, coronation expenses were a "worthwhile investment." The state could be compared to a business concern: capital had to be risked for a business to thrive. "We Thai are too shortsighted to be good businessmen . . . we are similarly shortsighted in state affairs." "My purpose," said the King, "is to lead Thai thought into broader and larger paths. And this ceremony was part of that policy" (1978:25).

Despite his so-called "Westernized" tendencies, one of Wachirawut's first major tasks was the purification of the ritual system. Like King Mongkut, Wachirawut emphasized state ceremonies which marked points in his personal career--those commemorating of his accession to the throne and his birthday, for example--eliminating many of the rest. He wrote to a local newspaper criticizing the tonsure ceremony, as well as ordination, marriage and funerals rites, characterizing them as wasteful. Spending money for any of these ceremonies was like "grinding pepper sauce in the river" (1978:213).

Wachirawut's Superstitions

Although Vella concedes that most of Wachirawut's tendencies were "modernizing" and that he was "freer from superstition than most of his subjects," he documents a few notable exceptions from his career as a prince that would seem to contradict that statement. A mysterious light appeared on top of Phra Pathom stupa in 1909. When the then Prince Wachirawut could not explain it scientifically he concluded it was a miracle. "Much later he explained the meaning as a portent of a change in reign" (1978:229).

A second concerned his tutelary spirit of the forest, Hiranhu, a character from the Ramayana epic. Hiranhu, a forest spirit, appeared in a dream of one of the prince's men in 1906 while on a royal tour of the north. Several members of the royal party expressed fear over the perils they would face in the jungle and the prince ordered them to lay out propitiatory gifts to the spirit. Later members of the entourage claimed to have seen this deity and afterwards Hiranhu became acknowledged as the tutelary spirit of the king.

The Non-Harem

The institution of the harem was abolished in Wachirawut's reign. This, and the well-known fact that the king's preference ran towards men rather than women (Prince Chula 1960:269, 274, 301) made the harem a moot point insofar as it concerned antinomy binds, at least from the Western perspective. His advisors were reportedly disappointed at his failure to produce a male heir. Instead, the lack of a harem forced the king to look outwards, to new trading ventures and business partners, in his search for allies and income.

Wachirawut as the Lord of the Land

King Wachirawut fostered economic nationalism in his capacity as 'Lord of the Land' and 'Lord of the Fields' and anti-Chinese sentiment as part of this tradition. For perhaps the first time, Chinese traders faced serious and sustained discrimination.

The British controlled at least seventy percent of the nation's export trade and foreign imports began driving Thai manufacturers out of the market. Machinery, petroleum, benzine, coal, sugar, and cloth were supplied by the international market. The Chinese took over food marketing in Bangkok and dominated the construction industry and carpentry trades. The Thai, whom Wachirawut thought "by nature do not like to work," left manual labor to the Chinese. The situation forced the king to seriously reevaluate the relative merits of hard work and the entrepreneurial spirit--as they applied to all of his subjects, nobility included, not just to farmers or Chinese laborers.

The king began stressing the nexus between thrift and virtue, hard work and "civilization." Early in his reign, the minister of agriculture wrote a memorandum pointing out that ". . . all civilised states are putting every power they have at their disposal to support their agriculture, trade and commerce, even to the verge of war." Siam should do likewise, developing an economic policy that would wean the people away from their "thriftless" habits, introduce improved farming methods, stimulate new enterprises, and in short, bring about an "important national movement" to "increase production and promote the national wealth." This was necessary for Siam to become "a recognized power among the civilised nations" (1978:168).

The king responded by establishing himself as the patron of the newly emerging manufacturing sector. He exhorted his people to expand foreign

trade and reduce reliance on "foreigners," a category in which, unlike his father (Skinner 1957:161-162), he included Chinese. He promoted a National Savings Bank whose purpose was ostensibly to provide farmers with a source of credit that would free them from dependence on Chinese moneylenders and teach them habits of thrift. (This bank encountered a few problems, not the least of which was the lack of a business ethic on the part of its workers--how to convince clerks on low salaries not to abscond with the funds).

In 1913 the Siam Cement Company was founded. The prospect of Siam's producing its own cement reportedly "caught the King's imagination," and Wachirawut encouraged plans for the company, investing half of the needed capital from the privy purse" (Vella 1978:171). The king also promoted handicraft fairs and elicited donations from people by making personal presence at fund-raising events--probably the first time this particular mode of selling the monarchy surfaces in Thai history.

The king began to emphasize a work ethic and to deemphasize the ancient cosmological connections between wealth, birth and merit. He castigated Thai businessmen for depending too much on the government and for having too little energy. "What is the use of always blaming the Government for not making industries flourish in Siam?" he asked. "What do you think businessmen are there for? Do you think all you need to do is to look like splendid millionaires, and loll about in your arm-chairs planning the latest additions to your gorgeous mansions?" (1978:173)--a rather apt description of the posture of the heavenly devata.

The Chinese and the Modern Economy

Between 1882 and 1910 close to one million Chinese poured into Thailand because of expanded economic opportunities--free trade--and

royal support (Skinner 1958:10). In 1910, the year of Wachirawut's accession to the throne, this policy backfired. Bangkok was paralyzed by a Chinese labor strike. This reportedly made members of the nobility aware of the Chinese stranglehold on the "Thai" economy. When petitioned for a national parliament, the king refused on the grounds that "the parliament would be entirely dominated by the Chinese" since "they hold the hard cash" (Batson 1974:48).

The most powerful of the nation's Chinese were members of families who had served for generations as the tax collectors of former kings. The least powerful were manual laborers, but all were castigated as "the Jews of the Orient" during the Sixth Reign and beyond, a term which first appeared in public print in 1914 in the Bangkok Post and is still heard in the kingdom today, often among military officers. Both the category cin and the economic activities of Chinese (i.e., as middlemen) were aggressively portrayed in negative soteriological terms. Smallscale 'Chinese' trading activities were characterized as the very essence of upadana, a form of excessive attachment to worldly things and the sign of a greedy and grasping nature (cf. Coughlin 1960:75). 'Chinese' merchants were excluded from citizenship status because Wachirawut had defined nationalism as Thai Buddhist nationalism. Their exclusion was justified on the grounds that they were outside the mainstream of the Theravada Buddhist soteriological community. Men who had elected to retain the 'Chinese' identity did not perform Buddhist rituals such as the kathin, nor did their sons ordain as (Theravada) Buddhist monks.

The king took the lead in creating this ideological formulation. In 1914 he wrote a document called The Jews of the East which recapitulated the most prominent of the anti-Chinese themes. The Chinese were

unassimilable because of their racial loyalty. They regarded residence in Siam as temporary, their only purpose in coming being to make as much money as possible. They were accused of being opportunistic and two-faced: "the Chinese profess Buddhism and political allegiance only for the advantage they get out of it; in fact they are neither loyal nor Buddhist." They were devoid of civic virtues, they worshipped Mammon as their sole god. "In money matters they know neither moral nor mercy." Finally, they were accused of being "parasites on the Thai economy, draining off the wealth of the country in the form of remittances to their homeland" (Skinner 1957:164-165).

This nationalistic formula had a paradoxical effect on Theravada Buddhism. It created an impetus for growth as a "state" religion; Theravada Buddhist rituals became, more than ever, the mechanism through which national loyalty was proven. It raised a second possibility, however, that men who used religion for this purpose were "treacherous" and "secretive." I will examine the longterm cultural impact of these changes in the conclusion.

Under Wachirawut, the practice of enobling Chinese was allowed to die out, and, as Skinner observes, once denied access to Thai nobility, a distinct Chinese elite was allowed to develop. Members of the new Chinese elite received honors and recognition from the government of China. Chinese wives were brought to Siam, reducing intermarriage with the Thai elite. There was a growing and heightened sense of responsibility on the part of Chinese leaders to the special interests of their ethnic group. For perhaps the first time in the polity, ritual mechanisms that transformed 'Chinese' into 'Thai' were threatened with closure; the strategy was criticized by Wachirawut and later political leaders (some of whom were lukcin) as a sign of the 'insincerity' of the

Chinese. Their greed would take them to any lengths--even to performing rituals with false intentions.

Several factors were at work in the formation of the twentieth century economy. By 1910 labour was no longer in short supply, and there was less reason for the king to encourage immigration. In 1913/1914 the Thai government promulgated the first Nationality Act. This act affirmed the principle of jus sanguinis by stating that "every person born to a Thai father on Thai or foreign territory" was Thai. The law also claimed as Thai "every person born on Thai territory." This meant several hundred thousand persons, born in Siam of Chinese fathers, became dual nationals (Skinner 1957:165).

The passing of such laws and Wachirawut's largely ceremonial business activities are amenable to several interpretations. First, Wachirawut was probably serving warning to immigrants to assimilate as 'Thai.' Second, since kings no longer held trade monopolies, he was developing a new rationale for the extraction of surplus from the Chinese community.

There were other factors at work in the formation of the modern economy. With much of the export trade out of indigenous hands, ambitious Thai started jockeying for direct control over new industries; since they were developed inside the polity, there was less need to depend on Chinese as compradores. The possibility arose that talented 'Thai' could participate more directly in business endeavors. As Thompson (1941:590) makes clear, however, such attempts usually ended in disaster. With the king no longer exerting direct control over the distribution of economic privileges, the elite had to establish independent contacts with Chinese-owned businesses. In the 1920s and 1930s, the nature of these contacts was yet to be established. What did happen, however, was that King Wachirawut established the ideological

conditions for the emergence of a new class of warriors--for the transformation of the tradition of "merchant princes" to that of "trading generals."

There were also cosmological factors at work in the formation of the modern economy. The paradigm embraced so enthusiastically by King Lithai et al.--that blaming rainfall (and, by extension, the price of rice) on the ruler and his ritual performances--was both collapsing and becoming less attractive (to the king) as the international economic situation began to deteriorate. With men (Individuals) now held directly responsible for the efflorescence of the national economy, with the king advancing the capitalist mythology that hard work and thrift would generate wealth and well-being (and given that this principle did not seem to be an appropriate code of conduct for the early 1930s), the Chinese became convenient scapegoats for explaining hardship. Certain occupations--at least when filled by men of Chinese ancestry--in particular, were identified by rulers as causal roots of hardship for farmers; their troubles were ascribed to the "baleful influence" of Chinese money-lenders and middlemen (Skinner 1957:221). This was true both of Wachirawut, who would rather have traders than his faulty barami advanced as an explanation for decline, and the military leaders who came after, who lacked the barami to prevent criticism and who needed scapegoats to absolve for themselves for responsibility the economic hardship of their subjects. Decline of the nation's economy was also blamed on the practice of Chinese sending remittances home to China, blame which, as Ingram (1952:461) points out, was misplaced; much of the capital invested in Thailand arose from profits re-invested there, and this was especially true of Chinese-owned capital. Waves of immigration continued from 1918 to 1955, the rate at which immigrants returned to

China varying according to wages and the state of the Thai economy (Skinner 1957 chapter 6). This, then, was the climate in which Wachirawut introduced the now well-known formula of Thai nationalism: loyalty to the king, nation and religion. He made explicit connections between nationalism and Buddhism--excluding the Chinese. With the colonial problem resolved, it was apparently safe to invoke the royal traditions of Ayuthaya once again. Wachirawut emphasized militaristic themes and the importance of the warrior in society, glorifying King Narusuen, a famous warrior king of the Ayuthayan kingdom. He also glorified Taksin (Vella 1978:208), and Phra Ruang (King Ramkhamhaeng) (Reynolds 1973), thereby merging warrior ideals from all past epochs and traditions. This presaged the birth of a new tradition: by the 1950s and 1960s, Thailand's great warriors were becoming the nation's great capitalists.

Wachirawut and the Sangha

Wachirawut appears to have had an uneasy relationship with the Sangha at best, in part because of his frenetic efforts to portray himself as a modern ruler. He used his prestige to promote new ideas of merit-making and Sangha purification, building a school instead of a temple to commemorate his accession to the throne. A nobleman requested that the king dedicate a school he had built, and the king wrote in reply: "I am certain that this meritorious act will yield better results than the building of a temple for the shelter of sham monks who don yellow robes in order to escape their obligations." The king's model school supposedly had "exemplary ideals and practices that would spread, in the utopian fashion, throughout Siam" (Vella 1978:161)--i.e., in the model of the flowering of the lotus of the law.

A hushed-up but still bitterly remembered event took place at Wat Mahathat during the Sixth Reign. Wachirawut had ordained as a monk with Prince Wachirayan as his preceptor and he was strongly pro-Thammayut. Wachirawut forced the abbot of Wat Mahathat to accept white cloth in the kathin ceremony in the Thammayut manner. Such an act indicated Wat Mahathat's acknowledgement of the superiority of Thammayut practice and created a dilemma for the abbot. If other Mahanikai temples did not follow suit, Wat Mahathat would lose prestige; the Mahanikai order would be 'divided' and thus delegitimated. This situation was only exacerbated by Wachirayan's (1921) interpretation of the communal sewing of the white cloth as being conducive to the promotion of unity within the Sangha (cf. Phra Mongkhonmuni [Thet] 1978:85; Wicit 1974).

Problems were developing with the Isan Thammayut as well. The monks patronized by the Princes Wachirayan and Damrong were incurring the resentment of Isan people. There were charges that they were trying to destroy Lao culture and customs and that they were burning religious texts written in the Laotian script.

Somewhat ironically, the Isan monk Ubali became the nemesis of King Wachirawut and the Prince Patriarch Wachirayan. His life exhibits one pattern of Isan "integration": the initial acceptance of patronage from powerful central Thai figures, and its later renunciation in the name of monastic purity, the maintenance of the 'pure' separation of the Sangha from the royal and lay authority. Ubali became a symbol of regional pride for exhibiting precisely these characteristics.

For his part, King Wachirawut was trying both assert his control over the Sangha in the traditional manner of Buddhist kings and to represent himself as a "modern" (militaristic) ruler in the European mode. As is usual in Theravada polities, the power of the Sangha grew as the prestige of monarch or the monarchy declined.

In a famous historical incident, Wachirawut brought these issues to a head by punishing Ubali for a famous sermon, "The Sermon on Battleships." Since Ubali was commonly believed to be an arahant, this reflected poorly on the king, not on Ubali.

Ubali and the Sermon on Battleships

According to the previously-quoted Isan informant, King Wachirawut reportedly "did not like" Uan's older brother in the Sangha, apparently for good reason. The informant told the following story of their relationship: "One day Rama VI bought a new man-o-war, rua rod (battleship)," he began. "He invited a well-known preacher [Ubali] to give a sermon. When Ubali gave the sermon, his preaching was put in a textbook record at Mahamakut University.²

The sermon, given in 1916 (cf. Vella 1978:223), did not please the king. As the informant explained,

Ubali said there were two kinds of knowledge, good and bad, suwicha di, suwicha mai di. Suwicha di is 'clean knowledge to build a culture,' sang wattanatham. Suwicha mai di is 'knowledge to destroy, to kill.'

Ubali also said that if the Thai "learn how to build bigger guns and to destroy, they will destroy humanity. This is not a good path, not good knowledge. People must learn how to build humanity."

Then, as the story goes, "someone accused Ubali of failure to support the king" and reported the sermon to the Supreme Patriarch. The informant explained that Ubali "was third down from Somdet," meaning that he was advancing rapidly in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. "At that time his title was 'Thepmoli.'" In a highly controversial move, the patriarch punished Ubali by demoting him and "letting him live in a kuti at Wat Bowoniwet as a prisoner by order, and then no more Thepmoli (Can)."

²The monks' university established at Wat Bowoniwet.

By then there was a powerful Lao contingent among members of the royal family. Ubali's followers began agitating for his release. The story continues:

Then his supporters came to complain. He had a good temper. Before he was abbot at Wat Boromniwat, then demoted to Wat Bowoniwet. The laymen, especially high royal family, were against this. Monks must say killing is bad.

Ubali was apparently not fazed by the demotion, saying instead that

Thepmoli (the title below Ubali) is the king's name and he can take it back later. I care only for 'Can,' given to me by my mother. 'Can' is more than enough. If someone takes away 'Can' then people don't know how to call me.

Ubali was reinstated, much to the embarrassment of the Prince Patriarch.

Then high-ranking people said he is right by the Vinaya. He should not be punished. After phansa King Rama VI relented. "I was wrong," he said.

(This last part was told with great relish.)

As the story concluded:

After phansa (the rains season) was over, King Wachirawut promoted Can from Thepmoli to Thammathirachamahamuni and he returned to be abbot of Wat Boromniwat. Later he was promoted to Ubali, second to Somdet, and kept it for many years, but got no promotion afterwards.

Wachirawut was facing more serious problems than that posed by Ubali, however. His emphasis on a work ethic and on fiscal responsibility eventually backfired, and charges of profligacy were leveled against him. He was caught in an antinomy bind.

The King's Profligacy

Wachirawut began his reign on a "democratic" note, appointing lesser royalty and commoners to high office (men he could easily dominate, as his critics of noble blood pointed out). He antagonized the military by

establishing a private army, the Wild Tiger Corps, and a special Guards Brigade. He established the Rama V Military Academy and the Civil Service School, institutions which eventually produced a new generation of career officials of non-royal blood.

In 1912 there was an officers' plot against the king. The plot failed, but but the message was clear. The monarchy was imperiled.

To answer charges of prodigality, the king removed the Privy Purse Department from a tax-exempt category. In theory, all of the king's personal lands and properties were then subject to the same taxes as those levied on properties of ordinary citizens--except that no one dared ascertain which was crown and which was personal property. The move was largely ceremonial, a chance for the king to demonstrate that, in his words, he was "on the same footing as any ordinary person" (1978:60).

The king sought ways to enhance his democratic image. Participation in ancient state ceremonies may have been like "grinding pepper sauce into the river," but not, apparently, participation in the kathin.

Wachirawut expounded at length on the advantages and disadvantages of the king's coming into close proximity with his subjects, concluding in favor of the Ramkhamhaeng interpretation: it was like a father "who comes freely among his beloved children." He was quite concerned, however, that, granted free access to the king's person, "anyone who does not get everything his own way thinks himself personally and particularly aggrieved" and could even hold it personally against the monarch. Wachirawut thus interpreted the Ramkhamhaeng tradition in a literal (Western) pragmatic sense--envisioning a steady stream of men arriving at his palace gate to ring a bell and have their grievances heard--and had a lively sense of its disadvantages (1978:63).

For the king's activities to fail to conform to the ritual calendar portends calamity. Therefore, when Wachirawut decided to become more democratic, he did so in the ritual context. In 1913 the King, breaking custom, decided to go on an unofficial kathin by boat to a small temple, and, as the Bangkok Times (27 October 1913) reported, he soon found himself the "object of a warm popular demonstration." Another impromptu kathin followed a few days later, and the "unexpected success" of these events led Wachirawut to try to repeat them. "People's kathin" followed in 1914, 1915, and 1916, although, as Vella (1978:77) notes, the later affairs "lacked spontaneity."

Despite such efforts, however, budgetary deficits, foreign loans, rice shortages, silver shortages, bank failures and inflation continued to be attributed to the king's profligacy and excessive "expenditure on ceremonial."³ In fact, as Vella (1978:168-) points out, the total income of the national government was relatively small, and "a basic cause of much of the reign's economic distress in the 1920s seems to have been the depression in prices of agricultural commodities, and this was a worldwide phenomenon that Siam could do little to contend with" (cf. Ingram 1971:193). It was King Prajadipok, Wachirawut's successor, who took ultimate blame for the price of rice on the international market.

King Prajadipok

Wachirawut was succeeded by his younger brother, King Prajadipok. The worsening market situation and the antinomy issue hit Prajadipok full force. He came into what the disaffected Prince Damrong (dismissed in 1915) called a "deplorable inheritance":

³Phra Sarasas (1960) contains a classical expression of this antinomy bind.

The authority of the sovereign had fallen much in respect and confidence, the treasury was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the government was corrupted and the services more or less in confusion. (Girling 1981:56)

Royal merit-making activities had long been under attack by elite, as were elaborate cremation ceremonies, similarly criticized as a waste of money. The building of royal temples was a particularly sensitive issue by the time Prajadipok took the throne. This was to conclusively invert the symbolism of virtue: Since when had the king's almsgiving and renunciatory activities become signs of cosmic decline? Since when had his merit-making activities become associated with things which 'spoil' [sia] rather than with things which flower like the lotus of the law? Prajadipok attempted to counter such criticisms by advancing the idea that the merit gained from the repair and embellishment of ruined temples was as great as that acquired by building new ones (Thompson 1941:638).

Prajadhipok's reign is of special interest to this dissertation because, for the first time, we are allowed a glimpse of the king's activities inside the temple during the royal kathin. Prajadhipok's kathin activities, albeit a scaled-down, depression-era version, are recorded in Wales' classic work, Siamese State Ceremonies (1931).

Kathin in the 1920s

Wales observed King Prajadipok's processions through the streets through binoculars bent in the shape of a ship's periscope. Despite Chulalongkorn's much vaunted reforms, men were discouraged from casting their eyes on the royal personage as late as the Seventh Reign. Wales was a guest at the kathin of the lord chamberlain and of Prince Dhani Nivat, but he was never allowed inside the temple during King Prajadipok's kathin luang.

Wales notes the existence of four classes of kathin in the 1920s: kathin luang (the king's kathin) kathin cao (the princes' kathin) kathin khun-nan (the kathin of the nobility); and kathin phrai (the common people's kathin) (1931:201). He writes the following of royal temples in the 1920s, those temples where the king performed the kathin luang:

These are under the special protection of the King, and expect to receive their Kathina gifts from him. But there are so many of them that it would make too great a demand on the King's time to visit them all, and so nobles are appointed to represent him at the more distant ones. (1931:202) (emphasis mine)

Some of the royal temples were visited by the king in his state carriage or by motor-car. "These Kathinas take place with little or no show, and are of no great interest." Others, which Wales described in detail, took place "with the pomp of Old Siam." These were the kathin at Wat Phra Chetuphan, Wat Bowoniwet, and Wat Rachabophit. (1931:202)

In the land processions leading to the royal temples, King Prajadipok was surrounded by military guards wearing European uniforms and representing the branches of the armed services. The processions included a military band, men playing ceremonial instruments, and the bearers of the royal weapons.

The king was at the center of the procession, seated on a golden palanquin. An umbrella was held over his head and he was proceeded by a palace worker holding a fan in the shape of a leaf (i.e., from the Bodhi tree), similar to fans of rank awarded to Buddhist monks. The bearers of the royal insignia came next, followed by the kathin gift, the state chargers, and H.R.H. the prince of Nagara Svarga, mounted (1931:202).

Wales saw nothing in the procession that distinguished it from other royal processions except that it was carried out on a relatively modest scale. The main difference between Wachirawut's and Prajadipok's kathin

processions was the absence of the Mahatlek, the minister of the interior (Prachadipok had abolished the position).

In contrast to the kathin of earlier reigns, Prajadipok's procession included other princes or their retinues.

It is also to be noticed that the king wears plain white military uniform with plumed helmet, whereas in Old Siam he wore full monarchical dress and the Kathina Crown, which is now seen only in Coronation Progresses. (1931:203)

Inside the Temple

Wales provides the following description of the royal procession up the Chao Phraya River before the kathin at Wat Arun. These are the only data available for comparing royal kathin past and present (chapter 11).

At the kathin nam leading to Wat Arun, palace guards were situated at the landing-stage of the palace and the military band played the National Anthem when the king arrived.

The King was escorted down the jetty, beneath a royal umbrella, and embarked in a pavilion barge, accompanied by a number of noblemen It is interesting to note that on the occasion of Kathinas the King does not himself ride in a brah-di-nam barge, which supreme honour is reserved for the King's offerings to religion . . . and in the Kathina procession all the state barges are quite plain gilded structure without figure-heads, the great Hansa and Naga barges being reserved for the Coronation. There were a number of drum barges and escort barges, but probably the whole number did not exceed thirty, whereas in the old days there were as many as 150 to 200, this number including those of numerous princes and nobles, whose rank was indicated by the varying degree of magnificence of the barges. (1931:203)

When the king reaches the temple,

. . . he alights and proceeds on foot to the temple between the files of a guard of honour, while the military band plays the National Anthem, in opposition to the blowing of the ceremonial conches. The path to the temple is carpeted with matting exclusively for the King to walk upon In Old Siam the handrail of the landing was wound with white cloth, as a sign that the landing might not be passed by any Siamese subject in a standing posture, or with covered head. Hence all boatmen rowing their boats standing, in gondola-like fashion, had to go down on their knees, just as they had to do before the palace, as a sign that the temple-landing was, for the time being, the King's landing.

Wales provides the following description of events inside the temple.

The king walks up to the uposatha or temple proper and at the door takes one complete set of monks' robes from the hands of an official who is holding them, and then enters the temple. At the far end of the temple the great image of Buddha is seated on the decorated and illuminated altar, and the monks are seated in row at the upper end. The King places the set of robes in a table specially prepared for the purpose, on which are five golden vases of flowers, five golden dishes of parched corn, five golden candlesticks with their candles, and five incense sticks. The number five represents the five Buddhas of the present world cycle, Gautama Buddha, the three Buddhas who preceded him, and the future Buddha, Maitreya.

The King then pays homage before the image three times with joined palms, each time repeated the Pali salutation to the Buddha, "Namo tassa bhagavato, arahato samma sambuddhasa." The Abbot lifts his fan and holds it before his eyes, so that he may not be distracted, and thrice repeats the same salutation. The king then proceeds formally to offer the robes to the priests, and the monks signify their acceptance, "Sadhu, Sadhu!"

The Abbot then addressed the monks as follows:

This pha kathin has been given to us by His most illustrious Majesty the King, who being endued (sic) with exceeding goodness and righteousness, has condescended to come hither himself, and present these garments to us, a company of Buddhist Priests, without designating any particular person by whom they shall be worn; but leaving it for us as a company, to decide who of us is most in need, and who of us has attained to the fifth degree of Anisansa (fruitfulness in holy living), and who of us practise the eight rules of Matika (priestly etiquette). (1931:204)

The abbot divides the robes in the king's presence, and the king makes a few other miscellaneous presents as well as special robes for those monks who have distinguished themselves in the Pali language. The monks pronounce a short form of paritta (verse of protection) in Pali, concluding with a sentence in Thai.

May you live over one hundred years in the fullness of vigour, free from disease and happy; may all your wishes be fulfilled, all your works accomplished, all advantages accrue to you; may you always triumph and succeed, O Paramindra (the King's name), august Sovereign. May it be so forever! We beg to tender (to you) this blessing.

The ceremony ends when the "King then again pays homage before the image and leaves the temple. He spends about half-an-hour in each wat" (1931:205).

The End of the Absolute Monarchy

Prajadipok did the opposite of King Wachirawut. He surrounded himself with high-ranking members of the royal family and thus incurred censure for being "undemocratic," for allowing royal princes to monopolize high office when there was a ready supply of men from noble and wealthy families who were better qualified to run the bureaucracy. This left his princely advisors open to charges of corruption--that they were "making their living in the old way"--to charges that they had received high office because of their blood connections, not because of their ability (!).

In the 1920s and 1930s the best and the brightest men of the kingdom began returning from study abroad with the expectation that they would receive high office. Many were lukcin of confirmed 'Siamese' identity (Skinner 1957:244-245). Their return boded ill for the established 'Chinese' merchantry. The "new men" not only expected to help modernize the polity, some had studied the Western "science" of economics and fully expected to reform the antiquated Thai economy. In this they were frustrated at all turns. In 1931 a secret association calling itself The People's Party was formed with the aim of overthrowing the absolute monarchy (cf. Yano 1977:195).

The new men had been exposed to a variety of Western economic ideologies--communism, socialism, and capitalism--all of which could be interpreted to reflect ill on the institution of the monarchy. According to communist ideologies, if the king was a rich man, it was

not because of his superior merit but because he was the nation's leading tax collector and landlord--his wealth was farmed "off the backs of peasants." From the perspective of capitalist ideologies, if the king was a rich man it was because he was exercising improper control over the marketplace and the state budget, inhibiting free enterprise. If the king was not a rich man, however, if he ceased to donate large amounts of money to the Sangha, he was not a Dhammaraja in the eyes of the majority of his subjects. He automatically faced both a disgruntled Sangha and a loss of credibility (purity) that was derived from the ritual process.

Prajadipok's downfall took place in a radically different economic climate than that which existed for his ancestors. The population had doubled between 1870 and 1934 and the volume of rice exports increased 25 times (Ingram 1971:36-42). Almost all rice exports came from the Central Plain. Only 2 per cent came from the largely subsistence holdings of the North and Northeast. What finally brought the monarchy to an end was the great crisis of international capitalism in the early 1930s. Girling summarizes the economic situation thus:

The price of rice, the country's principal export, fell by more than half during the depression years; this reduced the incomes of farmers, especially in the Central Plain, worsened the burden of taxation, and increased the pressure by moneylenders to repay debts. The value of tine exports was halved; rubber prices fell even more drastically. Government revenues, dependent on trade, fell far below expectations. (1981:58-59)

The depression brought great misery to the poor classes in Bangkok and in the Central Plain. As many as one third of Thai farmers in the Central Plain were unable to pay their debts and were forced to sell their land; they became tenants or laborers (Ingram 1971:66,162). The royal virtue [phrarachabarami], since the earliest royal traditions

(Gokhale 1953) an index of the health of the polity, the key to order in the cosmos, was insidiously linked to the international capitalist economy. In the 1930s it, along with the world market situation, was rapidly declining.

King Prajadipok, as a modern head of state, was held directly and publicly responsible for this state of affairs, albeit for different reasons by different segments of the populace. When it became necessary to cut the government's budget, Prajadipok compounded the situation by confessing in public: "The present situation is beyond me and I am forced to make the cuts"--which not only proved definitively that he was "a man and not a god," but angered scores of bureaucrats as well (Batson 1974:77).

The Revolution

The revolution [patthiwat] of the People's Party did not originate with the masses. It was organized by a talented group of commoners of Sino-Thai backgrounds who resented the monopoly of high office held by princes of the blood. The "promoters" of the coup, as they were referred to for many years after, consisted of about seventy men. The senior army officers had studied in Germany. The younger army officers and civilians studied in France in the early 1920s. Luang Pradit Manutham (Pridi Phanomyong), the leading figure of the coup group, was the son of a Teochiu father from Ch'eng-hai. Phraya Phahon Phalaphayu, Premier of Siam from 1933-1938, also had a Chinese father, as did Luang Wicit Wathakan, the cultural leader of the Thai revolution (Skinner 1957:244).

The coup group made much of the unfair privileges and the undemocratic rule of the king and his nobles. For perhaps the first

time in history, a powerful apposition was established between ability and royal blood. The coup group rejected the idea that the pure blood of the nobility endowed them with innate characteristics that qualified them to rule. On the contrary, they identified pure blood with an opposite set of associations: it confirmed men's lack of ability rather than their ability. They had not worked to achieve their high office. Pure blood was the symbol par excellence of a despotic monarchy.

The antinomy problems of royalty reached their apotheosis in the coup drama of 1932, but the subsequent apology to the king by the coup promoters was a sign of things to come, a warning to all men of non-royal blood who would try to rule the kingdom. The wording of the coup document is ambiguous as to the reasons for the king's dethronement. Was he overthrown for being a bad administrator, or for having insufficient religious purity to right the wrongs of the economy? Or were they the related?

Like Uthong, the Sino-Thai founder of the Kingdom of Ayuthaya, the coup group appropriated Theravada Buddhist cosmological paradigms in their quest for power.

The Fall of the King: The Coup Document

In the manner of Lithai, the coup document opens with an observation of the classical signs of moral decline: the proliferation of greed, anger, and illusion among the king's subjects. "The king did not listen to the voice of the people; He allowed civil servants to use their power corruptly to take bribes for government construction and purchase bids, to seek profit from money exchange, and to waste the country's financial resources" (Thak 1978:4). He

ruled without knowledge and left the country to fate as witnessed by the economic depression and hardships The king's government holds people as slaves (calling them phrai or kha), animals, and did not consider them as human beings.

The People's Party assumes the rhetorical and perceptual role of learned Buddhist monks in the document, that of observing and interpreting the meaning of social events for men of lesser merit. "This is generally known to the public," the document declares; i.e., it was 'clear for all to see,' i.e., unquestionably true.

The document accused the king of the suprafunctional sin of the divine monarch--that of lying. The king has "deceitfully and dishonestly ruled the people by saying that [his government] would promote better living. But after waiting a long time⁴ it was not seriously undertaken and has failed."

The document linked the ability to see evil and diagnose its causes to secular rather than to religious education, again rejecting the traditional nexus between blood, birth, merit and ability.

If the people were stupid, the princes must also be so since they belong to the same nation. The people do not know as much as the princes not because they were stupid, but because they lacked education which the princes prevented them from acquiring. The royalty feared that should the people have education, they would see the royalty's evils and would no longer allow the "planting of rice on their backs."

The king had lied to his subjects, but what had he lied about? He had lied by representing himself as the true "lord of the land," the khattiya or "lord of the fields": "People! Let it be known that our country belongs to the people and not to the king as was deceived" (1978:5).

The coup document reinforces traditional concepts of hierarchy at the same that time it rejects the institution of the monarchy. In the manner of a cool-hearted monarch, the People's Party exhorts the people to remain calm--as if they are hot-hearted beings, easily roused. The

⁴After waiting for the 'fruits' of his actions to manifest themselves.

document conjoins the symbols of democracy with traditional symbols of religious purity. If no one acted in ways to oppose the People's Party, the country would have "full [perfect] independence." People would no longer be slaves of royalty or subject to corvee labour. "It [the Revolution] is an end to the 'planting of rice on the people's backs' for the royalty. Happiness and prosperity which is known as 'si ariya' would be enjoyed as wished by all" (1978:7). Ariya means literally "entering into the stream of nibbana." It is traditionally used to refer to noble men (Buddhist saints), to a noble Sangha, and to the Metteya and the ideal state that attends his coming (cf. Brimmell 1959:350; Sarkisyanz 1965:207).

The 1932 coup document did more than challenge the veracity of the monarch, however, it challenged a centuries-long tradition of veracity, that based on the concept of religious purity and having its roots in ancient, Hindu-derived metaphors of the body politic. This concept was similar to that found in Western democracies: truth is that which is arrived at as a consensus of the many in the process of debate in the open marketplace (Vernant 1982). The People's Party document thus proposed a parliament that would "allow for the consultation of many rather than one" (1978:5), in so doing, apparently striking a blow at traditional concepts of the body politic (or a caste-like division of interpretive and linguistic labour). This new concept upset assumptions about the specialized knowledge, 'duties,' and speech functions of the kingdom's citizens. It challenged the most fundamental concepts about the nature and discovery of truth: the idea that the search for truth is open only to men of established religious purity, a function of the "discipline of the senses."

The Tables Turn

King Prajadipok lost his throne because of the severity of the world market situation and the onslaught of charges that despite (or because of) his royal lineage, he lacked the knowledge and ability necessary to rule the polity. Perhaps he had demonstrated insufficient ritual purity, which made him unable to fulfill his dhamma as king. Perhaps he had performed too many acts of religious purity, accounting for the charges that he was a wastrel.

The new ruling group had the opposite problem. They had merit and talent. They were imbued with democratic ideals and they had the administrative skills necessary to run the state--but they lacked pure blood. After the revolution of 1932 it quickly became apparent that one of the benefits of royal blood was that it was believed to automatically endow men with superior insight, wisdom, and interpretive powers necessary to see past the material 'face' of events into their underlying dynamics.

As the kingdom entered a new and dangerous phase of its existence, it became imperative that its leaders demonstrate these qualities. How else were they to assess the morality of new and alien ideologies and practices, which they themselves had helped introduce and which were now spreading throughout the kingdom?

This particular king may have lost his virtue, but in the eyes of the populace, the kingship was still the "articulating" principle of the kingdom. King Prajadipok had lost the power to propose and enforce law in the early days following the revolution, but civil lawmakers could not ratify or enforce it without his approval. The judicial function of the state became deadlocked. The king could not appoint members of the government, but no other layperson was believed capable of seeing into

the 'hearts and minds'--and thus ascertain the intentions--of men aspiring to power. These most essential functions of the divine Buddhist monarch became apparent only as the monarchy was dismantled. They were immediately apparent in the apology that followed the coup.

The Apology

The following social drama (Thak 1978:10) occurred immediately after the coup. Colonel Phraya Phahon, the leader of the Revolutionary Party, approached the king with flowers, incense and candles (with bucha or objects of worship), to seek forgiveness for the coup and to obtain endorsement for the new government. He was asking for a kind of endorsement that only a great king could give: verification of the pure intentions of the coup members. The opacity principle was still in effect.

Colonel Phahon reportedly asked for a royal pardon "for taking the unlawful act of changing the political system." The king thanked him for performing the ceremony and for coming "to seek pardon from me and the House of Cakkri" (i.e., demonstrating his superior metta and karuna). The king said that the apology gratified him very much: "I have long forgiven all of you since I understood your desire very well," he said--(desire being the characteristic of lesser beings and its absence being that of kings). The king capitulated, saying that the act of seeking forgiveness was a great honour for the coup leaders because ". . . you have shown that you have dhamma in your heart."

Conclusion

When I come to the question of finance, I never feel quite happy, because I never had a head for finance. (King Wachirawut)

The Thai kingdom of the 1920s and 1930s was hopelessly caught between competing cosmological paradigms, and with them competing concepts of kingship and practical action. Wachirawut, for example, wrote a scathing review of a book on political economy. Such books had only one use for him: "they helped to put him to sleep." Economic theory was "useless." What other conclusion could be drawn from the fact that rich men never studied political economy, and political economists were never rich men? (Vella 1978:170).

Three features of the modern polity began to emerge during the reigns of Wachirawut and Prajadipok. First, when the negative consequences of linking the Thai economy to the world market system became apparent, they were interpreted as signs of cosmic decline, as signs of the decline of virtue of the nation's rulers. Second, to the traditional signs of decline--the natural disasters of plague, pestilence, floods and evil kings--were added new and more modern ones, the low price of rice or of export commodities and the high price of imports.

A pattern emerged: When the contradictions inherent in capitalist ideologies became apparent, these, too, were identified as signs of cosmic decline: Hard work and thrift did not end the Depression. Not only had the nation's leaders lost their virtue during the Depression, the true meaning of dhamma had been lost as well--knowledge of proper conduct under the cosmic (market) conditions of the moment.

As Prajadipok's and Wachirawut's situations demonstrate, when the magical future promised by capitalist ideologies never materializes (Bourdieu 1977), when entrepreneurial virtue fails to yield its just rewards, this, too, is interpreted as a sign of decline, one that constitutes a failure of veracity on the part of the nation's rulers.

This paradigm has persisted to the present. When the glowing future promised in a succession of three- and five-year economic plans comes to nothing, when the resplendent future promised to good capitalists, to men who would practice austerities in the present to receive benefits in the future, never materializes--these discrepancies are observed as a loss of understanding of dhamma, as signs of the decline of the kalpa. This is the point where men armed with new and more pure economic principles step in to restore order. Thus the fall of King Prajadipok marked the beginning of Thailand's infamous coup cycles.

PART III
RACING FOR VIRTUE

CHAPTER 7

RACING FOR VIRTUE: THE FATE OF THE ROYAL PREROGATIVES

. . . when the relic was taken the effect of its capture was astonishing and almost beyond the comprehension of the enlightened (John Davy, An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and Its Inhabitants)

Introduction

The issue of royal blood became most acute when the nation's leaders had none. In 1935, King Prajadipok finally abdicated. The People's Party offered the crown to the ten year old Prince Ananda Mahidon. With the exception of one visit in 1938, the young prince remained outside the country, pursuing his studies in Switzerland, until his return in December 1945.

Men who offer large gifts to the Sangha to show who is purest amongst them are said to be kaeng barami or 'racing for virtue.' The period from 1932 to 1947 can be characterized as one in which the new Thai leadership raced for virtue against each other, struggling to control previously 'royal' prerogatives. Military and political leaders maneuvered to control the sacred traces of the Buddha and to acquire new ones. They struggled to control the regency, to 'protect' royal property, to sign documents 'in the name of the king,' and to perform the ritual duties of royalty: to control every possible manifestation of the Buddha's teaching body and his relic body, the dhamma-kaya and the rupa-kaya.

As the years passed, they fought over who would protect and defend the Sangha, who would change the rituals of state, who should build

'royal' temples and who could make merit there. Men who controlled the distribution of virtue controlled government, and men who controlled government controlled the economy, or the men who ran the economy. These indigenous races for virtue are the backdrop against which new Western political and economic ideologies were introduced in the Thai political arena, to the general public.

In this chapter I will describe the most important of the races of virtue that occurred after the exile of the monarch and during the so-called "constitutional period" in Thailand. I will begin the discussion, however, with an overview of the economic changes which occurred during this period, followed by a discussion of the antinomy problems that plagued the new elite.

The Economy: 1932-1957

The British controlled seventy per cent of the nation's export trade (teak, tin, rubber and rice) until World War II (Ingram 1971). During the war the Japanese drained the country of its rice surplus. Afterwards, the British stranglehold on the nation's export trade was broken and Sino-Thai coalitions took control of exports and industrial production. In the 1950s, Japanese and American corporations began to do business in Thailand and to reshape the nation's economy--production, consumption, and exports.

The structure of the economy, i.e., modes of production, did not change greatly from 1932 to 1957, especially in the Isan region. Military and political leaders replaced the king and his nobles in extracting surplus in the form of direct taxes or through taxation of various economic activities. Chinese merchants replaced the nobility as the nation's chief moneylenders. Although there was some expansion of

the industrial sector, mostly around Bangkok, Thailand's economy remained grounded in rice production. The rice in the north and central plains, the most fertile areas of the country, was grown mainly for export. Crop diversification took place on a small scale, but the Isan area, the poorest in the nation, was little affected by these changes.

As a general rule, 'Chinese' merchants controlled commercial networks and high-ranking 'Thai' bureaucrats administered the polity, their partnership uneasy at best. In a continuation of King Wachirawat's policies, government leaders promoted an ideology of Thai nationalism that was based on anti-Chinese sentiment and which equated loyalty to the nation with the practice of Theravada Buddhism. The Chinese were discriminated against and denied full citizenship rights, but they were a major source of income for Thai bureaucrats. If Thai bureaucrats demanded too much of Chinese traders, they undermined their major source of income. In effect, the polity was characterized by a division of interpretive, commercial, and physical labour from 1932 to 1957. Thai bureaucrats and Buddhist monks performed religio-interpretive duties, Chinese merchants ran the economy, and Thai farmers did the work.

Bureaucrats lacked the skills or desire to run the economy directly. Instead, they ran the government, concerning themselves with the moral and legal aspects of order. Chinese businessmen were not Thai-Buddhists. They did not control the ritual process or ordain as Buddhist monks. By definition, this automatically placed them outside the mainstream of the religio-interpretive tradition. They could not take on prominent roles as national leaders because they lacked the religious purity necessary to interpret the cosmos, and to selflessly prescribe social practice for the populace at large.

The Antinomy Problems of the "New Men"

When King Rama VII abdicated in 1935, the polity found itself without a Righteous Ruler, its status as a soteriological state in question. Who was to perform the rituals of state, protect and defend the Sangha, interpret the cosmos and prescribe correct modes of social practice? The nature of royal prerogatives, the centrality of religious to ruling processes, became apparent only in the absence of a Buddhist king.

Laid bare, things 'royal' [luang] were things renunciatory, and men's renunciatory abilities were the key to their control over the interpretive process. The heart of the Theravada Buddhist royal tradition was exposed; only men of outstanding virtue and religious wisdom had the right to assign names to new experiences and to make authoritative pronouncements on the true meaning of events and alien ideologies. The names and meanings of things were assumed to evolve as the cosmos devolved; truth was evaluated in the moral/temporal context of the kalpa. In the absence of leaders of royal blood, no one held a clear edge in the interpretive hierarchy, and ritual privileges often went to the strong.

The antinomy problem reversed itself for the "new men" of the civilian and military governments of the 1930s and 1940s. Some of them did understand the Gold Standard. They advocated democratic principles, and they were familiar with European political and economic ideologies. Many had practical administrative experience. They lacked royal blood, however, the assumed basis of the king's innate moral and interpretive powers, the basis of his ability to purify the Sangha and Buddhist ritual. The new leaders lacked pure blood and its attendant powers, yet they assumed power at a crucial historical juncture, when interpretive skills were most in demand, when "Old Siam" began building its identity as a "new nation" in the world community.

Questions of Value: Practical Versus Spritual Utility

As this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the dominant structures in modern Thai history are antinomy structures created by the playing out of fundamental contradictions between Thai and Western cultural, cosmological, and religious traditions. In the post-1932 period as before, antinomy issues surfaced in public debates about the value of Buddhist monks and ritual performances to the state. They touch on the most fundamental issue of change, the representation of value. The legitimation battles of the twentieth century reflect fundamental tensions between Western and Thai-Buddhist concepts of value, between ideas of practical and spiritual utility that grounded, respectively, in ideologies of direct and indirect causality. In Western ideologies and rhetoric the good can be articulated in pragmatic and utilitarian terms, i.e. as "getting the work done." In Buddhist ideology and rhetoric, the good is articulated in an idiom of detachment and religious purity, in terms of a worldview that is based on the idea of indirect causality. Westernized elite's disclaimers aside, indigenous systems of value were and are firmly grounded in the ancient cosmological tradition by which religious purity causes things to go right in the cosmos.

Because of the unequal power situation in the colonial and post-colonial eras, Western values that undercut the indigenous cultural system were publicly adopted in Thailand. Both systems were maintained, sometimes in alternation, and neither fully jettisoned.

According to the Westernized political and economic ideologies advanced by the People's Party, an ideal nation state was that run according to the canons of efficiency. Party members spoke of prosperity as a function of rational economic planning, not of religious

purity. If the new leaders used state funds to offer gifts to the Sangha or to build Buddhist temples, they violated their own ideals. This was inefficient use of the nation's capital, 'waste,' by the standards they themselves had declared.

Like the Cakkri kings before them, if they used personal wealth to make merit they raised questions about the source of that wealth. If they were truly living on the modest salaries of civil servants, how could they afford to build magnificent temples?

The new leaders were constrained by the traditional parameters on a "legitimate" discourse. If they spoke of economic prosperity as a function of practical action, and if they exhorted their followers to devote themselves to this-worldly, material goals, they were seen as inverting the moral order, encouraging their subjects to commit soteriological suicide: to be attached rather than detached. By themselves practicing and advocating such ideologies, the new leadership demonstrated a lack of detachment and automatically lost credibility.

If, on the other hand, the strongest among them attempted to act in the manner of a great king, starting a new dynasty, he could be accused of being "undemocratic," and there was yet another pitfall that awaited new leaders. If they fought publicly over rights to make merit at royal temples, they were seen as 'greedily' grasping after things not theirs by birthright, the hereditary ritual prerogatives of kings and members of the nobility. In almost all of the above cases, the sacred order was seen as being destroyed or inverted.

The Thai word for corruption is borrowed from the West. It is korrupition, a term that was oft-used in the 1930s and has remained so ever since. Under the new political system, all financial transactions were morally reevaluated. What constituted a corrupt use of funds (for

'personal' use) as opposed to a legitimate, renunciatory use of funds (for 'official' or communal use)? Which financial transactions were the proper expression of a lord's moral obligations toward his followers, and which constituted the theft of state funds? Could taxes be legitimately collected by men of little proven merit, and not reciprocated with ritual generosity and personal protection?

In the absence of royal blood, ritual purity became, ironically, the basis of the new elite's credibility in introducing new ideologies: in promoting some courses of action as being legitimate and modern, and others as being corrupt and old-fashioned. It was the basis of their ability to assign terms to social practices, and to successfully level corruption charges against their rivals.

The new elite had to introduce and interpret new and alien ideologies quickly after the revolution of 1932, and they needed the moral authority [barami] to do so. Private beliefs to the contrary, it was of utmost importance for them to control the ritual medium. This was necessary to demonstrate detachment [dana] and gain credibility--to gain sufficient barami to interpret new terms and the moral significance of disquieting events in a convincing manner. They had to build their barami in order to represent their ideologies and practices as being in conformity with dhamma, as being conducive to positive moral outcomes. They had to control the ritual medium in order to encode their revolutionary principles into religious practice, and to convey them to the general populace. Finally, they had to build their barami by performing conspicuous merit-making ceremonies and building religious monuments in order to overcome the contradictions entailed by their adoption of Western ideals and Western modes of discourse. By purifying ritual--moving from one ritual style to another--the leadership could

alternate between 'democratic' and 'traditional-hierarchical' principles of order. Western speech styles and materialistic political themes were automatically delegitimizing. They connoted upadana, excessive attachment to worldly things, lack of religious purity and therefore of credibility. These new political facts were discovered only gradually, through a succession of legitimation battles in the 1930s and 1940s.

Cycles of Purification

The fortunes of the new military and bureaucratic elite fluctuated wildly in the 1930s and 1940s. There were more than fourteen military coups between 1932 and 1957, part of a vicious antinomy cycle in which politicians were criticized by dual, contradictory standards: for failing to embody democratic principles and for failing to maintain the sacred order. It was relatively easy to topple an opponent and take power; it was almost impossible to hold it for long.

The inherent contradictions between democratic and sacred traditions of rule resulted in alternating cycles of 'democratic' and military rule. Democratic ideologies and practices were interpreted as sign of moral decline: lack of unity among the populace, people 'speaking out of order,' and 'selfishness,' upadana. When the military stepped in to restore order, they were criticised for failing to support democratic principles. Most leaders, regardless of political style, were eventually accused of corruption (cf. Yano 1977).

These cycles, the gumsa/gumlao structure of contemporary Thai society, took place against a backdrop of elites racing for virtue, at times frantically attempting to build prestige in traditional ways. Their interpretations of experience necessarily had to correspond to fluctuations in the world market system, to incorporate signs of

suffering and well-being from the material world; the laws of kamma associate religious purity with material prosperity. Market indices--the price of rice rather than the bounty of the harvest--became indices of the cosmic condition and thus of the religious purity of the nation's leadership.

By the late 1940s, given the economic and political chaos that followed World War II, the legitimacy problems of the new men of the Thai government equalled those of the monarchy in its final days. Democratic ideologies proliferated and powerful warriors could no longer build dynasties like the kings of the past, yet civilian governments were easily toppled by military coups. By 1957 the protagonists were deadlocked.

Three Phases of Competition

The elite's race for virtue occurred in roughly three phases. In the first, from 1932 to 1938, civilian and military governments dismantled the monarchy and divided royal prerogatives among themselves. In the second, from 1938 to 1945, the so-called "constitutional period," the country had no reigning king. Luang Phibun, a charismatic military leader, established himself as the nation's 'leader' [phu nam]. He protected and defended the Sangha almost single-handedly, taking on royal prerogatives in the name of the state. His 'democratic' nemesis was the socialist, Dr. Pridi Phanomyong. In the third phase, from 1946 to 1957, a military triumvirate ruled the country. A king was placed on the throne, and he, too, found himself racing for virtue, fighting to regain the prerogatives that were his by office.

This chapter discusses key historical events in the first two phases of struggle. It details the systematic dismantling of the monarchy and

the antinomy problems that resulted, thus providing the background necessary for understanding the three-way race for virtue that took place in 1950s. This last race set the stage for the intensive capitalist development of the 1960s, development that began with the reintegration of the monarchy into the power structure.

The Sangha

The post-revolutionary period witnessed major changes in relations between the Thammayut and Manahnikai religious orders, and between monks of noble and non-noble birth. In the absence of a great king, or of any king at all, the Sangha became independent of lay authority and thus more schismatic. Charismatic monks no longer had to compete with kings of pure lineage who were making implicit arahant claims. Like the new political leadership, powerful monks laid claim to royal prerogatives of ritual and textual purification.

The situation boded well for the fortunes of Isan monks. Like Isan politicians, they gained more power in the constitutional period than they ever had before, or ever would again. Like all Thai leaders, however, Buddhist monks were afflicted with the antinomy problems of the era.

The Fate of the Royal Prerogatives: 1932-1938

Three main coup promoters led the government after 1932: Colonel Phahon (Phya Phahon), the highest-ranking military commoner; Pridi Phanomyong (Pridi), a brilliant French-educated lawyer and intellectual; and Major Phibun Songkram (Luang Phibun), who became the nation's leading military strongman. Phahon, Pridi, and Phibun headed a group called the "People's Party," first formed in Paris to overthrow the monarchy.

Members of the original coup group played heavily on traditional royal and cosmological paradigms in their later portrayals of the planning of the revolution. Like pure Buddhist monks in search of dhamma, they described themselves as being united by 'strong mental unity' at their first meeting in Paris. The most important was to begin 'searching for knowledge on procedures for for seizing political power.' They coined new words and phrases, assigning Thai names to Western ideologies and practices. The code name for communism was sri ariya, literally, 'auspicious nobility,' a reference to the Metteya (cf. Sarkisyanz 1967). They portrayed the revolution as an act of purification that would correct a declining moral condition.

In the words of one member (Thak 1978:37) of the original coup group, writing after the revolution,

. . . keeping in mind the deteriorating condition of the country then, patriotic Thai students in Europe, especially in France and Switzerland joined minds with strong intentions, ready to gamble our lives to change the political system for national prosperity.

In his memoirs, Pridi, who had received his early schooling at Wat Benchamabophit, wrote that he was on his way to ordain as a Buddhist monk in his hometown of Ayuthaya when he jumped the train and participated in the coup instead (Vicitvong 1979:36-37, 45)--an incident that was symbolic of the times.

The People's Party appointed a royalist and former senior judge, Phya Manopakarn, as the nation's first prime minister, at the same time preparing a constitution suggesting a three-stage approach to democracy. In the first stage, the People's Party would control the government. In the second, a People's Assembly would be established in which half of the members were elected and half appointed. In the third stage, when over half the country had completed four years of primary education (but

in any case, not less than ten years after the revolution), there would be direct elections to the Assembly (Thak 1978:38-39). With the exception of a brief three year "experiment in democracy" from 1973 to 1976, the country never reached the third stage.

The first confrontation was between Pridi and the royalist faction. Pridi proposed an "Economic Plan" that was partially inspired by the French and Russian revolutions and aimed at countering the effects of the world depression. The plan proposed the nationalization of all farm land. Farmers would work for the government as paid employees and receive pensions and the government would take over the production and sale of rice and eliminate middlemen from the process (Landon 1939). Phya Manopakarn and conservative members of the coup group branded the plan communistic [kommunit] and Pridi went into voluntary exile in 1933. Phya Manopakorn then tried to turn the dispute to advantage by restoring royal authority, but failed, and Army Commander-in-Chief Phahon succeeded him as prime minister, mediating conservative and radical party members.

In 1933, Prince Boworadet, the former minister of defense, marched on Bangkok from Korat in an attempt to overthrow the new government and restore the monarchy (Vicitvong 1979:89). Phibun quelled the rebellion, establishing himself on the road to power. Afterwards, royalist sympathizers were held in detention and high-ranking princes were exiled, followed soon after by Rama VII.

In 1934 Pridi returned to defend himself against charges of communism in front of a specially appointed government committee. The committee was charged with ascertaining the truth of the charges, although there was some uncertainty as to the 'true meaning' of communism.

As the two foreign experts on the committee pointed out, it was not so difficult to define communism in theory but it was very difficult to judge whether the political system of a particular country was a communist system. The committee therefore defined its task as that of determining whether Dr. Pridi (as opposed to his economic plan) was communist.

The royal kathin ceremony was featured in this social drama. "Are you contemplating the withdrawal of government subsidy from Buddhist Sankha Council?" asked a committee member. "No Sir", answered Pridi, "On the contrary, when the Manopakorn government was proposing to abolish the Royal Krathin charity with a view to economizing the Royal Purse, it was I who was strongly opposed to it (Vicitvong 1979:102). Pridi was cleared of the charges, staying on to serve as minister of the interior, foreign minister, and finance minister.

The next race for virtue took place between the National Assembly and the (absent) king. The issue was the administration of the Sangha, specifically, who had the right to approve the building of new temples.

In April 1934, the parliament officially appointed a committee independent from the Department of Church Properties to clarify rights pertaining to situations in which private persons could be allowed to build temples by individual abbots. In the parliamentary debate that followed, traditional concerns about impurity in the Sangha were assimilated to Western concepts of work and value--to Western concepts of purity. As Thompson (1941:639) writes:

In the following August some acrid comments were expressed in the Assembly debate over the proposed building of 122 new wats. There was general disapproval of the sentiments expressed by one member who complained that the monks were lazy and not beneficial to the people, and that it would be a waste of money to build more wats in which they might live comfortable and plutocratic lives. (1941:639)

Did the member mean that monks should work in the Western sense of the term, i.e., perform physical labour, in the same way Pol Pot thought monks should work when he drove them from the temples of Cambodia in 1975? Or did he mean that monks were lax in the sense that they were not strict enough in their observance of the Vinaya, that they had failed in their ascetic labours? Was he speaking in the manner of the "wise" King Sinhalese King Parakkamabahu I?

The result was not quite what one would expect from the apparent content of the debate. "As a result of this stormy debate the Assembly secured what had heretofore been a royal right--that of authorizing future wat building" (1941:639).

In 1935, two years after the rebellion, the king abdicated, saying among other things that "economics was beyond him" and that his people would blame him "even if the rain did not fall" (cf. Chula 1960) and the People's Party offered the crown to Prince Ananda Mahidon. The People's Party formed a regency council to administer the royal properties and the premier's office took control of the privy purse, which was divided into crown, state, and personal property (Thompson 1941:93). Once Prajadipok had abdicated the king's treasury and all his hereditary privileges were up for grabs.

With members of the royal family in exile, Buddhist monks were without competition as most pure beings in the kingdom, in theory the men most able to pronounce on matters of religious reform. After 1935, however, military and political leaders began to compete openly for control of the Sangha. They did so as individuals or by assigning formerly royal religious prerogatives to the National Assembly or to the state bureaucracy, to whichever organ branch of the government was currently under their control.

Democracy and the Sangha: 1935

The Thammayut order lost prestige as the king lost power in the post-1932 period. The Mahanikai tried to regain an ascendant position in the polity by representing itself as the more democratic order. In the words of a firm supporter of Wat Mahathat, "We are the order of the people, of the majority." The Thammayut was an undemocratic, elitist order.

Long simmering disputes between the two orders came to a head in the 1930s, with a twist. Should monks petition the Regency Council, the premier, or the national assembly for redress of their grievances? They chose the premier.

In February 1935 a delegation representing some two thousand monks from twelve provinces arrived in Bangkok to petition the premier. They requested that he bring government control of the Buddhist church into line with the 'democratic' regime. As Thompson (1941:642) writes, "They also asked for equality of treatment for both the reformed and unreformed sects, a request that was not granted by the Assembly until 1938," when Phibun came into power.

The Assembly versus the Ministry of Finance: 1936

In 1936 competition over the royal prerogatives took the form of a struggle between the National Assembly, the Ministry of Finance, and a major bank. In the absence of a king, who had the right to control Sangha property? As Tambiah (1976:245) (quoting Thompson [1941:639]) writes of this next social drama:

Church property and finance became an issue in September 1936 in the Assembly as a result of revelations that some wat were expending thousands of ticals on new buildings without asking the state's permission. It was an issue of discussion during the secret debates in the summer of 1938, and the Assembly sought specific information on the subject from the government, which replied "that the Buddhist church deposited

of Tcs 2,502,776 in liquid assets, exclusive of its real estate" and that this sum "was deposited in a bank and brought in Tcs. 100,000 in interest, which was donated by the Ministry of Finance exclusively for church interests.

The Fate of the Royal Ceremonies: 1936

Who had the right to change the ceremonies of state and to perform kathin ceremonies at royal temples: the 'big men of the royal lineage,' members of the royal family or nobility, or the 'slaves of the royal business,' civil servants, increasingly, men of non-royal blood?

The government's initial response was to downplay all ceremonies that formerly featured the king or members of the nobility. The river kathin to Wat Arun was discontinued in the 1930s. In 1936 the First Ploughing Ceremony, the brahmanic court ceremony associated with prosperity and rainfall, was discontinued. The celebration of the King's Birthday was replaced by the celebration of Nation Day.

Powerful generals made themselves patrons of royal temples. Traditional ceremonies at royal temples (e.g., the setting of boundary stones) were performed by 'royal order' signed by the regent or the premier 'in the name of the king.'

The Scandal of the Royal Properties: 1937

In 1937 Phya Phahon's government resigned over the issue of the "mismanagement" of royal properties. After the government had taken control of the privy purse, royal property was sold to thirty-four of Phahon's ministers. A scandal ensued but Phahon and thirty-three of his ministers took office again after the properties were returned (Thompson 1941:95).

The Constitutional Period: 1938-1944

By 1938 Luang Phibun had emerged as the undisputed military leader. That same year he succeeded Colonel Phayon as premier, his hand strengthened by the "scandal" over the royal properties. By 1938 members of the nobility were almost totally excluded from positions of power, in government and in the military. (This was not true in the Sangha, however, where monks of royal blood remained as the abbots of the leading royal temples).

By 1939 Phibun had exiled or dispossessed the old guard military commanders of the 1932 revolution. As premier he began to rule in the manner of a king, to single-handedly exercise royal prerogatives in the name of the 'state' [rat]. In 1938 he appointed the abbot of Wat Suthat to the position of supreme patriarch, the first monk of non-royal blood to have held that position in the Cakkri dynasty (Somphong 1972:368).

Phibun played heavily on antinomy issues. Phahon's government had shown disrespect for the monarchy by "mismanagement" of royal properties, but in 1939 Phibun's government sued members of the royal family for taking six million baht of 'crown property' with them to Europe (Thompson 1941:100).

The period from 1938 to 1944 is known as the "constitutional period" because Phibun ruled as prime minister under a series of constitutions. He shared power with a national parliament, one that was almost totally under his control. As I shall demonstrate, its members were almost automatically delegitimated because of the parliamentary format.

The first post-revolutionary period had witnessed a race for virtue among members of the nobility and powerful commoners. The second period witnessed races for virtue among military and political leaders of non-royal blood who controlled separate branches of the government and different factions of the National Assembly.

Similar dynamics--tension between men of royal and non-royal blood--were at work in the Sangha. Under military leadership, monks of common birth were able to kaeng barami with their religious preceptors of noble birth. Once talented Isan monks of the Thammayut and Mahanikai orders had gained positions of power within the Sangha, they began to kaeng barami against their royal preceptors. By the 1950s, they had begun to kaeng barami against each other. Meanwhile, the parliament had its own problems.

Antinomy and the Parliament

The prestige of the parliament, if, indeed, such a thing ever existed, was rapidly on the wane. in large part because its members tried to embody the ideals of democracy derived from the Greek polis (Vernant 1962:50): For some members, at least, "Speech was no longer the ritual word, the precise formula, but open debate, discussion argument." This automatically meant their utterances lacked veracity and they were perceived as being incapable of looking after the good of the commonwealth.

The new, hypothetical domain of 'political action' introduced after the revolution was, by definition, a this-worldly rather than a supra-worldly domain. Participation in 'political activities' [kan muang] was commonly referred to as 'playing politics' [len kan muang]. Members of parliament were called 'political animals' [sat kan muang], the subtitle of Chainan's (1971) "Revolution, Coup and Rebellion after the Change in Government of 1932."

The debate format automatically delegitimated members of parliament. The fact that their duty was to fight over the allocation of funds in a public forum opened them up to charges of ignorance and selfishness,

confirming their low birth. Avirodha or 'non-anger' is one of the ten perfections of the great ruler. That they argued in public was a sure sign that the Buddha's teachings were not manifest in the kingdom, that the entire moral order was threatened. It was symbolically impossible to make a connection between disunity and virtue, attachment and veracity.

Since they were men of low birth and non-royal blood, and since they lacked the funds to sponsor merit-making ceremonies in the style of kings, members of the nobility, and powerful generals, members of parliament were not protected by the speech conventions that attended royalty, that would protect them from being publicly 'criticized' [damni]. According to the most ancient of Hindu and Buddhist traditions and ideologies of rank, 'blame' confirms one's lack of barami, and blamelessness is an analogue of religious purity.

To add to the problem, members of parliament came from rural areas, from the 'forest' which further identified them as barbarians the eyes of the Bangkok ruling elite. Since they continually argued over budget allocations, they appeared to be 'hot-hearted' and thus incapable of cultivating wisdom [pañña] or selflessness [dana, than]. They lacked the mental coolness and perceptual distance that would have enabled them to correctly analyze conditions in the kingdom and prescribe pure practice to correct the nation's economic problems. Since they were speaking in 'grasping' and 'hot-hearted' ways, they were automatically viewed as lacking insight into the ultimate causes and consequences of social or economic events. They were easily labeled as 'selfish' beings who hen kae tua or 'saw only themselves' (looked after their own 'bodies'), not the 'bodies' or needs of others nor the encompassing moral structure of events. This put them about on par with Chinese merchants in the interpretive hierarchy.

From Kingship to Leadership

The inherent weaknesses of the parliamentary format left Phibun free to dominate the interpretive process. He developed his own ideology of nationalism. Instead of promoting nationa, monarchy, and religion as the 'three pillars' of the Thai state, Phibun's advanced the ideology that at strong nation was based on faith in a strong 'leader' [phu nam] who supported the twin pillars of state [rat] and religion [sasana]. The phu nam concept (meaning literally a 'person who leads') was coined from the Western "leader" and was identified with democracy. Phibun identified the traditional concept of the leader as 'lord' [cao] with the "despotism" of the "absolute monarchy." Phibun's ideology of nationalism emphasized support of Theravada Buddhism and promoted discrimination against Chinese. Like Wachirawut, he played heavily on the warrior ideal (that of Ramkhamhaeng) as a basis for nationalism.

Pridi remained in the picture as a champion of democracy. He held numerous ministerial portfolios and became co-regent in the 1940s. He founded Thammasat University, a university for the study of law with an open admissions policy. His patronage of the university enabled him to build up a powerful support base from among talented members of the rural elite. His students returned to their natal areas and became the local leaders of national political parties.

The military retained its dominance in the constitutional period. State expenditures on education quadrupled from 1934 to 1938 while those on the military doubled in the same period, but the military budget was still twice that of education by 1937 (Landon 1939:58ff.).

Phibun was a great admirer of the Japanese, who were beginning to dominate Asia. Like the Japanese, Phibun rejected the influence of white foreigners [farang] in favour of a Pan-Asian movement. Like King

Wachirawut, his brand of nationalism stressed past injustices of Westerners towards the Siamese and was aimed at proving that the Siamese were as "modern" and "civilized" as their Western counterparts.

Phibun's "Economic Nationalism"

Phibun's nationalistic programs was created in partial response to the unprecedented flow of Chinese immigration that occurred between 1918 and 1931 and which supposedly led to fears that the Thai would be "swamped" by Chinese. In actuality, some of Phibun's moves seemed oriented towards the prevention of assimilation in order to maintain a balance of power between (parasitic) bureaucratic occupations and thriving economic ones.

In 1938, Luang Wicit Wathakan, Director of the Fine Arts Department, gave an address in which he compared the Jewish problem in Germany with the Chinese problem in Thailand, the effect of which was to increase the pressure on Chinese citizens and businesses. That same year, Phibun's government began to "Thai-ize" the economy, i.e., to nationalize Chinese businesses. In the absence of a king, this was one means of distributing economic control among the new government leaders. Since Luang Wicit, like Pridi and Phibun, was a lukcin, this movement seems primarily economic in its aims, and, as Skinner (1967:245), following Lapomarede (1934:256) points out, an expression of anti-Chinese sentiments by elite of Chinese extraction.

Thompson (1941:590) describes Siam as being "over-banked"; a rich source of income for the new military elite. In a press conference in 1940, Phibun suggested that the government had abandoned assimilation as its aim toward the Chinese, and that it would be better for the nation if civil officials refrained from marrying aliens and that Thai should

marry Thai (Skinner 1967:269). Government raids were aimed, in part, at Chinese banks. A 1939 raid against the Overseas Chinese Bank, for example, was "found to hold disguised deposits of 800,000 baht from merchants and societies presumably destined for China's war chest. . . ." (Skinner 1967:267)--deposits "confiscated" by the government. Among those deported for giving secret support to the Kuomintang were the managers of the Bank of Canton and the Overesea Chinese Bank. In 1942 the Bank of Thailand was established to coordinate banking in the nation. Riggs' (1966) extensive work on the connections between government and business indicate the final outcome of such moves: the installation of Thai generals on the boards of directors of Chinese banks and businesses--a new and more "modern" way of extracting surplus.

The Prerogatives of the King

In 1939, Phibun changed the country's name from 'Siam' to 'Thailand' and the name of its people from 'Siamese' to 'Thai' (cf. Coast 1953:15; Landon 1939). In 1940 and 1941 he began to assume the prerogatives of the Dhammaraja in earnest. He developed what may be described as "state lay Buddhism" with strong militaristic overtones. In 1942 he established a National Council on Culture (Thak 1979:95) which emphasized the spiritual and cultural development of the nation's citizens and which defined propriety as the practice of Western customs (as adopted by the Japanese). He declared that shirts and shoes should be worn in the capital and that husbands should kiss their wives before going to work and discouraged the chewing of betel nut on the grounds that it was a barbaric and uncivilized practice.

Phibun began to assume the ritual prerogatives of the Dhammaraja. He downplayed the royal kathin ceremonies (Thak 1979:323), but, according

to several elderly informants, personally 'adjusted' details of these and other ceremonies in the manner of a great king. According to an official in the Department of Religious Affairs, he personally adjusted the royal kathin by eliminating red handkerchiefs (used for chewing betel) from the kathin gift. Luang Wicit supported his efforts by writing numerous books on Thai nationalism that combined religious with nationalistic themes.

In some respects, Luang Wicit's work was a subtle usurpation of the interpretive prerogatives of Buddhist monks. He wrote, for example, a book entitled The Law of Kamma, i.e., a subject traditionally reserved for Buddhist monks. A whole generation was raised on Luang Wicit's nationalistic slogans, and military leaders found them particularly inspiring.¹

The Sangha Reform Act of 1941

In 1941 Phibun attempted his most serious exercise of royal religious prerogatives. He declared the Sangha Reform Act of 1941. Acting on behalf of the state, he set out to heal schisms within the Sangha and to declare on matters of religious orthodoxy. The act was declared as "an experiment to introduce the Buddhist order to the principles of democracy." It was "passed by the king" (?) on the advice and consent of the People's Representatives (Tambiah 1976:249).

Under the provisions of this act, the Supreme Patriarch was to be appointed by the king. Since there was no king in the country, this left a convenient vacuum for Phibun to fill. It established a democratic ecclesiastical assembly called the Sangasapha or Sangha Council, to be headed by a Sangha Premier, called the Sangha Nayok,

¹Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn thought highly of Luang Wicit's kamma book, for example.

Nayok being the same word used to refer to the prime minister of the civil government [nayok ratamontri]. The overall effect of the act was to distribute power more evenly between the Thammayut Mahanikai orders, at the same time bringing the Sangha more firmly under the control of the government (Phibun).

The act decreed that the legislative decisions of the Sangha Council had to be countersigned by the Ministry of Education (Tambiah 1976:249-252). It divided power between the Supreme Patriarch and the Sangha Prime Minister. Since the latter was appointed by the government, this further decreased the power of the (invisible) monarch over the Sangha.

Phibun and the Isan Monks

The revolution of 1932 changed the lay/monastic dynamic. Members of the revolutionary coup group needed to build powerful monastic lineages that were independent of royal and noble influence. They chose Isan monks for this purpose. Isan monks were highly respected; they had received royal patronage, but they were not of royal blood and many held grievances against the royal authority. On their part, in the absence of a king, i.e., of a single source of prestige and focal point of monastic competition, royal and commoner monks needed the support of powerful military leaders to advance in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The revolution changed internal Sangha dynamics as well. Given the new 'democratic' ecclesiastical rules, monk-leaders had to cultivate constituencies from both Thammayut and Mahanikai orders alike if they wished to command a majority vote in the Sangha Council.

According to a former Thammayut monk in his late sixties, Phibun first patronized the Thammayut order to identify himself with royalty.

It soon became apparent that he had to cultivate a broader base of if he was to control the Sangha and he later began to switch patronage to the Mahanikai, specifically, to Wat Mahathat, the head of this order. Luang Wicit may have been instrumental in this latter decision as he had ordained as a monk at Wat Mahathat and was the head of the Former Monks' Association there (Phra Phimonlatham 1957).

The situation thus arose that Phibun became the personal patron of two Isan monks: Somdet Uan, the 'younger brother' of Ubali (Can), the abbot of Wat Boromniwat (Thammayut), and one of Uan's own clients in the Mahanikai, Phra Phimonlatham, a brilliant monk from Khon Kaen who eventually became the abbot of Wat Mahathat.

Phibun chose Somdet Uan, the monk who had 'spoken softly' to the Prince Patriarch Wachirayan, as Sangha Nayok. This was a highly sensitive appointment, and, as the following incident demonstrates, one in which Phibun at least made a pretense of conforming to traditional hierarchical principles.

One of Uan's former students indicated in an interview that Colonel Phahon, the 'elder' member of the original coup group (and Minister of Education in the 1930s), was called out of retirement to select the new Sangha Premier. "Phayon came back [from retirement] at age 76 and asked all monks who should be Sangha Nayok," the story began, "and they voted on Uan. Phayon [the elder] then sent Field Marshal Phibun [the younger] to see Uan, and Phibun declared that Uan should become sangha nayok." Although the appointment aroused considerable controversy, the informant insisted that Uan was the unanimous choice of Thammayut and Mahanikai.

This gave Uan tremendous influence over the Isan Sangha. "After his promotion, Uan went to Korat," the informant continued. "He was in charge of all education in the Northeast. Udorn, Ubon and Korat were

centers of education Isan monks traveled to Khon Kaen, That Phanom, Loey and everywhere to inspect policy and equipment for education." As an afterthought he added that "Uan's pupils went anywhere [a sign of merit] . . . to the governors of provinces." The ranking monks of the Isan order remained close to the power elite throughout the constitutional period, just as they had throughout the days of the Chulalongkorn's administrative reforms.

Uan in turn cultivated a powerful Isan constituency among Mahanikai monks and actively promoted the career of the above-mentioned Phra Phimonlatham. It is to Phra Phimonlatham's story I will turn next.

Phimonlatham became a key figure in the major social dramas of the next three decades. His career bears a strong resemblance to that of Mongkut and Ubali and exemplifies the tensions that characterize relations between Isan people and the central Thai power elite in the twentieth century.

Phra Phimonlatham

Phimonlatham was born in Khon Kaen, the central-most province of the Isan area, in 1903. This was near the time of the phu mi bun uprisings, when hostility of Isan people toward central Thai rulers was at its peak (Khru Acaan Nisit 1975:1-4). He was educated at the temple school in his village, a day's walk from the provincial capital of Khon Kaen and in 1918, at the age of 15, he became a novice there, where he studied the central Thai dialect. Phimonlatham graduated with the title of wicha khru or 'teacher' and became a teacher at Wat Klang, one of the oldest Mahanikai temples in Khon Kaen.

In 1920 he left Khon Kaen to enter Wat Chanasongkhram in Bangkok. By his own account, this was the first time he was genuinely exposed to the

central Thai dialect (i.e., that he actively experienced discrimination for being Isan). There was and remains strong prejudice against Isan people on the part of central Thai, both in and out of Thai temples. A former prime minister equated the position of Isan people in Thailand with that of blacks in America. (The first time he was actively exposed to Isan people was when he ordained as a monk at Wat Benchamabophit.) Phimonlatham eventually took up residence at Wat Mahathat and became a client of Chao Khun Phra Thammatrailook, a high-ranking monk. In 1921 he passed the elementary monastic exams at that temple under the Chao Khun's tutelage.

In 1923, at the age of 20, he ordained as a monk with the Chao Khun as his upachaya, his teacher or ordainer. He attained the penultimate level of Pali scholarship, Level Eight, but did not achieve the highest Level Nine award. There are several possible reasons for this.

The Pali Nine title was and is highly prestigious; Pali Nine monks are under the personal patronage of the king. Pali exams have historically been controlled by a small group of monks at Wat Bowoniwet, the rival temple to Wat Mahathat.

Phra Phimonlatham, a truly brilliant individual, may have been blocked from advancement in the same way as was Prince Mongkut nearly a hundred years previously. In Mongkut's case, a high-ranking prince, a rival to the throne, impugned his motives in taking the Pali exams to prevent Mongkut, a prince-monk, from gaining excessive influence in the Sangha. Phimonlatham may have been blocked from advancement to prevent the Laotian minority from gaining excessive influence in the Sangha. Phimonlatham's own explanation of why he did not achieve Pali Nine status, given in an interview in 1979, was that he was 'not interested in achieving high awards' (i.e., he was not interested in worldly

matters), the same as that given by Mongkut when he requested that his own exams be discontinued in the 1820s (C. Reynolds 1973:77). The Pali exams marked Mongkut's first break with the traditional order. They may have also marked a turning point in Phimonlatham's life, judging by his later actions against the central Thai authority.

After these exams, Phimonlatham channeled his energy towards advancing in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In 1936 he attained the rank of Phra Rachakhana, a low-ranking administrative position and eventually he became chao khana or the leader of the monks in Ayuthaya province, one of the most prestigious positions in the Sangha. Since Ayuthaya has two first-class royal temples, Phimonlatham's appointment may have been made to counteract the influence of their abbots, men of royal blood. In 1947 Phimonlatham took a place on the Sangha Sapha and Uan eventually appointed him minister of the interior of the Sangha, the Sangha equivalent of that held by the minister of the interior in the civil government.

In 1948 Phimonlatham became abbot of Wat Mahathat, the headquarters of the entire Mahanikai religious order. In 1959, at the age of forty-six, he attained the rank of Phimonlatham, which placed him in line for the title of Somdet and in the running for the position of Supreme Patriarch.

Phra Phimonlatham built up a powerful support base throughout the kingdom, all-the-while continuing to build strong ties with monks and lay supporters in Isan. As minister of the interior of the Sangha, he distributed titles and resources to monks throughout the country and especially in the Northeast: to his followers at Wat Klang, Wat That and Wat Srinuan in Khon Kaen. He built a temple in his natal village, named, pointedly, 'The Temple of the Auspicious Phimonlatham,' and

created an extensive regional ordination line. He also reportedly made a practice of ordaining Isan socialist politicians and their followers, some say as a "political favour" to socialist leaders to help them obtain votes in national political elections. Phimonlatham and a leader of the Isan Socialist Party both confirmed this in interviews; they thought it perfectly proper.

This was another antinomy issue. Some viewed Phimonlatham's actions as a crime, as a failure to separate 'politics' and 'religion,' for which he was rightfully punished (chapters 13-14) while others viewed it as the spreading of morality.

Temples with the word 'Phimonlatham' in the title continued to spring up in Khon Kaen Province. He was establishing lordship over the region in the traditional manner, by personally scattering Buddha relics and teachings.

Phimonlatham received conspicuous patronage from Luang Phibun. Some claim he abused that patronage, going so far as to 'force people to stand and wait' for him, i.e., to pay respect as they would for nobility or highly sacred monks. (His entire natal village went to their knees with hands raised in a deep waiing position when Phimonlatham's Volvo rolled through the streets in 1980.) Powerful abbots at temples in Khon Kaen, men in their eighties, waiied him with their hands to their foreheads in the manner of children to adults or peasants to the king when he visited their temples, (somewhat resentfully, one sensed.) This habit of demanding submission may have ultimately proven to be Phimonlatham's undoing.

The New "Royal" Temple and the New State Religion

Phibun went further than is generally acknowledged in exercising the prerogatives of the Dhammaraja. He built a temple with state funds in his capacity as prime minister, assigned it royal status, and then attempted to merge the Thammayut and Mahanikai into a single Siyam-nikai or 'Siamese' religious order there. The following account of how this occurred is taken from 'The History of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat,' a commemorative volume printed by the Office of the Prime Minister on the occasion of a 'royal' kathin there in 1952, and from the statements of elderly informants who were either there or who knew the principals.

Phibun built Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, The Temple of the Auspicious Relic, in 1940 in Bangkhen, a district outside of Bangkok (the headquarters of the Air Force), conspicuously away from the center of Bangkok, an architectural monument to the Chakkri dynasty. The temple was built to commemorate or 'remember' [anuson] not the ancestors of a great king, but the revolution of 1932 and the founding of the new democratic government. It was and still is referred to as 'the first democracy temple' in Thailand.

When Phibun first proposed the project to his cabinet, he suggested that it be completed before Nation Day, a holiday which had preempted the celebration of the King's Birthday. He proposed that a democracy monument or 'pillar' [lak] be built near the temple, "because religion and nation are one and inseparable"--making no mention of the king in this nationalistic formula. The document, published by the Phibun government, refers to Nation Day as a rat-pithi or 'state ceremony' rather than as a racha pithi or 'royal ceremony' (Office of the Prime Minister 1952:1,5).

The Supreme Patriarch (the abbot of Wat Suthat) presided over the opening ceremony, during which cuttings from the bodhi tree in India were planted on the temple grounds. Luang Phibun donated a Buddha statue to the viharn.

In 1941 the temple became a wat luang or royal temple in an official ceremony that was presided over by Phibun and leading members of his government. Phibun appointed Somdet Uan as the temple's first abbot; Phya Phahon was the first person to ordain as a monk there, an event that was attended by both Phra Phimonlatham and Somdet Uan.

In 1947 the temple's sima or boundary stones were set by a 'royal order,' signed by Luang Phibun. That same year Wat Phra Sri Mahathat was declared a first-class royal temple, also by royal decree, the first time in the history of the modern polity that a temple became royal in the absence of the personal patronage of a king. The temple did not contain the relics of former kings, nor did it commemorate moments in their lives. Its main supporters were not members of the royal family or nobility, they were the creative entrepreneurs of the Phibun regime, men like Field Marshal Phin Chanhawan, whose business career I will discuss presently.

Pictures commemorating this 'royal kathin' of 1952 show Phya Phahon entering the bot to ordain as a monk, wearing the white robes of the novice seeking admission to the Sangha. A government official holds an umbrella of rank (the symbol of royalty) over his head. Another picture shows relics of the Buddha being set in a miniature cedi. The picture is entitled "the 'royal ceremony' [phra rachaphithi] enshrining the auspicious relic."

A Thai student 'guessed' that the military built Wat Phra Sri because they "needed a place to keep the relics of their ancestors"--in the manner of kings.

According to several informants, the real trouble began when Phibun tried to merge the nikai at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, a truly audacious act at which neither King Chulalongkorn nor his successors had been successful (C. Reynolds 1973). Phibun enlisted the help of Somdet Uan and Phra Phimonlatham in this endeavor. According to an elderly informant, Uan's participation signaled his break with the royally-born abbot of Wat Bowoniwet, who urged him not to do it because a 'Siam nikai' would eclipse the Thammayut.

Uan made the break. In the words of one of Uan's students, after he became abbot of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, his mind was 'clear' and he gained confidence (this of the man who was most famous for the saying 'To act stupid is not to be stupid,' a reference to effective ways of behaving around royalty and central Thai officials).

The experiment was a dismal failure, in part because Uan's idea of creating a unified nikai was to have Mahanikai monks follow Thammayut practice. In the opinion of a monk at the now Thammayut temple, the experiment did not work 'because Mahanikai monks were not strict enough.'

Uan's rise to power under military rather than royal patronage eventually compromised him, isolating his followers from royal patronage in later years. His monk-followers report that Uan was unhappy at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat at the time of his death; Bangkok was 'too far out' from Bangkok (i.e., from royally-sponsored religious orthodoxy).

Members of the Cakkri dynasty were not pleased with the temple. A palace official said Wat Phra Sri Mahathat did not deserve first-class royal status. "It is not old enough. It does not have enough history."

A rift developed between Isan monks of the Thammayut and Mahanikai lines. Somdet Uan died in the 1940s, leaving Phra Phimonlatham's path

to the position of Supreme Patriarch unobstructed, at least in his own eyes. As one of Uan's followers at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat reminisced about the old days when Uan was still alive: "Uan said 'Stop!' and Phimonlatham would stop." He called Phimonlatham a 'man who forgot himself like a buffalo forgot his feet,'² meaning that he was ungrateful (he did not 'look back'), but was quickly hushed by a senior monk.

For the first time since the Fourth Reign, the Mahanikai was ascendant over the Thammayut, in Isan and in the whole nation. Wat Mahathat and Wat Phra Sri Mahathat became rival centers for the interpretation of Lao history and culture. By the early 1950s, Phra Phimonlatham's career had begun to resemble that of the rebel monk Ubali (Can) of the Thammayut order. After Uan's death, Phimonlatham became the most influential leader from the Isan region.

Many rumours still circulate about the building of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat. There is general confusion as to whether monastic practice there is Mahanikai or Thammayut. One rumour maintains that Phaya Phahon built the temple as an act of expiation (lit., to lang bap, 'wash away sin') for leading the revolution against the king.

After World War II: 1944-1950

. . . during these disturbed times all the Grand theas . . . had carried away . . . the Almsbowl Relic and the Tooth Relic of the Master . . . and there on the mountain Kotthumala in a safe region had buried both the relics carefully in the earth and so preserved them. (Culavamsa II, LXXXI.17-19)

Since Phibun sided, perhaps reluctantly, with the Japanese during World War II, he found himself in a perilous position afterwards, he narrowly missed being tried as a war criminal and he and the army were in disgrace.

²Pen khon lum tua mua wua lum tin.

Pridi, on the other hand, had maintained strong ties with the United States. He organized a Free Thai movement which cooperated with the OSS, operating out of Ceylon. Many prominent members of the Thai nobility and educated classes were members of this movement, including the present Lord Chamberlain. Many Isan leaders were also members, and their prestige, like Pridi's, increased after the war.

Phibun made a last-ditch attempt to reassert his royal status after the war. In 1944 he proposed a bill to parliament to move the capital to Petchabun which would have signalled the definitive end of the Chakri dynasty. Phibun proposed that a buddhamonthon or 'Buddha circle' be established there as a more 'pure place' to keep important relics.

The parliament refused to authorize the bill and Phibun was forced to resign. There were rumours that Pridi, a co-regent with Lieutenant General Prince Athit, engineered his downfall.³

Phibun's resignation led to a cycle of democratic rule dominated by his arch-rival, Pridi. In 1944, Pridi restored the old name, 'Siam,' and became sole regent, meaning that he rather than Phibun was signing documents 'in the name of the king'.

In 1945 Pridi invited twenty-one-year-old king Ananda back to Thailand, perhaps to undercut Phibun's persistent claims to a king-like status. The regency was dissolved and Pridi was given the title of Elder Statesman by the parliament. His official duty was to advise the king and the parliament on national matters.

³One of Phibun's followers, General Praphat Charusathien, was the phu burana or person charged with 'developing' the Buddha-circle at Petchabun. Burana is an ancient Pali word that refers to preservation of sacred [sakit] objects and monuments (chapter 18). Praphat's explanation of why the 'Buddha circle failed' was that "The government could not agree on the budget."

The years 1944 to 1947 comprise a relatively liberal period in Thailand's history in terms of foreign and domestic policy. Government actions were undertaken in the name of 'Thai socialism' and the period is generally referred to as one of "economic nationalism." Political parties were organized, and royalists were allowed to participate in party politics for the first time since the 1930s.

The royalists rallied around M.R. Kukrit Pramote, a grandson of Chulalongkorn, a great grandson of Mongkut. Kukrit later allied himself with the political conservative, Khuang Apiwongse, founder of the Democrat Party. In the early 1970s Kukrit organized the Social Action Party (SAP), whose role in the modern history of Isan will be discussed in upcoming chapters.

The country faced severe economic problems after the war. Rice production had been seriously curtailed and the Japanese had depleted the nation's existing surplus. After the war there were floods and production fell even more (Thak 1979:16).

There was a rapid succession of prime ministers until 1946. Political in-fighting caused Pridi to step 'down' from his position of Elder Statesman to become prime minister.⁴ Despite his apparent support of the monarchy, Pridi's government passed a new constitution in 1946 limiting the king's power (Thak 1979:13, 36).

A succession of civilian governments were held morally responsible for severe post-war economic conditions: inflation and a shortage of goods plus allied-enforced war reparations in the form of rice. The nominally 'socialist' government controlled the sale of rice. This increased smuggling and corruption as government and market prices differed radically.

⁴No 'political' position is ever held in great respect.

I suggest that the "perfection paradigm" of religious virtuosity was integral to the political dynamic of the period. Given the enormity of the nation's problems and the uncertainties as to what constituted legitimate principles of rule, each prime minister would take on and complete or 'perfect' [tham hai sombun] a limited task, then resign (renounce power) having completed it (Thak 1979:11) to preserve his personal integrity. This was one way around antinomy problems.

Isan Politicians: The Voices of Dissent

Isan politicians gained leverage in the political process during the post-war period. Some joined Pridi's Free Thai Party, others the Democrat Party. This was not necessarily a good thing, however, as action in the political arena was generally identified by metaphors of dirt and disorder.

Political parties were regarded in the traditional manner, as new types of vehicles for personal patronage: the embodiment of traditional ideals once again constituting the transgression of Western ideals. There was a temporary split in the Isan political faction in 1946, when Seni Pramote resigned from his stint as prime minister (Thak 1979:11), but in general Isan politicians remained united in their demands that monies be allotted for development of the Isan area.

Isan M.P.'s played a specific type of discourse role in the political dramas of the period. In return for patronage of powerful central Thai political leaders, they became the 'voice of suffering' in national conflicts, instruments of 'criticism' and 'blame' against national politicians at political rallies. This speech form connotes not only the hidden 'impurity of heart' of the targeted leaders, but the low rank of the speakers as well. Coming as they did from one of the poorest

regions of the country, Isan politicians were perfect for this role. Their complaints of suffering and disorder confirmed national political leaders' observations of the decline of the 'whole' national and cosmic order.

This criticism took two forms: criticism of leaders' policies (but not of their intentions), and the more common form of 'indirect' or 'roundabout' speech, the observation of signs of decline in the physical universe (i.e., the price of rice). These observations were such as to impugn the inner purity of the nation's leaders.

The assumption of this low rhetorical position in the Thai political process did nothing for the national prestige of Isan leaders as the public airing of grievances was referred to by such terms as the 'washing of dirty linen' (Thak 1979:105). Worse yet, the 'voices of suffering' in one political cycle were immediately targeted for repression as 'obstructions to unity' in the next.⁵

The Restoration of Order: 1946-1949

Pridi's democratic government was on shaky enough grounds when the young King Anan was found dead of a gunshot wound to the head in the Grand Palace in 1946. Pridi used force to quell 'rumours' of his own involvement with Anan's death (some spread by the above-mentioned Isan politicians), and he was eventually forced to resign.

The damage was done, however, as rumours of evil were 'spreading across the land.' The cause of Ananda's death was never resolved because Ananda's mother, members of the royal household, and the police destroyed the evidence (Vicitvong 1979:251; Thak 1979:21).

⁵For example, Pridi arrested a Democrat from Ubon for shouting in a public theatre that Pridi was behind the assassination of the king (Thak 1979:21). The next government arrested three Isan leaders, followers of Pridi, for planning a rebellion.

On 9 June 1946 the young Prince Bhumibol succeeded his brother as king but his coronation did not take place until 1950, four years later. Like Pridi, the young king was on shaky grounds, as rumours were circulating that he, too, was involved in his brother's death.

In 1947, General Phin Chunhawan, acting on behalf of Luang Phibun, led a successful coup to 'restore order.' In justifying the coup, Phin noted that "although Thailand was one of the world's richest rice countries, the people had to line up to buy low grade rice". Civilian governments had failed to provide adequate police protection, and Phin himself had been "forced to flee to Bangkok after being warned that bandits were planning to raid his house and no one could give him protection." He was particularly upset over the fact that a car belonging to the king had mysteriously disappeared, indicating that "even royal property was no longer safe" (Thak 1979:18-21).

The coup group invited Khuang back as prime minister to avoid criticism from abroad--to maintain at least the appearance of democracy. When Khuang attempted to take control of the government, however, four coup leaders visited him at his home in 1948 and "invited" him to resign (Thak 1979:40). In an incident that underscored both the weakness of Khuang (the 'democrat') and the young king, Khuang resigned, but not before giving full details of the "hold up" that led to his resignation to the uncrowned and powerless Bhumibol (1979:40). Soon after the incident, Bhumibol returned to Switzerland with his mother to "pursue his studies" and prepare himself for the kingship.

These events paved the way for Phibun's comeback in 1947, an event Phibun celebrated by organizing yet another cultural revitalization program. He brought back the First Ploughing Ceremony, but only the phrarachaphithi phutamonkhon, the part when the (absent) king went to

the temple to pray for good crops (Thak 1979:323). He changed the name of the country back from 'Siam' to 'Thailand.'

The death of King Ananda marked the end of Pridi's political career. In 1949 he staged an unsuccessful coup and afterwards went into permanent exile in the People's Republic of China. Phibun became prime minister and remained in that position until 1956. In 1949 four Isan politicians, ministers in Pridi's government, were arrested by the notorious Police-General Phao Sriyanon on charges of planning a rebellion. They were "shot while trying to escape" (Thak 1979:46, 48-49; Vicitvong 1979:267).

Enter the Triumvirate

In 1947, Thailand entered a decade of military rule. Power was divided among members of a military "triumvirate" consisting of Phibun (who never again regained the power he held before the war), Police General Phao Siyanon, and General Sarit Thannarat, Commander of the First Army of Bangkok. Instead of his arch-rival Pridi, Phibun had to share power with two ambitious and dangerous military leaders.

In the 1940s, antinomy issues had been expressed in the contrasting careers of two individuals, Phibun and Pridi. In the 1950s they were expressed in the career of a single individual, Phibun, who constantly purified and repurified social ritual practice, shifting from authoritarian to democratic to authoritarian leadership styles to stave off challenges from Phao and Sarit.

The 'Socialist' Rice Cooperatives

Capitalism is duty to family. Soldiering is duty to the nation. (Field Marshal Phin Chunhawan, Cremation Volume)

As noted earlier, relations of production did not change radically with the rise of the new men in the 1930s. Powerful generals and high-ranking bureaucrats replaced members of the nobility in extracting surplus, by directly taxing peasants or by taxing different economic activities. In the 1940s and 1950s surplus was extracted through "state cooperatives".

The Thai bureaucratic elite developed so-called "free-wheeling" and "semi-official" trading ventures by allying themselves with powerful Chinese merchants in what became the military version of Thai socialism. These ventures operated along traditional patron-client lines and exploited monopolistic privileges secured through political and bureaucratic influence. Military leaders also "tapped" Chinese financial resources and managerial expertise to provide funds for their political parties; this helped swell the ranks of a leader's clientele (Girling 1981:76).

One of the most notorious of these cooperatives operated in the Northeast. The military coup group of 1947 formed the Organization for War Veterans (Saha Samakhi), headed by General (later Field Marshal) Phin Chunhawan, a strong supporter of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat. The organization first engaged in the soft drink trade without notable success. It next "engaged" in rice trade in the Isan area and began to flourish. The organization established a partnership with a Chinese rice merchant and a mill owner. These two businessmen in turn founded an association of rice millers which bought and milled the rice of Isan farmers and then resold it at higher prices in Bangkok.

Phin and his military colleagues sat on the board of directors of the cooperative. One reason the arrangement was so successful was that Phin headed the Second Army of the Northeast; he controlled the region's

railroad and trucking systems. No rice left the Northeast without its owners first selling it to the cooperative or paying a transportation tax (Skinner 1958:199).

Phin became so involved in business that he modestly declined the position of prime minister after the 1947 coup, which he led (and after which he supported Phibun for the position of premier). As he explained in a 28 January 1973 interview with the Bangkok Post: "There were then so many colleagues pushing me to take the premiership. I refused to do so. I am a soldier and want to be only a soldier."

In 1949 with the communist victory in the People's Republic, the Chinese flow of immigration ended abruptly. The immigrants were no longer suspended between two kingdoms and new types of accommodations between 'Thai' and 'Chinese' people had to be reached.

Enter the Americans

Uncoincidentally, the brief democratic period in Thailand ended when the McCarthy era began in the United States. Soon after the war, the U.S. interest turned to "stopping communism" in Southeast Asia (Darling 1965) and in 1954 Thailand became a founding member of the American-dominated, anti-communist Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

The cultivation of strong ties with the United States boded well for Police General Phao and ill for independent Isan politicians. It led once again to a serious interpretive exercise, that of ascertaining the 'true meaning' of communism.

The Trading Generals: Thai Military Capitalism

Beginning in 1954 the United States gave the Thai police millions of dollars worth of weaponry--tanks, armored cars, planes, helicopters, boats and modern firearms--to "fight communism" in Thailand. The CIA-affiliated Sea Supply Company helped train Thai police in the art of guerilla fighting. Phao began to exert monopolistic control over the opium trade, all of which helped him build up political and business support (McCoy 1972).

Phao, like Field Marshal Phin, engaged heavily in business. He sat on the board of directors of more than twenty-six companies (Thak 1979:82-83). Like other military leaders, he made select alliances with leading Chinese businesses and banks, and persecuted less powerful Chinese for being suspected communists, men susceptible to 'outside influences.'

Phao saw kommunit everywhere. His enemies, real or imagined, began to disappear, some claim into the Chao Phraya River wearing cement shoes (Thak 1979:81,87).

One of Phao's most notorious acts was to eliminate the above-mentioned five politicians, three of whom were Isan members of the Free Thai (Seri Thai) movement. They were detained for questioning, charged with planning a coup with "foreign backing."

Phao played the role of government "enforcer" in the 1950s. Phibun did not attempt to curtail his activities, and Sarit was not yet ready to make a bid for power. Phao, like Field Marshal Phin Chanhawan, was mainly interested in building up a personal fortune, much of which found its way into Swiss bank accounts (Thak 1979:84).

Since Phao and Phin were devoting their energies to big business, the most important social dramas of the 1950s took place between King

Bhumibol, the monk Phimonlatham, and Field Marshal Phibun. The careers of these three men demonstrate the nature of the legitimation deadlock the nation found itself in after World War II.

CHAPTER 8

SEARCHING FOR DHAMMA: 1950-1957

A non-ksatriya king was not acceptable to the Sinhalese as king. Towards the end of the Sinhalese monarchy, the Sinhalese allowed their throne to pass into the hands of the hated Tamils, and let it stay with them, rather than support the claims of Kandyan chiefs who were of goyigama (farmer) caste. (Seneviratne, Rituals of the Kandyan state)

Introduction

In 1950 the young King Bhumibol returned to Thailand to claim his throne and a three-way race for virtue developed between him, Luang Phibun, and the "clever, quick-witted" but no longer polite Phra Phimonlatham. The blood/merit issue came to a head and a legitimation deadlock developed that remained unbroken until the Sarit coup of 1957.

In 1957 the military used antinomy issues as part of a complex rationale for dismantling Phibun's soteriological state and for creating a new one. A capitalist folk economic ideology was born in this revolution, one that was refined in a series of military coups that were patterned after royal succession battles. Thus were born the "development ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s.

Searching for Dhamma: The Pilgrimage Paradigm

The post-war crisis was perceived in moral rather than economic terms. As Dr. Sanya Thammasakti, former prime minister and head of the king's privy council characterized the period in a 1979 interview: "After World War II, people were desperate. Then Somdet Prayan and

Buddhathat bhikkhu taught the way to control breath and control mind."¹

These races for virtue took the form of pilgrimages, of protagonists 'searching for methods' [pai ha withi] of practice that would restore order. Pilgrimages were ways of suwaeng tham, 'illuminating dhamma.' They were also the focal points of the key political dramas of the 1950s (cf. chapter 12).

Pilgrimages are traditionally the means through which Buddhist monks, princes, and kings advance on the path of purification. There are many paradigms of sacred travel in the Theravada tradition. Sidhatta's search for dhamma from capital to forest is the master paradigm. The great Indian King Asoka conducted dhamma tours' of his kingdom to look after the welfare of his subjects (Nikam and McKeon 1959). The Great Cakkavatti King flies through the air, stopping at each of the four continents of Jambu in the Trai Phum cosmology to exhort his subjects to behave with propriety, and King Nimi is taken on a tour of the Buddhist hells by his charioteer in the Nimi Jataka (Wray 1972:49) to learn the truth of suffering and attachment. In the northern chronicle, the Phra Malai Sutta, the monk protagonist, Phra Malai, pays a visit to the heavenly worlds to ask the Metteya when he will descend into the human world. In mythology and warfare, Hindu and Buddhist princes travel (i.e., flee) to the forest to practice austerities, returning to the capital to claim their thrones (Falk 1973). Buddhist monks 'full of faith' endure hardships in the forest while traveling to the Buddha's side in the Thai government's version of the origins of the kathin ceremony (Phra Rachamongkhonmuni [Thet] 1978:1). Meditation monks

¹Somdet Prayan is the present abbot of Wat Bowoniwet. Buddhathat is one of Thailand's leading monk-philosophers. Dr. Sanya ordained as a monk at Wat Benchamabophit, a Thammayut temple whose abbot was appointed Sangha Nayok after Uan's death.

'wander' [thudong] through the forests of the kingdom in search of dhamma, practicing austerities and attaining arahant status along the way. Southeast Asian Buddhist kings, like those in the Sinhalese epic tales (Geiger 1958:258) venture forth from their palaces to venerate the relics of the Buddha. They may journey to the edges of their kingdoms to restore or venerate religious objects, thereby marking of the boundaries of the state. To the nineteenth century, Thai kings rarely ventured out of their capitals, but sent their councilors, the 'eyes and ears' of the court, to inspect their kingdoms and report on the welfare of their subjects. In contrast, King Bhumibol 'progresses' [phrarachadamnoen] across his kingdom in a clockwise or munwian (circular) pattern to 'observe' the suffering and happiness of his subjects.

In Thailand, many such journeys share features in common. They are referred to as 'searching for dhamma' or 'searching for methods' [pai ha withi] of new social or religious practice. Like the monks in the kathin origins myth, Thai pilgrims, monks or laity, generally experience a 'disturbed heart' [kangwon cai] about existing moral conditions before embarking on their journeys (chapter 12). Like the protagonists of mythic tales, they observe new sights, meditate on their moral significance, and achieve new levels of awareness on their journeys.

In most cases, in social life as in mythology, the pilgrimage is climaxed by the pilgrim's triumphant return to the capital. The prince claims his kingdom and announces the new moral order. Princes, kings, and monks return home to purify rituals and texts, changing them 'to suit time and place'--translating the insights from their journeys into concrete social practice. Once returned, they prescribe new social principles to 'reduce the suffering' [lit., tat kilet, 'cut the impurities'] of their subjects.

When Thai monks set forth on journeys, they usually travel to Sri Lanka in search of original 'uncorrupted' versions of Buddhist texts, or they travel to Burma to discover new meditation methods for which Burmese monks are reknown. When they return to the capital, they, too, introduce new methods of religious practice, but for centuries only Buddhist kings had the right to commission such pilgrimages.

In this chapter I will describe key events in the intertwined careers of King Bhumibol, Luang Phibun, and Phra Phimonlatham. Pilgrimages marked the turning points in their lives and in the life of the kingdom. These were controversial pilgrimages that reflected on issues of modernization.

The Deadlock

The antinomy issue was most acute in the post-war period. The 1947 coup leaders had little basis of legitimation. They were not democratic in any conceivable sense. They obtained a high court ruling declaring that the coup was legal: "To hold that [a country after a coup] could never be lawfully governed would be a dangerous legalism" the document stated weakly (Vella 1955:392-393).

The new leaders were not members of the nobility; Phibun had purged princes of the blood from the armed services, systematically stripping the nobility of opportunities to fulfill their khattiya status (his own king-like actions stripping soldiers of common birth of opportunities to claim membership in a pure bloodline of warriors).

The return of the king placed Phibun at a point non plus over the distribution of ritual privileges. With a genuine king in the country, military leaders could no longer support the fiction that they were performing state rituals 'in the name of the king.' They could not

demand control of ritual privileges on the grounds the "precise performance of rituals" was necessary for the efficient administration of the state because they were advocating "modern" socialist and democratic ideologies of order as a corrective to the ills caused by the monarchy. Military leaders could not perform religious ceremonies at royal temples and call them 'royal ceremonies' [racha-pithi] without the formal endorsement or participation of the king. Since many 'state ceremonies' [rat-pithi] were adapted from royal ceremonies, their performance by men of non-royal blood would have little impact on the populace when a genuine king was in the kingdom. (The sight of a military strongman performing a kathin ritual was not likely to bring men flocking to Bangkok to hen khon prasoet or see nobility.) Finally, public battles over the division of ritual privileges only raised a century-old dispute over the cost of such rituals. Their performance demonstrated profligacy not wisdom on the part of the leadership and furthermore, if funded privately, what was the source of these funds, corruption? Nevertheless, military leaders were not men of pure lineage. Since they lacked the innate wisdom associated with the possession of royal blood, they had to perform conspicuous rituals to purify themselves. How else were they to demonstrate the moral authority necessary to govern the kingdom and purify the Sangha?

Barami and Amnat: Virtuous and Unvirtuous Power

The deadlock resulted in an intensification of emphasis on the distinction barami and amnat, between virtuous power and the ability to use force. Because they lacked royal blood, members of the military were seen as having amnat, the ability to use force (especially after they began receiving U.S. military aid), but as having little barami or

virtue, the basis of leaders' ability to command voluntary compliance from their subjects. Membership on the boards of directors of rice cooperative may have made military leaders the de facto 'lords of the fields,' but it did not help them 'charm men by the norm.'

King Bhumibol had the opposite problem. He had barami but no amnat. He had pure warrior blood running through his veins. He was clearly descended from a line of powerful kings; Bangkok was one great architectural monument to the glory of his ancestors. He had unquestionable rights to perform rituals at the leading temples in Bangkok because they were lineage temples that contained the relics of his ancestors. Professional bureaucrats may not have been impressed by a king's bodhisatta claims or possession of magical powers, but the rural populace was.

The king lacked the money necessary to fulfill his Dhammaraja status, however. After the revolution of 1932 royal palaces had been turned into government ministries. (The palace of Prince Boriphat, the minister of the interior under King Prachadipok, was turned into the headquarters of the Bank of Thailand [Vicitvong 1979:11].) Royal treasures disappeared and the royal treasuries were emptied of cash. The constitution of 1948 was similar to that of 1932 in that the government controlled the privy council and the privy council controlled the royal purse strings (Thak 1978:19-20).

There was a related problem. The king had no universally acceptable means of generating income apart from that deriving from the royal properties. He could not sell trade monopolies. He could not maintain a royal lifestyle with tax money 'farmed off the backs of farmers.' If he went into business he might become a great merchant, but he could not become a great world renouncer. Merchants or noble householders may

have become kings in the past, but kings of warrior status did not descend the ladder of virtue to become merchants themselves. Their task was to oversee the activities of great merchants. King Bhumibol may have been born with barami but he could not become a fully realized Dhammaraja if he was poor. Without cash how could he perfect the virtue of dana or demonstrate the virtue of tapa, unending diligence in search of dhamma?

For King Bhumibol there was additional complications. He was only twenty-three years old when he took the throne and he did so under a cloud of suspicion because of the circumstances of his brother's death. Police-general Phao and others of his ilk would have gladly had done away with the monarchy (as they had perhaps done away with King Ananda) and yet for many years afterwards rumours circulated in Bangkok that Phao was blackmailing the king over Ananda's death.

Finally, the king inherited the general antinomy problems that had plagued his more immediate ancestors. He could not openly invoke his pure lineage as a basis for exercising power without reviving charges that monarchs and monarchies were despotic, old-fashioned, and undemocratic. Was he trying to restore the "absolute monarchy"?

Bhumibol had the edge, however. Buddhaghosa's statement to the contrary--that men are made righteous by pure actions alone, and not by lineage and wealth--Bhumibol's pure blood and magical touch gave him a clear lead in the race for virtue. Objects given by 'the hands of the king' were still considered to be sacred, all the king needed was the cash to buy them.

There was yet a third category of contender in the races for virtue in the 1950s, powerful Buddhist monks, the king's most serious rivals in the race for purity. The Sangha had gained considerable independence in

the absence of a powerful king but powerful monks faced their own antinomy problems, however, those deriving from Phibun's 'democratic' reforms of the Sangha. A democratic Sangha was a divided Sangha. Even worse than the spectre of politicians arguing in public was that of monks arguing in public, which boded ill for the religious state of the entire polity. And, after 1950, powerful monks in the Sangha had a new concern. Did the patronage of powerful military figures suddenly carry a hidden price tag, the loss of royal patronage?

Enter the King

Pundits are honoured by their lore, warriors by their bravery
but Kings for their quietness and King Bhumibol had earned
that honour. (Phra Sarasas, Thailand My Country)

King Bhumibol, a grandson in direct line to King Chulalongkorn, was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on December 5, 1927, the third and youngest child of the Prince and Princess Mahidol of Songkhla. He received his primary schooling in Bangkok and his secondary and university education in Switzerland. Like other members of the royal family, his parents had left the country after King Prajadipok abdicated in 1935.

Bhumibol was not crowned until 1950. Pictures of the coronation procession show him held high on a palanquin with the umbrella of state held over his head: flanked by Phibun, Phin, Phao and other leading military figures of the day.

During the coronation ceremony, Bhumibol, the ninth king of the Cakkri dynasty, swore to "rule for the benefit and happiness of the Thai people" but Phibun, who still aspired to be a great leader if not a great king (and perhaps the founder of his own dynasty),² did everything in his power to prevent him from ruling in any capacity at all.

²In the 1950s ranking military figures arranged marriages among their offspring. Phin Chunnawan's daughter married Police-General Phao's son.

The Ritual Strategy

The king began to exercise power and acquire income by exercising those prerogatives that were his by birth, ritual prerogatives, in order to establish alliances with rich Chinese merchants and to secure the loyalty of Thai peasants. (For King Bhumibol to participate in other than ritual activities in the 1950s was to invite charges that he was 'playing politics.')

Since Luang Phibun was directing the king's official activities, those formally identified with the interests of the nation, the king expanded his unofficial ritual activities, his 'special royal work' [ngan luang phiset], a concept first expressed in relation to his performance of kathin ceremonies.

In interviews in 1979 and 1980, workers at the Grand Palace said that the king offered kathin at four or five main temples a year as 'official royal work,' called his official 'duty' [na thi]. His offerings of kathin ton were 'special royal work.' According to a longtime palace retainer, "All kings offered kathin ton occasionally. This king, beginning in 1950 or 1951, does it every year. That is what distinguishes him from other kings." Where did he offer kathin ton? "At poor temples in rural areas. This is for the benefit of the wat," the official explained. "If the king goes and invites lots of people, it helps the wat."

The king's "inviting lots of people" to his kathin changed the financial structures of his ceremonies. People from all walks of life were invited to add to the king's kathin gift. As the court astrologer

General Sarit arranged the marriage of his son to the daughter of Air Marshal Chalermkiat.

explained, this was necessary because the king had no money. Who added to the king's kathin gift? "Wealthy (Sino-Thai) businessmen." As another palace official explained, "Businessmen like to make merit." The king had began his own climb to power.

Soon after his coronation, King Bhumibol began a thirty year practice of exchanging ritual for economic benefits. Rights to participate in 'royal rituals' in one capacity or another were distributed in exchange for support of those temples, cash contributions to royal charities, or perhaps for discrete privileges in the business world (seats for representatives of the royal properties on boards of directors). As I will argue in upcoming chapters, such exchanges eventually transformed the most powerful members of the Chinese merchant class into the modern Thai corporate nobility.

From statements made by older officials in the palace, it appears that the young king began to assert himself was by retaking control of ritual privileges at royal temples, a practice which is tangentially related to his performance of kathin ton. As one official said, the king allowed wealthy people to offer kathin at royal temples in ceremonies called kathin phrarachathan. "Phrarachathan means he is the royal sponsor," said one palace official. "Phrarachathan is phrarachanukhra," the conferring of royal 'auspicious welfare' on the most privileged of his subjects. The king also started assigning ministries the kathin at royal temples outside the capital, for which practice the kathin ton was supposedly the prototype. As a palace official summed it up:

Offering kathin ton is to supplement the king's work. This sets a trend for the people and for ministries. Instead of fighting to get wat in Bangkok, they are assigned them. They can care about and have money for those wat. This way ministries and businesses can help people in a way that is suitable.

Judging by contemporary practices, men who were judged worthy of receiving those ritual privileges were men who had made generous contributions to the royal charities, acts which were characterized as 'donations [boricak] to the nation.'

The kathin ton were offered mainly in rural areas. They had two effects on the monarchy. First, the monarchy was revitalized (or reactivated) in rural areas, and the king gained the passionate loyalty of Thai farmers, a task the military often found difficult if not impossible. The king thus bypassed the educated and often fractious elite of the capital in a strategy that was similar to that used by Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia in the 1950s (Osborne 1973). Second, these kathin gave the king the chance to discover and venerate his own line of (Thammayut) meditation monks, the nation's new crop of 'supposed' saints. "The king offers kathin ton at temples with special monks and at temples poor people respect very much," the official continued. What kinds of monks? "This king respects monks who are strict in the vinaya. He supports all the best monks like Acaan Fan at Wat Pa Udom in Nakorn Sakorn. This is ngan luang phiset." Acaan Fan is one of the most famous of the new line of Isan saints. His ordination line extends from that of King Mongkut (Tambiah 1984).

The King and His Bankers

The government continued to pass laws discriminating against the Chinese into the 1950s. At the same time, the Phao, Sarit, and Phibun factions divided the nation's large corporations and commercial banks into separate spheres of influence (Riggs 1966).

Although not as much is known of the process, the king also began to ally himself with powerful Chinese merchants and major commercial banks.

He could not offer physical protection in return for economic privileges as could the military, but he had something equally important to offer: royal titles, ritual privileges, and honour [kiat]. These gifts confirmed the inner purity of the nation's merchants. Of all men, the king was assumed most able to 'see into' their hearts and minds and confirm the purity of their intentions a loyal Thai citizens.

According to palace officials, the king granted royal patronage to five commercial banks in the early 1950s. These banks were allowed to use the krut or garuda bird, the sign of royalty and the Royal Thai Government, in their business transactions. As Thailand into the 80's (1979:13) characterizes this policy, the krut is given by royal appointment to those companies which have "served by nation." The king offered royal titles to businessmen, in exchange, perhaps, for contributions to royal merit-making endeavors, the royal charities, or, even, perhaps to the (hidden) royal treasuries. Between 1952 and 1956, King Bhumibol decorated twenty-six Chinese leaders. In February 1956, he granted an audience to a large group of Chinese leaders in connection with the public sacrificial rites held by the Chinese for the deceased grandmother of the king. The forty-six included the forty-six wealthiest and most influential leaders in the Chinese community (Skinner 1958:318-319). As Skinner further notes, "There are certainly grounds here for suspecting a return to the tactic described in the 1860's," that observed by Bastien (1867:68) as a "policy to enoble every Chinese important because of riches or influence and thus draw him into the interests of the country." In Skinner's (1958:319) estimation:

If present trends are continued, these leaders and their families will eventually be entirely lost to Chinese society in Thailand. Following the example of their leaders, and weakened by their defection, the entire Chinese community will inevitably move more rapidly toward complete assimilation to Thai society.

As I will demonstrate in later chapters, this was not exactly what happened.

The palace had direct ties with the banking world. The present and previous lord chamberlains, father and son, were directors of major commercial banks. The present lord chamberlain was director of Thai Farmers Bank before becoming director of Thai Commercial Bank. As Skinner (1958:193) notes, the former was controlled by (then) Major Thanom Kittikachorn and Hakka leaders in the 1950s. Bangkok Bank was a Chinese bank that was reorganized in 1952 and 1953. It became a heavily capitalized Sino-Thai institution (Skinner 1958:237). The minister of economic affairs was the chairman, a former lord chamberlain was vice president, and two deputy ministers (both generals) and a police officer were on the board of directors (Girling 1981:80; Skinner 1958:142-196). At present the royal family is the majority stockholder in its own bank.

The Pilgrimage Aborted

By 1955 Bhumibol was ready to make a bid for power. He travelled to the Northeast to visit his subjects, at which time he was reportedly mobbed by the peasantry. As a publication of the 1979 Kriangsak government described that visit, "King Bhumibol was enthusiastically welcomed by crowds numbering hundreds of thousands. Villagers walked for days, following crude trails over rugged, dangerous terrain just for a fleeting glimpse of their king" (Office of the Prime Minister 1979:119).

Luang Phibun, reportedly disturbed by the king's popularity (Wilson 1962:114), refused to finance any more such trips and the king was henceforth prevented from personally looking after the welfare of his subjects in any but a ritual capacity (Thak 1979:310). If the king was

to build his barami he would have to do so through his 'unofficial' activities. In October 1956 he ordained as a Buddhist monk at Wat Bowoniwet, advancing himself on the path of purification in a way that Phibun could hardly contest.

Phibun Strikes Back: Bureaucratically

To counter the loss of influence caused by the king's return, Luang Phibun reverted to the legitimation strategies he had practiced in the previous decade. He assigned ritual and interpretive prerogatives to the state [rat] and then exercised them in his capacity as prime minister.

In 1952, a year after Bhumibol's coronation (and yet another coup), Phibun upgraded the National Council on Culture to the status of a ministry and established himself as the new minister of culture. The ministry of culture became the official interpretive branch or instrument of propaganda of the state.

The ministry developed a ideology of Thai culture that was linked to Thai nationhood and to Thai kingship, but not to the Cakkri dynasty. It issued edicts on propriety and the true meaning of things, the traditional task of kings and monks. It took control of the Sangha (Phibun having transferred the Department of Religious Affairs from the ministry of education to the ministry of culture) and of important state rituals.

Phibun upgraded his position from that of 'leader' to that of 'father of the people,' identifying himself with King Ramkhamhaeng of the Sukhothai dynasty and the king as the 'lord' [cao] of the people, a term reminiscent of the 'absolute monarchs' of the Ayuthayan kingdom. Luang Wichit, one of the chief ideologues of the ministry, wrote a play called

"The [Virtuous] Power of King Ramkhamhaeng" which supported Phibun's claims to be a latter-day King Ramkhamhaeng. In the play Ramkhamhaeng had lines such as "There are no big shots or lords [cao] in Sukhothai; there are only father and children [pho kap luk]" and "Sukhothai has no king [caokrung], it has only father [pho], father of the city [phomuang], and highest father [phokhun]." The country was strong and prosperous because it had a great and understanding phokhun who mingled with the people (translated in Thak 1979:96)

Unfortunately for Phibun, a commoner and a king "mingling" with the people did not generate the same effect, and Thai citizens never forgot that Phibun lacked royal blood. Thus Thak (1979:95) writes that Phibun's attempts to reinforce traditional social values through the ministry of culture "were met with cynicism and amusement by many people."

The U.S. government had recognized the Phibun government in 1948 (Darling 1965). In the early 1950s Phibun began to identify himself with the United States, and pro-American and anti-communist themes wove their way into his rhetoric of purification. He began to forge his own 'middle way,' equating things noble [ariya] with things American, stressing filial values and anti-communism as conjoined virtues (Thak 1979:95,97).

Early in the 1940s, Phibun's National Council on Culture had defined propriety [khwan riap roi] as the practice of Western customs.

Western characterizations of the Thai (or Siamese) as "barbarians" still rankled in the post-war period (especially since Westerners were beginning to associate the term with the endless string of military coups.) Like a great king, the new ministry of culture defined the 'true meaning' of the most important terms in Thai society, including

that of 'Thai' [thai], 'culture' (watthanatham), and 'Thai culture' [wattanatham thai] (cf. chapter 19-20). These terms were glossed in such a way as to counter charges of barbarism and superstition by disassociating the idea of culture (literally, 'the material aspects of dhamma, ' wattana-tham) from the idea of religion.

For example, Acaan Suchip Bunyanaphap, the head of the prestigious Monks Academy at Wat Bowoniwet and a former employee of the ministry of culture, wrote the following statement about Thai culture, entitled "Thai Culture in Brief" (n.d.). "The word Thai means to be free," Suchip begins.

Culture means "way of life" or "social heritage." It embraces all forms of human response to environments. Different meaning (sic) between culture and civilization is that culture includes all aspects of way of life whether they may be primitive or modern ones while civilization means only "the state of being brought out of barbarism or the advanced stage of social development." (n.d.)

Suchip then divided culture into its "various aspects"--linguistic aesthetic, customary and traditional, material, and spiritual. "Spiritual culture," traditionally the 'essence' [nama] of dhamma as opposed to its shape and material aspects [rup, wathu] came last (cf. Mus 1959), a ranking that had begun to assume great importance by the late 1970s (chapter 20).

Phibun used state funds to restore temples and to promote himself as the chief protector and defender of Buddhism. In this respect he had a decided advantage over the king as he had the entire state budget at his disposal.

Phibun's merit-making activities were most intense in the years of crisis. According to government records, 1117 temples were restored in 1951, the year after Bhumibol's coronation. Phibun had another 1239 temples restored in 1956. This was the 2500 year celebration of the

Buddha's parinibbana, but it was also the year of Bhumibol's ordination as a monk and a year before Phibun's fall from power. In all, Phibun's government reportedly restored over 3,000 temples in the 1950s.

Phibun also built great monuments in the manner of a king. He erected statues of Phraya Phahon and King Taksin, enemies of former Cakkri kings. As Thak (1979:97) writes,

This last move seemed to be a slighting of the ruling royal house for Phahon was a 1932 coup promoter while Taksin was the founder of Thonburi whose death many felt was unjustly ordered by the founder of the Chakkri dynasty. Phibun seemed to be competing with the king by developing alternative sources of legitimacy, such as Ramkhamhaeng-ism, patronage of the arts and religion, reminding people that he was a 1932 Promoter, and making reference to non-Cakkri charismatic leadership (Takin-ism).

The king could not compete with merit-making on this scale but Phibun's extraordinary merit-making activities caught him up in a classical antinomy bind: He was perceived as usurping the prerogatives of royalty, of being "greedy and "grasping," and of violating the sacred order. Professor Lauristan Sharp reports that villagers at Bang Chan were aware of Phibun's temple building activities but believed nevertheless that he was trying to compete with the king which was unacceptable to them (personal communication in Thak [1979:97f.]). A person who reaches beyond his station in this manner is referred to as a phu kham yai, a man who speaks 'big words' (or performs big deeds) that are not suitable for his 'face' or role.

Phibun's Pilgrimage to America

The king was not Phibun's only problem, however, or even his most worst one. Backed by American money and arms, Phao was becoming downright dangerous, and Sarit was rapidly building a powerful support base among military, business and political groups. There may have been

some confusion over what constituted royal prerogatives in the 1950s and who had the right to wield them, but one thing was clear: The United States was offering the arms and financial support necessary for military leaders to compete for them.

In 1955 Phibun went on a pilgrimage to America 'to see how democracy was practiced,' i.e., to emphasize the authoritarian aspects of Phao's and Sarit's behavior. The trip reportedly convinced him of the practical merits of popular elections and legitimacy based on the people's mandate (Thak 1979:102), and he returned home as "Phibun the democrat." His 'political style' underwent a radical change and he became the champion of democracy.

After returning home, Phibun introduced new 'paths of action.' He introduced the practice of press conferences and ran for the Assembly. He told army cadets that soldiers should not be involved in politics and should not be engaged in trade and that power should come from popular elections. In a word, "force and coups d'etat were no longer in style." He introduced the custom of having political rallies and meetings at Sanam Luang, the Royal Parade Grounds, making it (renaming it) the "Thai Hyde Park." Common men were encouraged to speak out in this forum and Phibun, in the manner of a Righteous Ruler, "ordered government officials to pay attention to the suggestions of the speakers . . ." (Thak 1979:105).

Not surprisingly, Police General Phao was the first target of the critics at Sanam Luang. He was charged with corruption and was forced to swear that he had no part in the political assassinations of former members of parliament. He also had to swear that "his sudden vast wealth was a natural process." Phao agreed to take a sacred oath: "if he had lied, let him not achieve prosperity in this life and the lives to come" (Thak 1979:105).

Phao made a comeback by hiring his own speakers to criticize Phibun. Noting signs of disorder in the kingdom, Phibun banned public meetings and weekly press conferences became sporadic.

The damage was done, however. The people remained interested in democratic practices even when Phibun was not. In 1957 a Thai newspaper remarked that "a government which thinks that it is governing on behalf of the people should not be afraid of any discussion . . ." (Thak 1979:115). It was about this time, in 1956 and 1957, when legitimation problems were at a peak, that the signs of cosmic decline [lang hayana] began to appear in earnest. The men debating at Sanam Luang were not speaking in a single voice or even speaking in order of wisdom and age, they were complaining of harsh economic realities, natural conditions that reflected ill on the virtue of the ruler. Before discussing Phibun's fall, however, I will examine the career of yet another protagonist in the races for virtue of the 1950s, Phra Phimonlatham.

Phra Phimonlatham: A Monk Takes on the Royal Prerogatives

Phra Phimonlatham took advantage of the confusion in the early 1950s to make his own bid for power. After the war, he became active in Moral Rearmament Program (MRA), an American-backed international peace movement, and he became an international pilgrim (Maha Phon 1978). Phimonlatham was invited to Europe and to the United States in his capacity as a Buddhist leader of the Moral Rearmament movement. In the relatively liberal period following the war, when Pridi was still prime minister, some of Phimonlatham's followers were invited to the People's Republic of China. Wat Mahathat's many publications on Phimonlatham's activities show numerous pictures of him interacting with foreigners (some with whom have their heads lower than his). His MRA activities increased both his prestige and that of Wat Mahathat.

Phimonlatham's most famous and most controversial trips were those he took to Burma in the 1950s (Nisit 1975). Relations between Burma and Thailand had remained strained after the war. Each sought to establish claims to be the chief protectors and defenders of Theravada Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia as part of their new national identities.

Phimonlatham became divisive when his ambitions in the Sangha hierarchy were thwarted by Phibun. Phibun appointed the abbot of the Thammayut Wat Benchamabophit to the position of Sangha Nayok after Uan's death in the 1940s. It was about this time that Phra Phimonlatham made his declaration of independence from the civil authority.

Both Phibun and the new Sangha Nayok initiated official religious exchanges with the Burmese. The Thai and Burmese had been enemies for many centuries, and this was viewed an act of national reconciliation (the healing of schism), a prerogative of royalty.

In 1952 Phra Phimonlatham became 'worried' about the schism between the two nations and decided to take students from Mahachulalongkorn Monks' Academy at Wat Mahathat to Burma to 'observe' Burmese religious practices and study Burmese meditation techniques. This created an uproar. Phibun and the head of the Department of Religious Affairs strongly objected to the second objective of the trip, arguing that the Burmese Sangha had been made impure by British influence. For Thai monks to study Burmese religious practices would indicate the superiority of the Burmese over the Thai Sangha.

Letters were exchanged, in which Phimonlatham pointed out that the practice of Buddhism was not limited to ban muang or the 'political house' of Thailand, which effectively squelched Phibun's attempts to identify himself and Thailand as the sole legitimate defenders of Theravada Buddhism in the post-war period (Nisit 1975:26). A meeting

was arranged between the Sangha Nayok, Luang Phibun, and Phra Phimonlatham at Wat Samphraya but Phimonlatham failed to attend (Nisit 1975:22-26).

Phimonlatham played heavily on antinomy issues. No single monk or government leader of common birth had sufficient moral authority to prevent him from going to Burma. A Righteous Ruler did, but Phibun was unwilling to strengthen the monarchy by acknowledging the king's right to control religious pilgrimages. Members of the government saw Phimonlatham as a traitor, whereas Phimonlatham's followers saw him as a great religious figure, acting as a 'chain' between nations, healing the schism between them.

To make matters worse, Phimonlatham used the opportunity to reestablish the dominance of the Mahanikai. He portrayed his trip as part of an ongoing religious exchange. He presented the 'Thai' (Wat Mahathat's) version of the Tripitika to the Union of Burma and 'brought back' new meditation methods [withi vipassana] that are still practiced in the kingdom today (chapter 20). It was also highly probable that the Supreme Patriarch, the abbot of Wat Benchamabaphit (a 'Mahanikai' temple with Thammayut practice) did not want Thai monks learning Burmese meditation methods: the Thammayut was patronizing its own line of potential saints, that of Acaan Man and Acaan Fan of Isan.

When Phimonlatham landed in Rangoon, members of the Thai diplomatic corps were forced to stand and receive him lest Thailand lose face over its inability to unify its Sangha. It would appear, from Phimonlatham's memoirs at least, that the high point of the journey was when M.R. Pikathip Malakun, a descendant of M.R. Pia Malakun,³ was kept waiting to

³Phraya Wisut Suriyasak, the official in charge of the governors of the Northeast under King Chulalongkorn's thetsaphiban system in the 1890s (Wyatt 1969:198-205, 231-235).

attend him (a sign of lower rank): first for two hours because Phimonlatham's plane was late, and then while Phimonlatham was greeted by Burmese officials. His official duties required that he attend Phimonlatham throughout his visit (1975:28-29).

This was a rare historical moment, indeed. The Mahanikai was ascendant over the Thammayut and members of the Bangkok nobility were publicly subordinate to a monk of Isan origins: one who had come to Bangkok only thirty years before from an impoverished Isan village.

In 1954 the president of the Union of Burma conferred the title of "Great Teacher" on Phimonlatham and a monk from Cambodia (Wat Mahathat 1975:12). This indicated his position as the protector and defender of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

When Phimonlatham returned home from Burma he established a meditation center at Wat Mahathat, at Wat Phra Sri Phimonlatham ('The Temple of the Auspicious Phimonlatham') in his natal village, and at temples throughout the nation (cf. Tambiah 1984:171). He created a popular lay meditation movement that spanned the country, attracting monks and laity alike, i.e., changing religious practices throughout the country. One of the attractions of this large meditation drive was a central tenet of the "Burmese" system of insight meditation: that laymen could learn and practice it after a fairly brief, intensive period of training (Tambiah 1984:171). Every year during the hot season he led hundreds of monks on a procession to the northern city of Chiangmai to practice meditation.

Phimonlatham's actions were similar to those of Mongkut a century earlier when Mongkut created the schismatic Thammayut movement. Mongkut purified the Thai Sangha and challenged the supremacy of Wat Mahathat by adopting the practices of a Mon (southern Burmese) monk. Mongkut

similarly wanted to lead a textual exchange, to Sri Lanka, but Nang Klao forbade it. Mongkut's actions created schism in the Sangha and the kingdom. There was a crucial difference between the two men, however. Mongkut was a prince of royal blood who eventually became king. Phra Phimonlatham was the son of a poor farmer. He was eventually jailed, accused of being a communist.

By 1957 the protagonists were deadlocked. The year 2500, the mid-point between the Buddha's parinibbana and the end of his historical "dispensation" had arrived (Reynolds 1983).

The Signs of Decline

Three factors contributed to Phibun's downfall: democratic elections, a drought in the Northeast, and the 2500 year celebration of the Buddha's parinibbana. These events combined to bring antinomy issues to a head.

The following excerpts from those social dramas are taken from Thak's (1979:106-111) Thailand: The Politics of Despotism. Thak is quoted extensively not only because his is the most comprehensive scholarly work available on the Sarit era (in Thai or English), but because his prose reflects indigenous concepts of person and events.

The 'Dirty' Elections

In February 1957, his control over the kingdom slipping, Phibun called for democratic elections. The military-dominated Seri (Free) Managkhasila Party won the majority of assembly seats outside of Bangkok. Khuang Aphiwongse's Democrat Party was leading in vote counts in Bangkok until "vote tampering resulted in Phibun's victory" leading to a "heated debate" over the election process. Phibun's attempts "to build a new legitimacy was clearly not a success, and signs that the regime was in decline now began to appear quite rapidly."

Because of rising public resentment at his version of democratic practice, Phibun reverted to repressive methods to regain control of the polity. He declared a state of emergency and appointed Sarit Supreme Commander of the military forces to "maintain order." Hoping to keep Sarit loyal, Phibun charged him with investigating the allegations of corruption. Instead of supporting Phibun, Sarit noted that "The elections were dirty, the dirtiest. Everybody cheated" ("Everyone," one assumes, included both Phibun and the Democrats.)

The government countered by spreading rumours that "communists were instigating the disturbance," but "rumours spreading across the land" are themselves linguistic signs of cosmic decline. Writes Thak:

To many observers at that time, there were more and more signs that the government was losing its power. It was as though the cosmic forces had turned against Phibun. In Thai popular thinking, the events which followed the dirty elections were seen as forboding signs of doom, lang hayana. The psychological impact was significant for it prepared people for the final fall of Phibun. Hence, when Sarit took over, it seemed almost inevitable and no surprise at all.

The Drought

Plague, pestilence, drought and bad rulers are the "four evils" commonly said to afflict Thai farmers. In 1957, three out of four of these evils afflicted Isan.

Since Sarit was showing an unbecoming interest in expanding his power base as minister of defense, Phibun appointed Sarit's enemy, Phao, as minister of the interior. This created a balance of power of sorts, one that was upset when then a drought hit the Northeast in August of 1957.

The drought was so bad that Northerners poured into the capital looking for work. Marshal Phin Chunhawan, the minister of agriculture, maintained that the migration and the eating of frogs and lizards by Northerners were "common things, nothing to be worried about." A

Thai newspaper contributed to the confusion by reporting that hordes of locusts had descended on the Northeastern province of Mahasarakham.

Phibun sent Phin to "survey the situation" by helicopter but Phin "found little wrong." Criticism began to proliferate throughout the land. Members of parliament from Isan accused the government of ignoring the plight of Isan people (of moral-perceptual blindness); an Isan government official said the Isan people would revolt if the government refused to help. The conservative and royalist Democrats did their part by sponsoring two fund-raising movies entitled "Nation in Confusion" and "Political Hooligan."

Reportedly "annoyed at this criticism," Phibun "sent Phin to Isan for another look." Phin issued a report saying that forty percent of Isan farm land was in good condition, fifty percent was in fair condition, and ten percent was in "satisfactory" (Thai officials by then having learned that statistical precision was a virtue in the eyes of their American backers). The government "hinted that the communists were responsible for exaggerating the predicament and had urged the people to flock to Bangkok."

The Buddhist Celebration

Phibun's final fall from grace occurred not because he failed to create a viable economic policy (although this criticism was later voiced by members of the coup group), but because he had wrongfully usurped the prerogatives of the king.

In 1957 Phibun attempted to sponsor the 2500 (1957) anniversary of the Buddha's parinibbana and exclude the king from playing a central role in the festivities. In promoting the event, Phibun emphasized the strong connection between Thai nationalism and Buddhism, "giving only

lip service to the king's position as the nation's religious leader Instead of the throne being linked to Buddhism, the regime was in effect made the official sponsors for the national religion" (1979:98).⁴ Although the king was a nominal sponsor, he had little to do with the celebration.

Phibun invited U Nu of Burma to attend the festivities, which were held in Ayuthaya (the city the Burmese had sacked in 1767). This was viewed as an act of national reconciliation--a prerogative of kings. The king boycotted the festivities "because of a cold." They were not a success. As Thak writes of the incident:

The king's absence from many of the ceremonies spoke for itself, and many in Ayuthaya viewed U Nu's visit with contempt. It was felt that the prerogative for righting an ancient conflict was that of the monarch and not a commoner like Phibun.

At this point the signs of decline appeared in earnest. "Rumour was that when U Nu came to Ayuthaya, the city was covered with darkness and ghostly wailing was heard indicating the displeasure of the Ayuthaya ancestors."

Following up on Phibun's challenge to the king, Police-General Phao became emboldened enough to attack the king for failing in his ritual duty and for 'playing politics.' Thai newspapers owned or influenced by Phao ran captions and stories critical of the king's role in the elections and his attitude towards the Sangha. 'Royalty Dares' [Cao

⁴A government announcement stated that:

The Thai nation has believed in the Buddhist religion since time immemorial and has received great benefit from its faith in Buddhism. Government of the country in all ages, have respected Buddhism as the national religion. On this august occasion, the government plans to hold a special celebration so the people could take part in the festivities.

Phayong], 'Royalty Snubs Religion' [Cao Lang Sasana], and 'Royalty Would All Die' [Cao Cha Tai Hong] were three of those captions (1979:116), the emphasis being on the cao or 'lord' (cf. chapters 15, 18). These newspapers reportedly accused members of the royal family of planning to overthrow the coup group, attacking the king and Sarit "for feigning sickness in excusing themselves from attending the 25th Buddhist Centennial Celebration", i.e. an insult to the nation and religion (1979:116). In addition, Phao accused the king of giving 700,000 baht to the Democrat Party and was reportedly planning to arrest him on those charges, of len kan muang, 'playing politics,' which no longer was a royal prerogative.

In the next act (August 1957) of the drama, a member of the National Assembly read the above captions and cited the above accusations to the Assembly as grounds for having Phao removed from power on charges of insult to the monarchy! Phao's fatal flaw was not that he had ordered the murders of Pridi's Isan ministers in 1949 or that he had mysteriously acquired a large fortune while in office, but that he had insulted the king.

In September a Hyde Park gathering was held to attack Phibun and Phao. Sarit and key army officers resigned from the cabinet in protest over the Isan crisis and a lumber swindle that also gained attention from the national press. Sarit was 'disturbed': Phibun had not "paid attention to the people's wishes" as he had promised to do--shades of the revolution of 1932. (Phibun was failing in his role as pseudo Dhammaraja.)

In October 1957 Sarit staged a blitzkrieg coup d'etat against Phibun, ending his more than twenty years of dominance over Thai politics. The coup was portrayed as the restoration of moral order. Sarit's group

wore white arms bands symbolizing purity to identify themselves. The code name of the military exercise was roekdi thanarat, 'good auspices Thanarat.'

Phibun panicked and left for Japan. Phao requested that he be allowed to go into exile in Switzerland, where his bank accounts were located. Within twenty-four hours, the triumvirate was dissolved and Sarit was in complete control of the country.

The Dismantling of Phibun's Soteriological State

Sarit and his associates had no problem finding reasons for dismantling Phibun's soteriological state: they merely used a double standard of criticism, with a pro-capitalistic twist. By the mid-1950s American concern over communism in Laos had deepened and members of the Kennedy administration became convinced that the spread of communism could be stopped in Southeast Asia if the United States offered economic and military support to Third World countries. Thailand seemed like a perfect test case for this theory.

Beginning in early 1950s, the Americans offered the Sarit group advice on how to modernize the Thai economy and they helped train the Thai police in counterinsurgency methods. Thus when the group took power in 1957 (and in subsequent, Sarit-orchestrated coups), it not only represented itself as composed of men purifying the nation, it introduced new and 'more pure' principles of order at the same time: those of free market capitalism and anti-communism. The following are the coup group's explanations of what they refer to as the 'revolution' [pathiwat] of 1957. These data are from scholarly literature and interviews with surviving members of the original coup group, conducted from 1978 to 1980.

Democracy as Chaos

Understanding of discernment of conditions is knowledge of the causal relation of states. (Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification)

According to the Thai-Buddhist [kammic] ideology of events, actions have a 'first' or 'root' cause [het phon], a physical manifestation (the event), and a physical and moral outcome, their 'fruits' [phon]. Speaking after the pattiwat, Sarit cited its 'first cause' as moral disorder (brought on in part by the introduction of Western democratic practices, i.e., the Thai Hyde Park, press conferences, etc.). In a 1959 statement he characterized the period before the revolution as one in which "you will observe clearly that there were severe divisions, intrigues . . . and the desire to destroy each other" (1979:156).

In Sarit's eyes and in the eyes of his associates illusion [dosa] was a major cause of the disturbance. One such illusion was Phibun's and the ministry of culture's mistaken interpretation of the terms 'Thai' and 'democracy.' As the Army Radio noted in 1958, "There are still people who believe that anarchy is democracy. They say that 'to be able to speak freely is truly Thai.'" This was incorrect because " . . . the conflict between political parties unfettered by proper rules of conduct, to the point of fisticuffs in parliament, [and] the prostitution of newsmen and politicians were sure indications of anarchy" (1979:159).

In 1958 Sarit disbanded the parliament with the explanation that its members were selfish and immoral. The Revolutionary Council (Thak 1979:151) justified this action in a proclamation stating that

. . . several parties made a sham of the constitution and democracy by their selfish manipulation. Their abuse of the privileges and liberties provided for by the constitution had obstructed national progress, created rifts within the nation, and made people enemies of each other. This would lead to the eventual disintegration and fall of the nation.

Phibun's mistake was that he had introduced Western political customs that were inappropriate to Thai conditions: This new visible shape of social practice conflicted with underlying moral codes and with the material conditions of Thai society. Democracy, Phibun-style, was symbolic of darkness, chaos, disunity and discord. As Thanat Khoman (Thak 1979:156), Sarit's international spokesman, explained the problem in 1958:

. . . the fundamental causes of our political instability in the past lies in the sudden transplantation of alien institutions on to our soil without careful preparation and more particularly without proper regard to the circumstances which prevail in our homeland, the nature and characteristics of our own people, in a word the genius of our race, with the result that their functioning has been haphazard and ever chaotic . . . the dark pages of our history show that whenever such an authority ["a unifying, not tyrannical one" he hastens to add] is lacking and dispersal elements had their play, the nation was plunged into one disaster after another.

Sarit advanced his own concept of Thai democracy, one based on the principle of moral unity, not on "democratic ideologies borrowed from the West"; this new idea of democracy was to be implemented along with a new "economic system." Army Radio (Thak 1979:157) drew on a crude metaphorical parallel to the nama/rupa distinction to explain this idea of democracy:

In studying democracy, one should not forget the important principle that knowing the outer skin of democracy is inadequate, one must also understand the "meat."

Sarit-style democracy would yield 'true benefits' for the nation. As a radio spokesman (Thak 1979:158) said of the newstyle democracy:

Let us hope that our democracy is like a plant having deep roots in Thai soil. It should grow amidst the beating sun and whipping rain. It should produce bananas, mangoes, rambutans, mangosteens, and durians; and not apples, grapes, plums, or horse chestnuts.

Members of the 1957 coup group were unanimous in the opinion that Phibun had made three major mistakes which accounted for his plunge from

power. He tried to institute Western customs (i.e., democratic practices) that were inappropriate to Thai conditions; he paid too much attention to ritual performances and not enough to the "rational administration" and economic policies of the state (he attempted to act in the manner of the kings of old); and he had mistakenly reformed the Sangha by having monks conform to 'political' principles and not the reverse: influence was flowing from the lay world to the Sangha and not the reverse. (He had violated the conditions of a "legitimate" discourse.)

In a 1980 interview, Field Marshal Praphat Charusathien said that Phibun's method [withi] of educating the Thai people was 'unsuccessful' and that "Phibun was not good because he had a duty to restore and support religion [bamrung⁵ songsoem sasana] and not the duty to administer the government"⁶ i.e., Phibun had mistakenly perceived his duty as being that of a great king rather than an efficient administrator. One of Sarit's first acts was to disband the ministry of culture and to return the Department of Religious Affairs to the ministry of education.

Twenty-five years after the coup, Thanom and Praphat still agreed with Sarit, that Phibun had followed incorrect (Western) principles in reforming the Sangha in 1941: for the lay order to influence the Sangha and not the reverse was to trigger moral decline. They felt that correctness of this assessment was borne out by the chaotic events that followed Phibun's appointment of the abbot of Wat Benchamabophit to the

⁵Bamrung refers to restoration of stupas or the building of religious monuments as an act of merit, creating a potent 'reminder' of the Buddha.

⁶Praphat was the general in charge of organizing Phibun's 'Buddha circle' in 1944.

position of Sangha Nayok. The infighting that resulted led to the Sangha Reform Act of 1962.

The situation was the following: The Supreme Patriarch, the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet, died in 1958 and the Sangha Nayok succeeded him as Supreme Patriarch. Phibun then appointed the abbot of Wat Saket (not Phimonlatham, Uan's follower) as Sangha Nayok. A former Thammayut monk described the aftermath of the appointment thus:

. . . anonymous letters and leaflets directed against both the patriarch and the prime minister began to circulate. Soon the differences and clashes between the Mahanikai and Thammayut sects spread far and wide in the country, creating conflict of loyalty even within monasteries, especially of the Mahanikai sect.

When the sangha was threatened with this schism, Field Marshal Sarit and his cabinet decided to intervene. Although there was no firm evidence, they accused Phra Pimolatham, abbot of Bangkok's famous Mahanikai Wat Mahathad, the ecclesiastical minister of the interior, as the instigator of the letter and leaflets. (Tambiah 1978:257-258)

Sarit became increasingly 'disturbed' over the fighting in the Sangha and attributed it to Phibun's democratic reforms of 1941. He disbanded the Sangha Council and replaced it with a centralized Council of Elders [Maha Thera Sankhom].

A supporter of Somdet Uan explained that the Sangha Council was disbanded because "Monks tried to imitate democracy." They were "influenced by politics" when they should have been following the vinaya and exerting a positive (detached) influence on the Buddhist laity.

Praphat's explanation of the same event was that "Phibun tried to have monks have the shape [or physical form] of democracy [mi rup khong prachatibodai]." This (visual) shape [rup], being egalitarian, was inherently disorderly. Thanom Kittikachorn, another leading member of the coup group, stated that "The Sangha Sapha was a group of monks which was 'in a political style' [nai baep kan muang]." The Sarit government felt "it was concerned with politics."

As part of its pattiwat, the Sarit group began a curious and crucial process of assimilating American corporate and bureaucratic terminology with the vocabulary of purification. Praphat characterized the formation of the new Mahathera or Council of Elders as "a return to the old ways of the past . . . to have monks as consultants," a word he also associated with American economic and military consultants. The new Sangha council was formed at that historical point when these American consultants began to flood the country.

Conclusion

The military coups of the 1940s and the 1950s resembled nothing so much as royal succession battles of earlier centuries--their rationale articulated in terms of contradictory political ideals. For Thai generals, as for the magical kings of which Hocart (1927) speaks, the succession to power is the "celebration of a moral victory." Military successions in Thailand are likewise analagous to the succession battles of Hawaiian kings, battles in which, as Sahlins notes, "the dead chief is by implication a transgressor of the tabus and an oppressor of the people. Slaying him, his successor not only recreates the established order, he thereupon appropriates the death as a claim of 'quasi-normal' succession" (1981:24).

There was something new about the Sarit coups, however. Beginning with the revolution of 1957 and the dismantling of Phibun's soteriological state, each 'moral victory' brought with it a refinement of pro-capitalistic ideologies of order. Coup rhetoric, the rhetoric of moral victory, became infused with capitalist values--articulated in the form of an ideology of religious purification called 'national development' [pattana prathet]. In an effort to avoid antinomy

problems, Western values were explicitly rejected by the new leadership. Capitalist values were introduced as new 'methods' of religious cum political purification.

The Sarit government eventually instituted radical economic reforms that transformed the Thai economy along lines suggested by the American government and United Nations organizations, yet Sarit used traditional symbols of purity to create the impression that these radical changes were a return to the pure ways of the past. In contrast, Phibun had used Western symbols of order to create the impression of change where none existed: at least in regard to traditional relations of production. 'Socialist' rice cooperatives were structured along traditional patron-client lines. The Phibun government's methods of taxation and extraction of surplus differed little from the those of the princes Prachak, Phichit, and Sanprasittiprasong at the turn of the century.

In the 1960s a new soteriological state was created, one that featured the activities of the Buddhist king. The informal royal ritual practices of the 1950s were accorded the status of formal principles, in much the same way that informal edicts [rachasat] of kings in the past became incorporated into into the thammasat: both were seen as being 'appropriate to the [material] conditions of the present'; they could produce longlasting benefits for the Thai nation.

The king was assigned the role of transcendent interpretor of the law in this new soteriological state. He used the extraordinary powers of insight associated with his pure blood to endorse Sarit's principles of economic development. A paradoxical regeneration of the monarchy began, leading, I will argue, to its subsequent decline.

PART IV
LATCHING ON TO THE ROYAL VIRTUE

CHAPTER 9

LATCHING ON TO THE ROYAL VIRTUE

Introduction

The soteriological structure of the Thai kingdom changed radically after the revolution of 1957, as did the religious needs of its inhabitants. The Vietnam War was looming on the horizon and the Americans were about to make their grand entrance in Southeast Asia. New kinds of greed, suffering, and illusion were about to proliferate throughout the land. A new system of corporate capitalism--based on international finance, multinational corporations, and cartels--was quietly set in place while development, free enterprise, and the royal activities became the focal points of Thai social life.

The legitimation deadlock remained unbroken. It was highly unlikely that Sarit could start his own dynasty in the manner of triumphant generals of the past. The educated elite of Thailand, like the American government that provided support, were interested in developing the economy, not the monarchy.

Luang Phibun's fate was proof enough that a commoner could never hope to become king or even to act in a king-like manner without delegitimizing himself. As for democracy, it was both portrayed as Thai society's highest ideal and rejected in its specifics as a viable means of creating moral order. The sentiment persisted: only a great Buddhist king could restore order in times of social unrest.¹

¹A Thai writer (Anan n.d.:54, translated in Thak [1979:161]) summed the situation up thus:

The legitimation problems faced by members of the Sarit group were different only in degree from those of their predecessors. They had to convince American backers of their democratic intentions and competence in economic matters to obtain foreign aid and stay in power. Because they were not men of royal blood, however, they were perceived by their native constituents as lacking the innate wisdom to rule the entire kingdom, regardless of their expertise in practical matters. If the new leadership could not demonstrate a high degree of religious purity, its members would be perceived as lacking the detachment [dana] and penetrating insight [pañña] necessary to rule the polity.

As Thak writes of the political situation of the 1960s, "It was important that leaders appeared to have bun wasna or merit and would thus be able to make moral judgements on behalf of the nation. For this one must appear to have khuntham, moral responsibility or, more literally, merit of dhamma" (1979:161), and khuntham, if not inherent at birth, is built and demonstrated through acts of ritual generosity.

With members of the nobility virtually eliminated from the ruling class an increasing emphasis placed on pure practice over pure blood (birth) as the basis of men's ability to rule the nation, an extraordinary amount of weight was thrown onto the ritual system as a source of legitimation. Powerful generals, bureaucrats, political leaders and eventually Sino-Thai businessmen began to compete for the nation's top ritual positions.

The Thai people in general do not wish to have a part in national politics. They wish only for a leader who has khuntham [moral responsibility] and ability. This is because a majority of the people feel that the power to rule belongs to the monarch who has moral and intellectual gifts from birth and to the chao nai [masters] who have bun wasna [merit].

As in the past, there was a catch, however: these positions were at royal temples, and rights over royal temples belonged to kings or members of the royal family, to the men whose ancestors had built these temples and whose remains were often enshrined there. There was another catch: The military elite needed access to important royal rituals to build their barami but they could not define their primary duty as the performance of those rituals, nor could they fight openly over ritual privileges without delegitimizing themselves. This blockage in the ritual system had to be overcome before a new capitalist elite could take complete control of the polity.

The Dual System of Leadership

The Mahavagga makes a division into powerful kings, kings of middle status, and petty kings (Misra, The Age of the Vinaya)

Sarit created a dual system of leadership to overcome a parallel "blockage" in political process: the king was the physical representation of the sovereignty of the Thai nation and its past, while Sarit was to become the actual leader or phokhun. As Thak writes, "Sarit's genius seems to have lain in his ability to reconcile the two concepts and to use the throne to enhance his own position" (Thak 1979:186).

A new division of interpretive labour was created. Sarit made a distinction between the transcendent moral principles [lak tham, lit., 'pillars of dhamma'] and related codes of conduct [withikan, lit., 'methods of practice'] that should guide the nation and the more specific and complementary 'political principles' [lak kan muang] and codes of conduct that should guide citizens in their everyday lives. In the past, the Buddhist king prescribed the principles and codes of

conduct for his subjects in matter great and small. (King Mongkut ordered his subjects not to throw animal caracasses in the canals of Bangkok). If these principles and practices were (1) truly reflective of dhamma, (2) appropriate to the cosmic conditions of the moment, and (3) practiced diligently, i.e. 'brought to completion' [tham hai sombun] by the king's subjects, ignorance would be extinguished, wisdom promoted, and the nation advanced along the path of purification.

The implication was the same with Sarit's 'political principles': If the Thai people scrupulously followed these principles in the same way they observed the Buddhist precepts, ignorance would be extinguished and wisdom and prosperity would flower across the kingdom.

The Partnership Begins

The post-coup exchange between Sarit and the king was the following: Immediately after the coup, the king issued a statement to the Revolutionary Council reminding the leaders that they should act faithfully for the good of the people and the nation. Sarit sent a message back reassuring the king that the institution of the monarchy would be one of the perpetual pillars of the Thai nation. "In this revolution, certain institutions must be changed," he declared. "However, one institution which the Revolutionary Council will never allow to be changed is the institution of the monarchy representing the nation as a whole" (Revolutionary Council Headquarters 1958, translated in Thak 1979:150). The king then gave Sarit a document endorsing the coup and Sarit immediately displayed it in public, declaring that his position was legal because the king had given his approval.

There was a brief trial period in 1958 and 1959 when the king toured the countryside to gain support for the new regime. In 1960 Sarit

issued a document announcing that this monarch was, indeed, worthy of worship--he displayed the ten virtues of the pure Buddhist king.

In a major speech to the nation (1959:22-24, translated in Thak 1979:320-321) in which he assumes the role of perceptual intermediary, Sarit said the following:

It is clear to all within the country and abroad that your majesty has followed the guidelines of thotsaphitrachatham (the practice of the ten royal virtues [barami] of dhamma) in national affairs and has been the most exalted leader of the nation. Your majesty is very farsighted and is genuinely concerned with the development of the country. One year has passed under the pattiwat system and your majesty has shown that you are a king of great ability and interested in the work of the government although these involve new methods and plans brought about by the pattiwat

I would like to ask for your royal indulgence to state to you from the bottom of my heart that your subjects have realized your great kindness, and will revere you within our hearts. All this is because you have a personality worthy of worship. Your visits to the countryside have swayed the hearts of your people towards unity within the nation.

The coup of 1957 was no ordinary coup, however, either in the eyes of its promoters, which was not unusual, or in terms of the nation's economic structure, which was. Sarit's Revolutionary Council shared many of Luang Wicit's ideas about pattiwat. As Luang Wicit (1952:285, translated in Thak 1979:185) wrote of revolution in the early 1950s,

. . . we can not confuse revolution with coup d'etat or rebellion. The work of a revolution not only means the changing of leadership, but involves changes which are important to the lives and thoughts of the people--the changing of the social system, the economic system, the line of education, together with the changing of habits of people towards something which is better than before.

In a 1979 interview, Sarit's son, Colonel Somchai Thanarat, confirmed that Sarit's behavior towards the king was deliberate and part of a broad change in social policy. "My father was the first one to report to the king," he insisted, "not Luang Phibun." Somchai was also clear about what it meant for the military to latch on to the virtue of the

monarch. Pointing to the insignia of rank on his uniform, he said that I must address him as "Colonel" Somchai because "this rank was given to me by the hands of the king"--a statement which perfectly captures the tone of the presentday relationship between the military and the monarchy.

Political Events: 1957-1968

The political events from 1957 to 1968 are roughly the following. In 1957 Sarit installed SEATO Secretary General Pote Sarasin as caretaker prime minister and shortly thereafter replaced him with Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. In 1958, with the help of Thanom, Sarit staged a second coup. He abrogated the 1952 constitution, dissolved the national assembly, banned political parties, forbade trade unions, controlled the press, arrested "leftists" (lay and monastic), and ruled under martial law (Girling 1981:111). Sarit then replaced Thanom as prime minister, which meant that he held the positions of army commander-in-chief, supreme commander of the armed forces, minister of national development, and head of the national police.

Sarit's rise to power followed traditional patterns of the religious virtuoso, the difference being that he was supposedly concerned with the formulation of 'political' rather than religious principles. As indicated in the previous chapter, his first coup was prompted by concern about the signs of moral decline he observed after the elections of 1956. In 1957 and 1958 he became a conspicuous seeker of knowledge. He began pai ha withi, to 'search for a method' of practice which would restore moral order. In a manner similar to that of the princes Siddhartha and Mongkut in the early stages of their religious quests (cf. Lingat 1926), Sarit made a point of consulting with the kingdom's

wise men--academics, the press, and a body of close advisors--about how to reformulate the nation's political principles.

After the second coup of 1958, analagous to the second coronation of Buddhist kings, Sarit no longer sought the advice of others but began forging his own principles of order. After measuring Western against Thai customs, new practices against old, he formulated his own 'middle way' [naew thang] and instituted the repressive political and economic measures discussed above, paving the way for radical changes in the nation's economy.

In 1960, acting only on the (somewhat fearfully given) advice of his closest advisors, Sarit began to implement far reaching economic programs whose goals were suggested by United States and United Nations advisors. His Western-trained development ministers wrote a Five Year Plan for development of the nation which articulated with those goals and with U.S. military objectives. This plan targeted the Northeast for intensive economic and political development, called, ambiguously, bun pattana or 'meritorious development.'

Sarit died in December 1963, at which time Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn became prime minister and Field Marshal Praphat Charusathien became deputy prime minister. For five years Thanom and Praphat exercised almost total control over the government. In 1965 the Thanom-Praphat government became fully committed--through the use of Thai airbases, counterinsurgency training, and volunteers--to American intervention in Laos and Vietnam. In 1968, in the face of corruption charges, Thanom and Praphat sponsored and won a 'democratic' election.

Thesis: Part III

The thesis of Part III is the following: From 1957 to 1968, the Buddhist king and the Thai military were self-conscious, cooperating protagonists in introducing capitalist practices and ideologies in Thailand. These practices and ideologies were introduced in several stages.

The elite first rejected Western political customs as being inappropriate to Thai social conditions and then introduced Western capitalist values and practices as part of an ideology of purification called kan pattana or 'development.' Over the years, a succession of new ideals and practices were introduced through the royal activities [phrarachakaraniyakit, phrarachakit] first in traditional rituals like the royal kathin and later in a series of newly-created civic rituals. In some instances, new values were explicitly connected to development activities, in others they were deliberately disassociated from them, introduced in radically separate contexts.

The king and the government also created an intermediate ideology of lok kuson or 'worldly merit'² which portrayed sacrifice [boricak] on behalf of king and nation--work for immediate material ends--as a new form of meritorious activity. This ideology of merit bears some similarities--in its impetus for worldly action--to the Protestant traditions discussed by Weber in The Spirit of Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic. The king was at the center of this civic religion: as an object or deity worthy of sacrifice, as its chief ritual officiant, as the director of ritual traffic, and the creator of new ritual forms.

²In the classical tradition, kuson refers to good deeds in general. Bun refers specifically to meritorious act in formal ritual contexts.

These new development ideologies and methods of purification attempted to mediate fundamental, irresolvable antinomies between Buddhist and Western cultural systems, however, and they exacerbated preexisting tensions and contradictions in the Theravada tradition. Eventually men began to perceive distortions in the ritual process, to receive the impression that Buddhist rituals and the Buddhist cosmos had gone seriously awry--which only added impetus to new religious purification movements.

'Latching On . . . ': The Characteristics of Virtue

The cultural thesis for this historical period is that first the military and then members of the new capitalist elite 'borrowed' or 'latched on to' [phung] the royal virtue [phra racha barami] to achieve their personal and professional objectives. This socio-cultural model of change accounts for the specific configurations of recent capitalist development and the ritual structures that characterize it. To understand how this pattern works, one must understand more of the nature of barami.

Barami refers to the ten Buddhist virtues individually (i.e., almsgiving, renunciation, non-anger, etc.) and to moral perfection in general, that which results from the diligent practice of these virtues.

In Thailand barami also refers to prestige in a more general sense. For example, some men are said to 'have barami' [mi barami] and others not. Some men (kings) have barami at birth as signified by the possession of royal blood. Barami can be 'built' [sang] through acts of personal and ritual generosity or it can be acquired through close proximity to sacred persons--Buddhist kings or Buddhist saints.

The latter dynamic is based on the idea that barami has distinct physio-moral and spatial characteristics: It "rubs off" (or, more accurately, "glows off") on those who see or are touched by the virtuoso. For example, the barami of a great world renouncer is believed to be so strong that the mere sight of him purifies men who draw near.

In this respect, Buddhist kings and saints are similar to Hindu deities: Men want to see and be seen by them (cf. Eck 1981a; Babb 1982). Like the Buddha, bodhisattas see and 'remember' men who worship them and reward them accordingly. Seeing the Buddhist virtuoso is similar in effect to gazing on the sacred traces of the Buddha (cf. Falk 1973): Men are 'struck' by the sight. They become imbued with knowledge of dhamma, and their subsequent actions generate a positive chain of cause and consequence. The idea of objects which glow and saints with powerful glances is one of the most crucial heterodox aspects of Theravada Buddhism.

Barami has distinct spatial characteristics as well: it radiates or 'spreads' [phrae] outward from the center to the periphery of the kingdom, from the top to the bottom of the social order. It flows magically from deity to worshipper, from the king to his subjects, from Buddhist monks to the Buddhist laity, from leaders to followers. Barami spreads among men like light from the Buddhist altar, like rays of the sun, or like the preaching of Buddhist monks (which is referred to as the 'spreading' [phrae] of dhamma) (cf. Hocart 1969:18).

In some of its usages, barami is synonymous with itthiphon or 'influence' (lit., the 'magical fruits' of virtue). Thai leaders with barami are believed to possess innate abilities that are a product of their bun-wasna, their fate or positive kammic heritage. These

qualities enable them to command voluntary compliance from men in that they inspire an inner state called 'voluntary-heart' [khwam samak-cai] or 'voluntariness.' In the words of one informant, "When a person with barami, with many good deeds of merit, wants to do something, many people will help him."

These beliefs about the nature of barami reflect on two crucial questions about capitalist development of precisely the sort that interested Weber. What types of persuasion or influence are used to convince men to change their beliefs and behavior in the marketplace and in the Buddhist temple? How are we to understand and analyze the cycles of violence that attend capitalist development in Thailand (cf. Turton 1978), and their relation to changes in the ritual system?

Such questions are central to an understanding of modern capitalist development and in particular to the expansion of the commercial banking system. Men can be forced from their land at gunpoint (as occurred in the north in the 1960s [cf. Anan 1984]) but they rarely can be forced (or they cannot infinitely be forced) to deposit their money at one bank and not another, or to do business with one merchant and not another.

Barami thus can be 'built' [sang] or it can be 'raced for' [keng]. It can be 'shown' [sadaeng] through competitive acts of ritual and non-ritual generosity or, like merit, it can 'spoil' [sia] or decline. Finally, it can be latched on to or 'borrowed,' which was Sarit's strategy in the late 1950s.

Following Thak (1979) I argue that Sarit's major legitimating strategy was to latch on to the royal virtue, initially to bolster his position as prime minister and later to develop the nation. This strategy became the basis of public policy in the 1960s and the 1970s.

I extend Thak's thesis by suggesting that the 'latching on' strategy was behind the new kathin rules of the 1960s, and that it helped determine the exact configuration--spatial, temporal, and social--of the modern economy. The new kathin system provided the concrete means, the "ritual infrastructure", by which government leaders and urban elite could latch on to the royal barami and penetrate Isan markets simultaneously. By performing kathin in the name of the king, they entered Isan markets as moral conquerors rather than as greedy merchants.

There was a crucial difference between these new capitalist invaders and those of the past, however. As Weber (1946:331) so cogently puts it, the relations that were created through ritual interactions between Bangkok elite and the indigenous populace were not those of "master to slave," nai to phrai: but capitalist relations, the more impersonal relations of bankers and corporate enterpreneurs to workers and new customers. These relationships were created in direct response to the demands of the international marketplace rather than out of a sense of of familial or personal obligation (although the new ritual idiom was often a kinship idiom). By entering the Northeast as devout Buddhists, the new, non-indigenous entrepreneurs of Isan could represent their activities as the flowering of dhamma (of the lotus of the law), as actions that arose spontaneously in fulfillment of religious obligations. Most important, the effects of their actions in other domains were interpreted accordingly.

Economic Change: 1957-1968

The economic changes that occurred from 1957 to 1968 were roughly the following: In 1957 a World Bank mission made a year-long visit to

Thailand. Their recommendations reinforced the views of modernizing officials in the Sarit administration and the Bank of Thailand. Before the nation could profitably launch into industrial development, the government had to build up the nation's infrastructure--roads, dams, power supply, irrigation and communications systems. The government also had to improve the productivity of existing economic activities--rice, rubber, tin, and other primary products (Girling 1981:81).

Members of Sarit's cabinet explicitly rejected the 'socialist' principles of the Phibun government (realized in the form of military-run state enterprises) in favor of the principles of so-called "free-market capitalism." Rather than expanding state enterprises, which they considered wasteful and inefficient, the development ministers used government resources to develop "public infrastructure for the use of private enterprise" (Girling 1981:81; emphasis in original).

The 1960s was a period of great population growth and the beginning of large-scale land speculation in rural areas. For the first time in the nation's history, land was no longer plentiful. Phrai could no longer flee from the nai or cao if taxation became too burdensome. The government and its subjects were forced to deal with each other on a systematic and intensive basis.

Many of the envisioned changes actually took place. Crops were diversified, communications systems improved, and the business sector expanded rapidly after 1958. The Thanom-Prapchat government benefited greatly from the worldwide economic boom of the 1960s. There was a more than seven percent annual increase in GNP during the period from 1961-66 when the government's Five Year Plan for development was supposedly in effect (Girling 1981:114).

The commercial banking system also expanded rapidly during this period. This and the general expansion of the business sector meant that relations between high-ranking military leaders, government officials, Chinese merchants, and the Thai king changed dramatically. A set of new ideological imperatives arose, that of portraying the nation's new entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial activities in a positive moral light.

These ideological imperatives explain why a king who was consigned to obscurity in the 1950s suddenly found himself at the forefront of capitalist development in the 1960s, during its pivotal phase, and why he and his business activities were beyond the reach of the military by the 1970s. Finally, it explains why the ritual system assumed such importance in these most recent and intensive stages of change.

The Creation of a New Business Elite

As noted in earlier chapters, high-ranking military officers and bureaucrats began to enter into select partnerships with the wealthiest Chinese businessmen in the 1940s and most of the corporations established after 1951 were cooperative Sino-Thai ventures. After King Bhumipol took the throne, representatives of the royal properties also became the silent partners in some of these corporations; they sat on the board of directors, but their activities were (and remain) undiscussed by a fearful press.

As a general rule, the Chinese supplied the capital and entrepreneurial skills in these new business ventures and Thai officials (military and civilian) provided protection, official privileges, and in some cases, government contracts (Girling 1981:80).

After Sarit's 1957 victory over his rivals, a more formal "ratification" of this business-bureaucratic collaboration took place, and, on the advice of the World Bank, state policy towards Chinese enterprise was reversed from what it had been in the 1940s. Instead of the state competing with Chinese enterprise, Chinese enterprise was used to underpin the entire economy. New types of cliques and business partnerships were formed. They consisted of high-ranking military officers, members of the bureaucratic elite, and Chinese businessmen.

A new generation of business elite came to power in the 1960s. The sons of powerful Chinese businessmen, sent abroad to study business, returned home with the skills necessary to form complex corporations and engage in joint venture projects with Americans. The sons and daughters of Thai bureaucrats (many of them also Western-educated) and Chinese merchants began to marry, their unions often blessed by the king.

According to Girling, government intervention in economic affairs became more circumscribed but also better organized and defined during and after the Sarit period. The reshaping of the economy was largely the achievement of this new generation of elite, Western-trained financial experts, managers, planners, and economists calling themselves Thailand's "new technocrats" (cf. Girling 1981:81). The technocrats were identified as public leaders and interpreters of Western economic theory, not as greedy capitalists.

This was not to say that the citizenship problems of the Chinese suddenly disappeared, however. Many of Sarit's most oppressive acts were directed against Chinese merchants (some of whom he had summarily executed). He and his successors promoted economic development in the context of an ideology of Thai-Buddhist nationhood, which meant that loyal Thai "citizens" were still defined as people devoted to upholding

the 'three pillars' of Thai-Buddhist nationalism: king, nation, and religion.

New Legitimation Issues: Ideological Imperatives

The new system of economic alliances--the increasing numbers of 'trading generals,' business-oriented bureaucrats, and Sino-Thai 'technocrats'--gave rise to new moral-symbolic dilemmas. How could 'Chinese' people assume prominent leadership positions if they were, indeed, greedy and attached? How could 'Thai people' engage directly in trade and still remain pure, selfless enough to lead the polity? How were Sino-Thai (who did not practice Theravada Buddhist rituals) suddenly to represent themselves as Thai (Theravada) Buddhist citizens loyal to king, nation, and religion?

There was an additional dilemma: For centuries, usury had been represented as the very essence of upadana, of extreme attachment to worldly things. How could this profession, traditionally practiced by Chinese traders on a small scale, suddenly be characterized as the essence of selflessness when practiced on a large scale by commercial banks?

I suggest that these issues were resolved in part by the restructuring the ritual system, beginning with the royal kathin, and later by the creation of a Thai civic religion. The overall effect of these changes was to create an idealized "celestial economy," a ritual dialogue with and against the realities of capitalist development.

In the 1930s and 1940s, when anti-Chinese sentiment was at its peak, there was no Righteous Ruler from whom Chinese merchants could seek protection. In the Sarit era there was. Because of the enhanced opportunities for doing business in the 1960s and the ever-constant

threat of government persecution, Chinese merchants were driven straight into the arms of the Thai king, their money straight into the royal charities.

Government leaders of humble origins and Western-influenced technocrats also needed to demonstrate their trustworthiness as leaders in the 1960s, the former to demonstrate their inner purity and wisdom and the latter to show that they were truly 'Thai.' This could likewise be done through the conspicuous performance of merit ceremonies, by gaining access to the king, and/or by patronizing Buddhist meditation monks believed to be saints. Or, it could be accomplished through a felicitous combination of all of the above activities: by participating in rituals at royal temples, or at royally-sponsored ceremonies at the retreats of Buddhist saints.

The Civic Religion

Sacrifice, boricak, is one of the ten moral perfections that advances men on the path of purification. In the 1960s the king, with government backing, began to form a new kind of Thai civic religion by creating royal charities whose explicit purpose was to benefit the nation and to advance national development. Contributions to these charities were called boricak, renunciation or 'sacrifice on behalf of the nation,' kuson, 'good deeds.' The king thus offered members of the new elite opportunities to purify themselves and develop the nation in a single act of civic-religious devotion. What better way for Westernized technocrats to demonstrate their devotion to traditional values, or for Chinese merchants to demonstrate their loyalty as Thai citizens than to contribute to the royal charities?

The king, in turn, gained direct control over a huge amount of capital. More importantly, he began to dictate the 'proper' (visible) flow of capital throughout the kingdom in ways that (1) disguised the actual flow of capital, (2) reassured his poorer subjects that radical economic changes were not radical, or (3) that they were part of a larger Buddhist purification movement.

In 1958 the specifics of this new civic religion had yet to be worked out. The military and the monarchy each had something the other wanted. The military had amnat, the ability to use force, and they controlled the economy (and probably the royal properties), but they lacked barami. Royally-endorsed access to royal temples would enable them to build their barami. The king had barami by birth but he lacked amnat. He controlled royal ceremonies, royal temples, and powerful monks as was his birthright. He controlled the nation's most auspicious relics and, because his touch was sacred and his insight divine, he controlled the production of new auspicious objects and persons: the distribution of honour [kiat] and the production of prestige. In 1957 the king lacked the cash and (protected) business opportunities that would enable him to realize his Dhammaraja status. This part of the dissertation demonstrates exactly how this situation was rectified.

Conclusion and Chapter Summary

Thak (1979) and Girling (1981) argue that the political and economic arrangements created during the Sarit era persisted through the 1970s. In the following chapters, I describe a set of parallel but less well known ritual arrangements which were also created during the Sarit era to support capitalist development. These arrangements likewise persisted through the 1970s.

Unlike the political and economic arrangements of the 1960s, which were public knowledge or quickly became so, these arrangements were made in private and have generally have remained so, unexamined by Western and Thai scholars alike. The new ritual order was born of complex negotiations between high-ranking officials and the Grand Palace.

In most scholarly accounts of the Sarit and post-Sarit eras (e.g., Turton 1978; Girling 1981), the relationship between the monarchy (and the modern Sangha) to economic and political change is examined only cursorily if at all. In upcoming chapters I will explain the logic and structure of the new kathin rules. In so doing I will examine how they remained invisible and therefore an effective force in shaping the economy.

Chapter 10 describes the new royal kathin rules of the 1960s and chapter 11 illustrates how these rules were put into practice in the late 1970s in ways that helped resolve the antinomy problems of the new elite. Chapter 12 discusses how interkingdom pilgrimages eased the transition to new capitalist ideologies and practices early in the Sarit regime. Chapter 13 discusses the cosmological paradigms underlying new economic ideologies and policies. Chapter 14 provides a detailed account of the beliefs and religious practices of Sarit's closest advisors; it relates how, by changing ritual and economic policies simultaneously, they systematically took control of the Northeast. Chapter 15 discusses the missing links in the new ritual structure, the invisible intermediaries who set up the interregional ritual performances of the 1960s and 1970s.

Each chapter contains descriptions of the attributes of the present king. Taken together, they comprise a "thick description" of the modern Thai Buddhist monarchy.

CHAPTER 10
THE NEW RITUAL SYSTEM

Introduction

Before Sarit could use the monarchy to promote development he and the king had to agree on a division of ritual prerogatives. Who would control merit-making at royal temples? Who would protect the nation's sacred relics, many of which were enshrined at those temples?

These decisions were made gradually. The first hints at the accomodation came in the form of grand ritual displays which enhanced the prestige of the monarchy and the military simultaneously. Accomodations continued to be made in private in a process which eventually resulted in the creation of new rules for the distribution of kathin privileges at royal temples. These accomodations are linked to yet another historical process: that in which the bureaucracy consolidated its power, becoming increasingly independent of either the king or the military.

Latching On . . .

The 'latching on' process began with Sarit reviving royal rituals and altering them to enhance the monarchy. The new ritual corpus depicted a worldview in which the king was a great cosmocrator and Sarit and his men were his loyal (and subordinate) servants: the protectors of the throne.

One of Sarit's first acts as prime minister was to bring back the royal river kathin ceremony. The government refurbished the royal

barges and King Bhumibol, like the great Buddhist kings of the past, rode down the Chao Phraya River in royal splendor to offer kathin robes at Wat Arun. The king's barge was not flanked by the barges of members of the royal family, however; it was surrounded by the barges of the police, the military, and government ministries (Tourist Organization of Thailand n.d.).

The 1960 river kathin visually reinforced Sarit's ideology that Thai nationhood was based on the three pillars of king, nation, and religion and that the monarchy was a permanent and central feature of nationhood. This view contrasted with Phibun's, for whom the modern Thai nation was one led by a strong military figure (himself), leading the state [rat] and the state bureaucracy [ratthaban] in support of Buddhism.

Sarit also revived the First Ploughing Ceremony, now called the Raek Nakhwan. The First Ploughing is a fertility ceremony that helps men predict rainfall and decide which crops to grow (cf. Chualongkorn 1920; Wales 1931) and it is also believed to insure a good rice harvest (cf. Inden 1976).

In the nineteenth century, King Mongkut added Buddhist components to this ritual to distance himself from its "superstitious" and supposedly "despotic" Brahmanic elements. I suggest that Sarit revived it for different and almost totally opposite reasons: to revitalize the very same cosmic linkages that generations of Thai elite had worked so hard to disavow (Alabaster 1871), those between the king's (and his close associates') "precise performance of rituals" and resplendence in the cosmos--in material domains.

Sarit had the king and queen personally attend the Raek Nakhwan ceremony which brought people 'flocking' to Bangkok. When the ceremony was over, the crowds

descended on the newly ploughed field to scrounge for the "blessed" seeds. These seeds were believed to bring luck and prosperity and they were mixed with seeds to be planted later or kept in money sacks to bring good fortune. (Thak 1979:323)

Sarit changed Nation Day to coincide with the king's birthday and encouraged members of the royal family to participate in military affairs. He revitalized a third type of ceremony called the Royal Conferring of Victory Flags on Military Regiments in which the king conferred victory flags on military regiments and the troops swore allegiance to the throne. The flags contained hairs from the king's head and Buddha images, the three auspicious elements together--flag, hair, and Buddha images--symbolizing nation, religion, and monarchy.

Taken as a whole, these ritual changes announced that the monarchy was once again at the middle-center of ordinative process. They portrayed Thai society as one in which the military, along with the nation's more humble citizens, came 'naturally' to venerate a great Buddhist monarch.

Other ritual changes had different thrust: they spearheaded the drive of Bangkok elite into the countryside. As Thak writes of these these changes made by the Sarit government in the 1960s,

the king was induced to present robes to monks at monasteries outside as well as within the capital; to perform the ritual of raising the chofa of newly constructed temples; and to attend Wisakhabucha ceremonies (ceremonies commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha) in different parts of the country. (1979:324)

The penetration of capital into the countryside thus took the shape of a royal procession; the king blazed a trail of virtue to rural areas and the laity followed, attracted by the power of his virtue.

Ancient Rituals, Capitalist Development, and the 'Believing Heart'

Merit, that a man has thus heaped up with believing heart,
 . . . brings to pass hundreds of results which are a mine of
 happiness; therefore one must do works of merit with believing
 heart. (Mahavamsa XXVIII.44)

The ritual changes of the 1960s created a paradox related to the imperatives of modern capitalist development. Urban entrepreneurs must create positive links with rural peoples and appear to share traditional values before they can effectively penetrate rural markets, take direct control of production, and replace traditional with capitalist values. Thus two contradictory scenarios characterized Thailand in the 1960s: men extolling tradition rituals but performing them without a 'believing heart'; technocrats forced to use ancient rituals to effect modernization programs. Thus Sarit's patiwat explicitly rejected American ideologies and practices as a model of social development, yet its overall effect was to commercialize the economy and increase Thai dependency on American goods and technological advice (cf. Thak 1979:154).

The revitalization of traditional rituals in Bangkok heralded massive social upheaval in Isan and elsewhere in rural Thailand. As Thailand into the 80's, the 1979 government's history of Thailand, notes of on this process, "The fabric of the Thai economy remained virtually unchanged up to the late 1950s." In the next twenty years, however,

. . . the manufacturing sector expanded very rapidly, increasing its portion of the national income from 13 percent in 1960 to 20 percent in 1977 . . . a high degree of diversification took place, enabling Thailand to boost its export items from only three major commodities--namely rice, teak and rubber--in the early 1950s, to more than 190 agricultural products by 1979. (1979:167-169)

In effect the new ritual forms constructed an idealized picture of the archaic economy on the eve of its destruction.

I thus suggest as a preliminary statement that Sarit's transformation of the ritual system had several functions with respect to the development of capitalism.

1. It provided urban capitalists with a means of establishing positive linkages with rural peoples. It was a way of creating new, interregional moral communities or dhamma realms in which urban capitalists could establish themselves as leaders;
2. It reconstructed the social-celestial hierarchy, boosting the nation's most aggressive capitalists nearer to the realms of the gods and placing their activities, like those of the monarch, increasingly beyond the range of critical discourse and analysis;
3. It assigned a sacred temporal structure to capitalist development (cf. Bourdieu 1977); and
4. It built a "time lag" into the critical analysis of the morality and possible long-range effects of new economic arrangements.

Because of the contradictions involved in the modernization process, the new ritual performances had a distorted and disturbing quality about them. For example, Sarit revitalized ancient rituals to emphasize the connection between the king's precise performance of rituals and national prosperity, to emphasize the conjuncture rather than the disjuncture of the socio-moral and natural orders, but his planning ministers explicitly rejected this worldview. These men were highly Westernized. Many were of Chinese ancestry and most had trained as economists in Great Britain or in the United States. Intent on establishing new identities as "technocrats" (and distancing themselves from the appellations 'merchant' and/or 'Chinese'), they were interested in the rational planning of the economy, not in the performance of Buddhist ritual. They of all men were vehement in their rejection of

the traditional cosmology, in particular, of beliefs that linked the king's (or anyone else's) performance of ritual to national prosperity--to growth in the GNP. Such discrepancies between belief and practice suggested that at least some of the men performing the nation's most auspicious rituals were doing so with insincere intentions, thereby polluting the ritual order. And, following Bourdieu (1977), we can predict that, as the contradictions intensified, so did men's efforts to overcome them--ergo the proliferation of new types of ritual performances and the spate of ritual policies that accompanied Thailand's economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s.

In a sense, these contradictions were already inherent in the Theravada tradition in that world renunciation has always been portrayed as the key to material prosperity in this-worldly realms. There were crucial differences in the merit-making ideologies and practices of the 1960s, however, differences which become apparent if we examine individual components of the traditional ideology of merit-making.

Men have always enhanced their general well-being (i.e., received the four benefits of merit: good fortune, long life, happiness, and health) and that of their ancestors by voluntarily performing selfless acts of merit. According to traditional Theravada ideologies of merit, the full benefits [phon] of virtue accrue only when the merit is made with a pure heart, with no thought of worldly gain. This ideology is grounded in a theory of indirect causality, whereby the major benefits of rituals are not portrayed as being derived from the immediate ritual context. Rather, they are seen as being diffuse in space and time (ergo the "indeterminancy" of kamma). They manifest themselves over several lifetimes, primarily in the next life [chat na] rather than in the present life.

According to this traditional formula, the benefits of virtue are not gained directly, from the immediate ritual context, by men "using" ritual to secure immediate and specific this-worldly ends, nor are they gained by men who perform ritual primarily for themselves or their close associates rather than for their ancestors, for immediate benefits--i.e., in this life rather than in the next. To perform merit-making rituals in this manner violates traditional ideologies of merit, i.e., the felicity factors of Buddhist ritual. The new government ideologies of 'worldly merit' [look kusun] thus reversed the main features of the traditional equation.

I thus argue that the ritual changes of the 1960s marked a turning point of sorts for the Thai state as a soteriological state. According to Theravada ideologies of merit, one's intention [cetana] in performing a ritual is what guarantees a positive or negative outcome. For perhaps the first time in the kingdom's history, improper intentions--to secure immediate, this-worldly goals as efficiently as possible--were self-consciously and systematically incorporated into merit-making activities at that historical point when the performance of Buddhist rituals was deliberately incorporated into a broad national economic 'policy' [nayobai]. This was to collapse the traditional distinction and dynamic between the two wheels of dhamma. Ritual became less a voluntary act of almsgiving and more a practical instrument of a comprehensive national economic policy. Many of my elite informants were aware of and made acutely uncomfortable by these contradictions.

This tendency had manifested itself at least since Prince Wachirayan's time, i.e., since the late colonial period. Wachirayan resolved his of personal doubts about the efficacy of religion by adopting a new ideology of efficacy--through the realization that,

although Buddhism was not efficacious in ways that he had been brought up to believe, it was nonetheless "useful" in a (Western) pragmatic sense: it promoted unity among the populace and created a link between the government and the people.

I suggest that the revitalization of ancient rituals at this historical juncture eventually created the sense that there was a serious discrepancy between appearance and reality, between the way things 'seemed' and the ways they 'really were': between rup-tham and nam-tham, the form and essence of dhamma. This is a cosmological issue whose ramifications will be discussed at the conclusion of the dissertation. The new ritual structures changed and distorted an entire cultural and interpretative tradition.

In the remainder of this chapter I will describe the new rules for the performance of royal kathin ceremonies and a parallel system of royal favours that was created during the same period. I conclude with a presentation of modern ideologies of kingship that were generated to support these new ritual arrangements.

The New Kathin Rules

Around 1960 the government (and the Grand Palace?) drew up a new set of kathin rules which marked the end of the nobility as a historical force and its demise as a separate ritual class. The government, with the king's blessing, created a royal ritual system that allowed powerful capitalists and development-oriented ministries to simultaneously and systematically 'latch on' to the royal virtue and move into the countryside.

The following reconstruction of this process is based on three sources. The first is an official document issued by the Department of

Religious Affairs in 1960 entitled "Royal Ceremonies: Making Royal Merit by Offering Royal Kathin Cloth." Its author, Wichien Wachiraphahu, held the title of 'inspector' at the Grand Palace. The second is a 1967 booklet entitled "Annual Royal Ceremonies in the Present Reign" written by Major-General Mom Luang Thawiwong, (mom luang being a non-hereditary royal title). The third source consisted of interviews with officials in the Department of Religious Affairs and the Grand Palace, conducted from 1978 to 1980.

Three Kinds of Royal Kathin Ceremonies

The 1960 government document states that there are three kinds of royal kathin ceremonies 'in the present':¹ kathin luang (those offered personally by king at the first-class royal temples); kathin phrarachathan (those offered by the 'big men of the royal lineage' at the remainder of the first-class royal temples as personal emissaries of the king); and kathin phrarachathan (those offered by private citizens or government ministries at second and third-class royal temples on behalf of the king). In addition the document refers to a fourth category of "unofficial" royal kathin ceremony, the kathin ton or the king's "private kathin" ceremony, performed by him at non-royal temples.

As is traditional, the document lists only two types of temple, royal and commoner [wat luang and wat ratsadorn]. It does not refer to any intermediary category of temple, i.e., those built by princes of the blood or members of the nobility. Similarly, it refers to only two types of royal kathin ceremony, kathin luang and kathin phrarachathan, those performed personally by the king or by personal emissaries on his

¹I.e., Three kinds of ceremonies that are 'appropriate' to the material and moral conditions of that historical period.

behalf. The document refers to no intermediary types of kathin ceremonies of the sort observed by Wales (1931) in the late 1920s, i.e., the kathin cao, those performed by royal princes, and the kathin khun-nan, those performed by members of the nobility (cf. O'Connor 1978).

The Department of Religious Affairs' rules state explicitly that the king alone decides who will represent him at first-class royal temples and that these persons are to be chosen from among the 'big men of the royal lineage.' Called kathin phrarachathan, kathin which are 'the king's royal alms,' the 'alms' [than, dana] in the title refers to those conferred by the king on members of the royal family or heads of ministries in allowing them to represent² him at merit-making ceremonies at royal temples, not to the alms they offer to Buddhist monks at those temples.

Besides announcing the death of the nobility as a special ritual class, these rules brought the ritual activities of high-ranking members of the royal family under direct control of the king. If members of the royal family or members of the nobility wanted to offer kathin at first-class royal temples, they needed the king's permission to do so. If they wanted to offer at second- and third-class royal temples, they needed the government's permission.

The 'Rule' for Kathin Luang

The rules concerning the performance of kathin luang are complex and full of cosmological allusions. They contain auspicious numbers which indicate degrees of moral perfection (and the levels of the Buddhist heavens). The method of reckoning the ritual calendar touches on

²Then, literally, to be his 'body substitute.'

monastic disputes that date back hundreds of years. Seemingly minor exceptions to the rules, made over the last twenty years, announce successive stages in the king's rise to power. They are as well declarations about the order of succession to the throne. Finally, the rules resolve a crucial question--Who has precedence at royal temples, men or royal or non-royal blood?--and they explain why.

"There are sixteen royal temples included in the rule for offering royal kathin cloth," the Department of Religious Affairs document begins.

Usually the king arranges to do nine temples each year on three days at three temples per day. The first day is the sixth day of the eleventh waning moon; the middle day is the eighth day of the eleventh waning moon; the last day is the ninth day of the eleventh waning moon. The lunar calendar is held to as the rule.³ Future occasions will follow that which is declared here except if there is a special reason or if the 'royal temperment' will deviate from this schedule of activities. (Wichien 1967:3)

Besides the regular kathin robes, the king offers ten additional sets of robes to the monks at Wat Bowoniwet and fifteen to the monks at Wat Chetuphon. These robes are pha phusayong, 'robes to pay respect to the ancestors.' They commemorate the death-days of former abbots of these temples, high-ranking members of the royal family (i.e., monks of royal blood). The kathin luang was and remains very much a family affair.

³The use of the lunar calendar rather than the real phases of the moon to fix the date of the kathin probably marks an unpublicized shift away from the kathin rules declared by Mongkut in the 1840s. The Thammyut reforms fixed the days of the uposatha according to the real phases of the moon which left the "unreformed communities" following the calendar date (Lingat 1933:79). Mongkut's 'more pure' system of calculating the ritual calendar is inconvenient. Like his rule stating that monks should receive white cloth as the official kathin gift, it can be portrayed as leading to a more 'pure' monastic practice, one that closely approximates that followed in the time of the Buddha.

The Sixteen First-Class Temples

The Department's rules indicate that the archaic lineage temples of the Cakkri dynasty were at the center of the royal ritual and temple systems in 1960 but that changes were in the making. In 1979 as in the 1920s, when H. G. Quaritch Wales observed royal ceremonies, there were sixteen first-class royal temples in Thailand. The Department of Religious Affairs' 1979 list of first-class temples indicates that their identity had changed, however. Wat Phra Sri Mahathat was included on the list. Since this temple was built in the 40s, it means that one temple built by a Cakkri king had been struck from the list. Furthermore, by elevating Wat Phra Sri Mahathat to first-class royal status, the king had implicitly (or perhaps temporarily) acceded to the principle that the state could create royal temples that had nothing to do with royalty, i.e., with the activities of kings (men of royal blood).

As O'Connor (1978:170) writes, when the adjective luang is used in relation to temples it means variously "the most sizeable and significant", "the most prosperous and popular", "major object of revenue" plus "wat of the muang." As O'Connor's discussion also makes clear, however, luang is a status conferred by or associated with kings.

Thus Wat Mahathat, a temple whose monks (like those at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat) were pro-military and anti-royalist during the constitutional period, remained on the list of first-class royal temples. This would seem to indicate that the king may have been forced to compromise on the composition of the list (or perhaps that he had no say in its creation). And, under the new royal temple system, the king could not demote temples like Wat Mahathat from first-class status without their relics falling under direct government control.

'Royal' Temples

What makes a royal temple 'royal' [luang]? This question is crucial to understanding how a new class of capitalist entrepreneurs is becoming sacralized in the modern kingdom (chapter 18).

In a 1979 interview, the head of the palace ritual unit said the sixteen first-class temples had to do with "family" [trakun]. Only close members of the king's family could offer kathin at first-class royal temples. He included the queen and the older and younger sisters and brothers of the king and his children in this category but (emphatically) none of the queen's relatives. According to this official, first-class temples were those with 'history' [prawat], second-class temples were those that the king had 'built himself' and third-class temples were those that people had built and offered [thawai] to the king (i.e., as the gift of a subordinate to a superior) (cf. O'Connor 1978:167).⁴

A retired palace official, a descendent of Rama III by a non-royal wife and ritual consultant to the lord chamberlain, volunteered the following information about what he thought made the sixteen first-class temples 'special' [phiset]. (Most of the temples are wat pracham rachakam or temples commemorating the reigns of past kings.)

1. Wat Bowoniwet was special because "the king ordained there and Mongkut was abbot." The king offered kathin every year.
2. Wat Arun (The Temple of the Dawn) was exceptional "because the family of Rama II supports it. People believe it is important because of history." "This is the story of the Lord of Thonburi,

⁴For a more complete discussion of royal temples, see Chulalongkorn (1963, II:215-16), Wachirayan (1971:378), and Döhning (1920:34). Döhning divides royal temples into four (unofficial) categories: those of kings, princes, officials and commoners (i.e., according to the rank of the donor).

King Taksin," he continued. "King Taksin was fleeing from the Burmese armies who sacked the capital of Ayuthaya in 1767. He was retreating from Ayuthaya Palace by ship when he arrived at this temple at dawn." Wat Arun was also designated as a royal temple because King Rama II 'restored' it [burana khrung]. In addition, it was "in the history of Rama I who went on the royal barge to offer kathin. It is the first time in history that the king went to a temple by royal fleet."

3. Of Wat Rachabophit, "The king goes every year because the abbot is the Phra Sangharat (Supreme Patriarch) and because Rama V built it. It is Thammayutnikai."
4. Wat Phra Chettuphon was on the list because King Rama I built it;
5. Wat Rachapradit was there because it was built by King Mongkut. "Some years the king has others offer kathin there, member of the royal family only. Only family can go."
6. Of Wat Rachatiwat (The Royal Abode, formerly Wat Samorai), he said "Rama IV was here. It is not necessary for the king to go every year."
7. Wat Suthat was special because it had "important monks and splendid relics, (plus) the ashes of Rama VIII. Rama I built it."
8. Wat Benchamobophit was on the list because "Rama V built it. It is Mahanikai."
9. Wat Thepsirin was royal because Rama VI built it "to make merit for his mother."

⁵This temple is undergoing extensive restoration by the present king. In 1980 he and his entire family participated in a ceremony celebrating the restoration.

10. Wat Phra Pathom Cedi in Nakorn Pathom⁵ was on the list because the cedi there "was the first in muang thai (The Land of the Thai). It is an old cedi."
11. Wat Niwetthamprawat was included because "Rama V built it next to the Grand Palace".
12. Wat Ratchaorasaram was there because "Rama III built it and it has his relics [that] also."
13. Wat Suwandararam (in Ayuthaya) "has the artifacts [borom] of Ayuthaya."
14. Wat Mahathat was special because the younger brother of Rama I built it.
15. Wat Makut-Kasat (The Royal Crown) was the first wat that Mongkut built. A controversy arose at the palace when Mongkut tried to name it after himself (indicating, perhaps, that he had already achieved an exalted religious status--in this life rather than in the next.) "It is the custom to use the name of a king to name a temple but he has to be dead," the official explained and told the following story:

Mongkut built this temple and said 'Give it my name' but we were not willing [mai yom, not inclined] to use it. This royal order was an idea of Mongkut's. Usually temples are built for the queen or king--for their relics. Temples are built like a monument to a king or queen. For this reason there was no kathin luang there. We still aren't willing to agree.

Instead, the temple was named Wat Phranam-Banyat (Temple of the Royal Naming Order) until Mongkut's death, when it was changed to Wat Makut-Kasat.

16. Wat Phra Sri Mahathat is

the democracy wat, the first temple built by the government. It was built by Phibunsongkhram in 2475 (1932). It is the most important wat of the Air Force and the first democracy wat of Thailand. It was built

at the end of the absolute monarchy. It was the first wat built by the government to become a royal wat.

As an afterthought he added, "The Air Force usually offers there."

Royal Patronage in the Present Era

The king's patronage of these sixteen first-class temples is an extraordinarily sensitive issue. The records of the Department of Religious Affairs indicates that the present king has not personally offered kathin at Wat Mahathat for many years (if ever).⁶ High-ranking monks and highly-placed palace officials were reluctant to discuss royal patronage of Wat Mahathat. At least two interviews were terminated when the question was raised. In one instance, a detailed accounting of the historical significance of each temple was abruptly replaced by the stock answer--the king, like other individuals, made merit at particular temples 'according to faith.' A ranking palace official summed up the situation at Wat Mahathat when he laughed and said "Go ask Phra Phimonlatham" why the king did not offer kathin robes there, and brought the interview to a close soon thereafter.

Officials at the Grand Palace were not particularly sensitive about the king's patronage of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, the temple built by the Phibun-Phin clique and currently supported by the Air Force, but the monks there were well aware that he had not personally offered kathin robes for many years. Their evaluation of the situation is summed up by their explanation of why Somdet Uan had never really been happy as abbot

⁶Ranking monks and temple supporters at Wat Mahathat confirmed this. A temple supporter said that King Anan had visited the temple in the 1940s shortly before his death to lay a boundary stone but that the present king had never been there. He attributed the uneasy state of affairs between the monarchy and the monks at Wat Mahathat to Rama VI, who he said had 'forced' the abbot to accept white robes in the kathin ceremony in the Thammayut style.

there: 'It is too far from the capital,' they explained--the capital being the symbol of royal authority.

Interviews with palace officials and high-ranking government officials further revealed that powerful generals had become personal patrons of first-class royal temples during the constitutional period (when members of the royal family were in exile) and that some had apparently retained this status into the late 1970s. A very few officials (Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, for example) apparently offered kathin at second- or third-class royal temples in a personal capacity, with family and close friends. This was more in the manner of the old nobility rather than in the new manner, in their official capacities as heads of ministries.

One interview at the Grand Palace revealed that royal temple committees retained authority over the distribution of royal relics even after the king returned. For example, an elderly palace official said that Wat Suthat was built by Rama I and that General S. of the army supported it. "This man helps the wat," he explained. "He decided that [the former king] Anan's ashes should be kept there." After his coronation, King Bhumibol may have found royal temples and their relics remained de facto in the hands of powerful generals.

The sixteen royal temples divides into the auspicious numbers nine and seven. These numbers mark a distinction between kathin luang (those performed by the king) and kathin phrarachathan (those offered at first-class royal temples by members of the royal family). Nine stands for kings, for the Buddha, for enlightenment and for progress, 'stepping forward.'⁷ Seven stands for the lesser nobility, for seven levels of

⁷Kao means both 'nine' and 'forward.'

heaven, and for the seven gems. Thus the government document further states:

When His Majesty proceeds to nine temples every year there are still seven temples to which he has not gone. He must then rotate [munwian] to visit these temples at least once every two or three years. The temples not done in the royal procession His Majesty will be pleased to declare as royal alms to big men in the royal lineage and they will offer in substitution for the king [for his 'sacred-royal self' (phra ong)]. (Wichien 1960:3)

The rules further state that (1) the king may offer kathin at any temple in the land, royal or non-royal. (2) He can allow any member of the royal family to offer kathin phrarachathan 'in his name' (i.e., not in their own) at any temple in the land, royal or non-royal. (3) He may designate any ministry, department, association or private party to offer kathin at any temple in the kingdom in his name as royal alms (Wichien 1960:3). In the past, such rights would automatically have been assumed to have been royal prerogatives. The import of the new rules is that the government cannot prevent the king from distributing ritual privileges to whomever he chooses, including, theoretically, opposition politicians, or at whichever temple he chooses, royal or non-royal.

The Royal Temperment . . .

There is ample evidence to suggest that, as the years passed, the 'royal temperment' increasingly dictated exceptions to these rules, beginning in the years after Sarit's death. The original document lists a single exception to the rotation rule: The king had to offer kathin every year at Wat Arun, Wat Benchamabophit, and Wat Rachathiwat. A 1979 footnote amended this rule: If the king had gone to these temples "for many years" he could graciously declare that other members of the royal family could represent him there, as, "for example," occurred at Wat Rachathiwat (the temple of the present Supreme Patriarch, a Sarit

protégé). Another exception occurred in 1979. Princess Chulaphorn represented His Majesty at Wat Benchamobophit, an event which marked her coming of age and assumption of official responsibilities.

Her older sister, the Crown Princess Sirinthorn, had been performing kathin phrarachathan at first-class royal temples for several years. The steady increase in Princess Sirinthorn's ritual responsibilities touched on the issue of succession. In 1978 the Parliament passed a rule that put her in direct line to the throne. At that time she received the title of Crown Princess, which put her on par with her brother, the Crown Prince, as heir apparent (Office of the Prime Minister 1980; chapter 17). In 1978 and 1979, in addition to her kathin duties at first-class royal temples, she offered kathin gifts at commoner temples in rural areas. She was 'helping the people,' emphasizing her status as an adult and increasingly independent member of the royal family. In 1978 and 1979 she never attended the king when he offered kathin luang, however; this privilege was reserved for the Crown Prince. (One informant vehemently objected to the above statement, saying that the Crown Princess had attended her father at kathin luang in the early and mid-1970s, a point I will address in chapter 17).

Thak (1976) indicates that Sarit personally directed the royal activities in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, but the Wichien document indicates that the king may have regained almost total control over royal kathin activities by the late 1970s. In 1979 he and not the government was personally 'adjusting' the details of state ritual performances 'to suit time and place.' In the process, he appeared to be directing royal patronage away from the temples that were supported by Sarit and members of the old military elite of the 1940s and 1950s (Wat

Mahathat and Wat Phra Sri Mahathat), and towards a new class of pro-royal and/or development-oriented monks.

As a final point, the king's failure to personally patronize first-class royal temples is a powerful slight (O'Connor 1978:165) to their monks and temple committees. The king's refusal to allow high-ranking members of the royal family ritual access to first-class temples (which contain the relics of their ancestors, too) is likewise a powerful slight.

Attending the Monarch

One question surrounding royal kathin of the post-1932 period was whether high-ranking military leaders like Phibun had personally attended the king at his ritual performances: a true test of power. In Thailand as in all the Theravada Buddhist kingdoms, the failure of nobles and powerful military leaders to attend the king on ceremonial occasions is akin to an act of treason; it indicates major schisms within the royal family and ruling group and imminent revolution.⁸ All informants agreed that no matter how competitive he had been with the king, Luang Phibun nonetheless attended him at royal kathin ceremonies.

With the exception of the mandatory ritual performances listed above, the 1960 rules left the king with total control over his own kathin activities and those at first-class royal temples. The palace decided when and where the king would offer the kathin robes and who would offer kathin phrarachathan at the remainder of the first-class temples. A series of interviews in the Grand Palace and with government officials

⁸In Cambodia in 1860, for example, the prince Si Votha refused to assist in a funerary ritual for his father. By refusing to take his place in the ritual order, he refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of his brother's succession to the throne. This precipitated an open break with the king and led to eighteen months of warfare (Leclère 1914).

revealed that the schedule of the king's kathin activities and the 'list' of designated representatives at royal temples comes directly from the palace, from the office of the lord chamberlain. The government has no veto-power over the list, nor does it 'suggest' to which temples the king should offer his personal patronage.

The process by which the king selects first-class temples to receive his yearly kathin offering is cloaked in secrecy. Interviews revealed that the head of the palace Ritual Division first pays a surprise visit to a prospective temple to observe its physical characteristics: to see whether it is clean and well-maintained, whether it is safe for the monarch to proceed there, whether its monks are well disciplined. He then prepares a report and sends it to the lord chamberlain. The lord chamberlain consults with his personal ritual adviser about the political affiliations of the temple's committee members and the reputation of its monks and then sends his recommendations 'up' to the king. The king makes final decisions about kathin luang and kathin phrarachathan. The lord chamberlain then draws up a list of sponsors and a ritual schedule and sends it 'down' through the chain of command, 'out' to the various ministries.

Attending the king at royal kathin is called fao rap sadet, 'guarding and receiving' the monarch. Once they receive the schedule of royal kathin activities for the year, members of the privy council (which includes high-ranking members of the royal family), heads of ministries, and branches of the armed forces decide among themselves who will attend the king at which temples. Most officials attend the king at temples where they have personal ties with the abbots.

Observations made in the course of field work revealed that high-ranking officials attend the king at royal kathin in the role of

civil servants, not as ritual participants (i.e., as close family members). For example, in the kathin luang I observed in 1978 and 1979, the king never once signalled to members of his personal attendants to offer the minor kathin gifts [boriwan kathin] to the congregation of monks as he did to his own son. Eight or so of his closest attendants sit inside the temple, but the remainder sit outside in the temple courtyard.

Kathin Phrarachathan: The List

After rights over the sixteen first-class temples were agreed upon, the question remained: Who would offer kathin at the remainder of the royal temples? Who would control the distribution of ritual privileges at these temples? Were members of the Sarit government even concerned with this issue?

The answer is yes, although the story of kathin phrarachathan in the late 1950s and early 1960s remains somewhat of a mystery. With the exception of a very few men who made the actual decisions concerning the kathin phrarachathan, informants agreed there was "nothing new" about kathin phrarachathan, which was precisely the effect sought by the Sarit government.

Writing of the ritual situation in the 1920s, Wales notes that the king designated which nobles who should offer kathin robes at royal temples. Under the 1960 rules, the government gained control of the lists of ritual sponsors at second- and third-class royal temples. The government--not the king--distributed ritual privileges at these temples--to ministries, high-ranking officials, wealthy people from the private sector, and occasionally to high-ranking members of the nobility.

The ritual division of the Department of Religious Affairs handles the administrative details of the selection process (chapter 16). These and a related series of ritual reforms meant that the Department began to direct ritual traffic nationwide. By approving the attendance lists at royal ceremonies, they began to determine which Buddhist monks and Buddhist laity had access to the king and to royal rituals. Professional bureaucrats, the 'slaves of the royal activities' [kharachakan] began to take direct control over the soteriological chances of the nation's citizens.

The process for choosing sponsors of kathin phrarachathan at royal temples is the following: The Department of Religious Affairs screens potential sponsors and then 'suggests'⁹ at which temples they may wish to offer the king's kathin robes. The list is passed up the chain of command to the prime minister's office, where names may be added or deleted. The palace does not take an active role in screening potential sponsors, but it does retain powers of final approval. In theory, the king may strike names from the list.

Royal Ceremonies in the Present Reign

The 1967 document, "Annual Royal Ceremonies in the Present Reign," was handed to me by palace officials with the explanation that it would "explain everything" about royal kathin. What it did was explain the relationship between the new kathin phrarachathan rules and the government's development policy.

⁹The word 'suggest' is always used in reference to merit-making activities. For the department to do other than suggest a particular temple implies coercion or excessive calculation in the merit-making process, which delegitimizes it.

The idea for the book originated in a seminar organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (headed by Thanat Khoman, the former head of SEATO) in the early 1960s. This meant that the government, not the palace, issued a definitive version of royal rituals for the Ninth Reign in the 1960s. In 1979, although the king had greater control over royal temples, this government-sponsored booklet was nonetheless accepted by palace officials as definitive statement of royal ceremonies 'in the present.'

Thawiwong, its author, takes great pains to indicate that no radical disruptions had occurred in the ritual system in recent years. "There is no change in the principles and objectives of royal ceremonies as they are performed in King Bhumibol's reign," he begins. "The king in the present era holds to the principles of 'the middle way' [thang sai klang], which is to not have changes in the principles of performance and the purposes of these royal rituals" (1967:3). The principles underlying the ritual may not have changed, but the methods of performing them had changed radically.

Thawiwong writes that the kathin phrarachathan "opens the opportunity for government servants from all ministries, departments and sections to attend the king in his work as 'specks of dust beneath the royal feet' [fao la ong thuli phrabat] (1967:5). Although

the king is the foremost sacred being [ong ek] and highest in the kingdom, and he goes everywhere in his kingdom [rachanacak] to offer kathin luang, there are still many temples remaining before all royal temples have been fully and totally offered to. (1967:33)

It is the duty of civil servants, the 'slaves of the royal work' (i.e., not members of the nobility), to assist the king in his ritual duties.

Interviews on the financial aspects of the kathin phrarachathan revealed that the new ritual sponsors offer the king's robes and their

money at kathin at royal temples. In the Ninth Reign as in the Fifth, the king exchanged titles, ranks, and ritual favors for services, gifts of temples, and financial support of royal temples from his wealthy subjects. The difference was that in the Fifth Reign King Chulalongkorn accepted such donations and still retained direct control over ritual privileges,¹⁰ whereas King Bhumibol accepted financial support for royal temples but gave up personal control over ritual privileges, sacred objects, and monastic activities there as a consequence. This was the price of maintaining the resplendence of royal temples in the modern era, and resplendent royal temples are traditional signs of the merit of the Dhammaraja.

As the Thawiwong booklet and statements from the king's ritual advisors made clear, the new kathin phrarachathan rules had an explicit purpose: to facilitate the government's penetration of the countryside (and to prevent generals and members of the nobility from publicly fighting over ritual privileges). To repeat an earlier quotation: "Kathin phrarachathan is done to supplement the king's work," said a palace official. "This sets a trend for the people, for ministries, etc. Instead of fighting to get wat in Bangkok, they are assigned them [outside of Bangkok] so they can care for and have money for that wat."

The author's emphasis on the lack of change in the royal ritual system implies that the elite's penetration of the countryside was but the continuation of an ancient religious tradition, motivated by piety and respect for the Buddhist king.

¹⁰O'Connor (1978:163) writes, for example, that the king's subordinates received petitions concerning the status of royal temples but "even seemingly trivial matters" remained at the king's discretion.

Kathin Ton

The Thawiwong document refers to the fourth category of royal kathin, the kathin ton, portraying it as the 'model' of a new type of ritual orientation--the 'proper (ritual) attitude' of the 1960s--that of 'helping rural people.' According to one official, the kathin ton set the 'example' of King Bhumibol's interest in the welfare of his rural subjects.

"Kathin ton is a new kind of special royal work," explains Thawiwong.

Besides proceeding to offer kathin cloth as a government activity, His Majesty proceeds to offer kathin at various temples which are not aram luang, another kind of royal charity. We have no evidence for knowing what this private kathin (kathin suan phra ong) was called before the Fifth Reign. It was called kathin ton in the Fifth Reign. In 2448 (1905) the performance of kathin ton was easily declared as principle by royal order. (1967:34)

The kathin ton was clearly part of a larger, formal ritual policy; the document lists the formal criteria by which the king selects temples to receive kathin ton. He offers special kathin robes:

1. at temples where he has not previously offered kathin cloth;
2. in places where the people "have much faith in that temple"; and
3. in areas where people have not yet had the opportunity to have an audience with the king [fao thun lae ong thuli phrabat, lit., 'to attend him as dust beneath the royal feet'] (Thawiwong 1967:36).

This passage confirms that post-Sarit governments had a systematic policy to maximize the king's exposure to his subjects, beginning with his traditional ritual activities. Unlike Phibun, Sarit and his successor wanted as many people as possible to see the monarch.

This policy marked a definitive break from previous royal traditions, which forbade or limited visual interactions between the king and his

subjects. In particular, it marked a departure from the traditions of Ayuthaya, where members of the king's bodyguard reportedly shot out the eyes of men who dared glance at the royal progress. Visual interactions--rare and auspicious when they occurred between Hindu gods and their worshippers and Devarajas and their subjects--became the basis of a modern policy of national integration.

The king's newly-designed ritual activities were self-consciously patterned after the ancient prataksin or munwian, i.e., as a perfect ritual circumambulation of the kingdom. As an elderly palace official said of the kathin ton,

In the last 20 years the king has concentrated works outside Bangkok because he shouldn't do the work of government So he finds work that has been neglected and he spreads work to the provinces, in the North, Northeast, and South.

Given the geographical division of Thailand, the king's rotation to different areas of the country is the equivalent of the Great Cakkavatti's clockwise tour of the four continents.

I suggest that, following this and other ritual examples set by the king, munwian or clockwise 'circulating' became a dominant idiom of moral order in the polity in the 1960s and 1970s and a dominant idiom of moral perfection for elite during that same period. It became a metaphor of the perfection of the ten virtues, a spatial metaphor of power that indicated men's 'sight' (knowledge of material conditions) and insight (into the causal roots and consequences of those conditions): a sign of men's "practical experience" of the moral and material conditions of the polity.

The munwian pattern of the kathin ton entails a magical/sacred financial structure that represents the symbolic redistribution of capital through the ritual system. This financial structure works on a

sacred "multiplier principle"; the king performs a perfect act of merit, his subjects emulate it, and virtue 'spreads' throughout the kingdom like the flowering of the lotus of the law.

"Kathin is called a minor method [withi noi] 'something preliminary to things which are made to follow,' sin thi tam ma," said a palace official in explanation of kathin ton. "If the king passes a hospital, school, temple or mosque, he will give money and others will follow." He was 'drawing' capital to the countryside.

The king's "seed money" for kathin ton (for ritual gifts non-royal temples) and for his personal contributions to nearby development projects comes from the royal budget and income from the royal properties. Such contributions are called 'donation by royal merit' [boricak doi sadet phra rachakuson].

There was a final, hidden dimension to the kathin ton. In offering kathin robes in places "where the people have much faith in that temple," the king managed to discover and venerate a new line of Isan meditation monks. Believed to be saints, most of these monks were of the Thammayut order or, more significantly, Mahanikai monks who followed Thammayut practice.

Seeing Nobility

And the king's subjects did flock to 'see nobility' at these ritual performances. Hundreds of peasants came to see the monarch at the kathin luang and kathin ton of 1978 and 1979. Some received the honour of kneeling next to the red carpet marking the monarch's path to the temple, offering white garlands to the king as he passed. Shaded beneath colored umbrellas, the king and members of the royal family bent to receive these offerings from their subjects, sometimes touching them benevolently on the head.

There were many explanations of this interaction. A palace official said that the custom of offering garlands showed that "people respect the king." Isan informants said that the people who saw and were touched by the king had luck [chok di] and merit. A university teacher from Isan, a former Mahanikai monk of Pali Nine status, said people offer flowers

because everyone wants to get close to the king. The opportunity is rare. Flowers are to pay respect. If you have something to pay respect, kathin is a good opportunity to present flowers to the king. These people tham bun mak (make much merit). People who see the king have merit. If we didn't have merit, we would not see the king.

As the above statements make clear, the steady proliferation of opportunities to 'see the monarch' created a new moral order in the polity, one based on a distinction of "good" to "bad" people. "To see nobility [hen prasoet] is for good people," he continued.

If you do not have merit you cannot see the king. Bad people cannot have the opportunity to see the king. People who have done good can see the king. Besides, it is merit. It is mongkhon (auspicious).

The Royal Touch and Double Merit

As for the king's touch, the above informant stated that "No one can touch the king . . . no one dares touch him. This is just like with Buddhist monks and Buddha statues. If we respect something we do not touch it because we give respect of the highest sort." Conversely, the royal touch is a favour of the highest sort (cf. Bloch): "If the king touches someone he gives a special kindness [karuna] or loving kindness [metta]. This is something His Majesty is pleased to do as something special."

"Anything the king touches is saksit or sacred," he continued. Scarves worn by the Village Scouts were gifts from the king, "given indirectly." The scarves were saksit

because they belong to the king. That which is close to the thoughts of the king is saksit. That which is close to the king is sacred, that which is far from him, far from his thoughts, is not too sacred. Near is sacred. When the scarf of the Tiger Scouts is taken off it is kept as an object of worship [bucha].

Visual and physical interactions between the king and his subjects the people's offering of bucha to the Buddha through the king create "bonds of remembrance" between the king and his subjects. Thus the former monk said that the garlands which are given by the people to the king and by the king to the Buddha are called 'memorials,' thiraluk. "They are given as memorials so the king will remember his subjects when he makes merit." Another more Westernized informant characterized the practice as "double merit." Men bring garlands to the temple to pay homage to the Buddha. They give the garlands to the king and the king places them before the Buddha image in the temple. "This is double merit," she explained. The garlands are then retrieved and kept as memorials of the event.

The new Thai civic religion is based on these same principles of worship and remembrance, except that some men give white envelopes containing checks for the royal charities to the king as he passes by on his way to make merit. According to the above monk-informant, these checks are also called thiraluk, 'memorials.' They are treated like khong thawai or 'things for offering' to the Buddha image. Like white garlands, they are set on white cloth on top of golden offering trays for presentation to the king.

He elaborated on this custom as it concerned the new, nationalistic Village Scout movement. "A check is given to the king by the head of the Village Scouts. He puts it on a special tray on light colored cloth that has never been used before. The best tray is gold colored or

silver colored." The king's receipt of the gift is phrarachathan, the royal gift. "You can't touch the king because according to the vinaya if the king touches someone he gives a special karuna and metta."

He explained that the custom of giving white envelopes to the king arose because "the Tiger Scouts were 'searching for a method' [ha withi] to donate or sacrifice to the king." "Things they give to the king at the temple are things that are a memorial," he concluded.

Another relatively new custom was that of the king offering his hand (i.e., the 'gift' of his hand) for his subjects to touch. This is called phrarachathan prahat, the king's 'giving his hand to touch.' The king does not reach out and touch his subjects, they 'beg' or 'ask' for the offering of the royal hand. One informant said this custom was introduced in the Fifth Reign, or perhaps in the Ninth.

Kathin and the Worship of the Pious

In fact, the giving of white envelopes at royal kathin was a relatively new custom, part of a new civic religion that was created by the Grand Palace and the government in the 1960s and 1970s. It was a religious activity with nationalistic overtones and a nationalistic activity with religious overtones.

As a palace official explained this custom, "the people make offerings to the king and and the queen and they make offerings to the Buddha. This makes merit for the people." People who gave white envelopes as bucha were 'adding' [phum] to the king's kathin gift.

This statement was ambiguous. Were they making merit with the king? Was the king making merit for them or on their behalf? Was he making merit for them or for their ancestors, for men in this world or in the next?

The nature of the ambiguity can be better understood when we note that two moments of worship are traditionally incorporated into a royal ceremony like the kathin. In the first, the people offer gifts to the monarch, worshipping him as a deity. These gifts are called racha-bucha. They are an everyday act of homage called the 'worship of the pious.' The second concerns the king's relationship with the Sangha and the giving of gifts like the ciwon, the 'three robes' of the main kathin gift. Two such ritual acts--one of homage, one of ritual participation--were incorporated in worship at the Temple of the Tooth (Seneviratne 1978:26, 98). 'Double merit' conflates the two levels or moments of worship.

This interpretation of double merit can be extended when we note that it is one means of resolving the king's antinomy problems with regard to wealth. How is he to have a "full treasury," one of the five attributes of the Buddhist king, if he does not receive tax money or control trade? How is he to provide lavish support to the Sangha without calling unwelcome attention to the size of the royal treasury or the sources of the royal income? By including cash with the racha bucha, the king's subjects fulfilled their dhamma by making sacrifices to the Sangha and demonstrating their loyalty to king, nation, and religion. The king, whose great virtue had 'attracted' this wealth, then selflessly passed it on to the Sangha, thereby fulfilling his dhamma as a great king and world renouncer and perfecting the virtue of boricak or renunciation. This practice was nonetheless a departure from tradition: It is only with great difficulty that one imagines the kings of Ayuthaya or even King Mongkut constantly touching or even drawing close enough to their subjects to accept minor cash donations.

These ritual data indicate that the government of the 1960s did an historical about-face with regard to its policy towards the king. The promoters of the coup group of 1932 only grudgingly acknowledged the king's right to divide the kingdom into its constituent parts, to articulate the principles upon which it would be ruled, and to communicate these principles to his subjects through the ritual medium. Beginning with a new kathin phrarachathan policy, the Sarit regime made a business of it. Thus when members of the new economic elite entered the countryside, they did so as men of merit, selflessly emulating the actions of a great king. They came seeking to reduce the suffering of the peasantry, not as businessmen in search of new markets.

The Disposition of the Nation's Relics

"Verily, there is no understanding of the truth among you nagas. It were fitting indeed to bear away the relics to a place where there is an understanding of the truth!" (The ascetic Sonuttara to the naga-king, "The Enshrining of the Relics," Mahavamsa XXXI.63-64)

The king made other, equally subtle accommodations with the Sarit and post-Sarit governments. These accommodations concerned the disposition of the nation's relics and historical artifacts. Before 1932 all important Buddha relics and sacred objects were universally acknowledged to belong to the king as the 'lord of the land.' After 1932 the disposition of the relics was unclear. The issue came to a head at least once--when Luang Phibun tried to use state funds to build a new 'Buddha circle' and create a new royal capital in 1944.

The 1960 kathin rules implicitly acknowledge that the relics enshrined in first-class royal temples fall under control of the king (or at least that he has the final say in their disposition). Those at the remainder of the royal temples fall under the immediate control of

the Properties Division of the Department of Religious Affairs. The department answers to three authorities: the Grand Palace, the prime minister's office and the Council of Senior Monks. This left a final question: Who was to control the nation's artifacts, especially those in remote provinces? The days when powerful princes or military leaders could single-handedly appropriate valuable religious objects were over. As a compromise, the state bureaucracy took control of these objects, placing them in national museums: The relics went neither to the king nor to powerful military leaders.

For example, in December 1961 the king made an landmark speech dedicating a national museum which hints at the accomodation. "It has been my view for sometime now that ancient relics and artifacts of any locality should be kept and displayed in the National Museum in the changwat [province] (1975:9)," he said. At the same time, he downplayed the soteriological importance of these objects. He spoke of relics and museums in a Western sense, not as objects of veneration (as material indices of the dhamma, rup-tham) but as artifacts and historic sites that signified the Thai 'cultural heritage.'

Ancient relics and artifacts and historic sites are all of great value and highly essential to historical, artistic and archaeological studies and research. They signify¹¹ the glory of the Thai nation from times past and should be kept and preserved as the common national heritage forever. (1975:9)

This was to assign new indexical values to those relics and artifacts.

Like the kingship itself, the nation's religious relics were increasingly portrayed as cultural artifacts, as khrueng sadaeng, 'implements which showed' the glory of the Thai nation in the 1960s. This formulation subverts the traditional indexical relation between rupa and nama, in which the former, the 'material aspects of religion'

¹¹Pen khrueng sadaeng, lit., they are 'instruments that show.'

[watthana-tham), index the latter, the invisible essence of dhamma. In this new ideology of nationalism, the 'material' aspects of dhamma were instead 'signs of the national glory.'

This speech was part of a longstanding controversy. According to one informant, the Department of Fine Arts (under Sarit) had tried to "pull" the nation's finest relics and statues out of the provinces and keep them in a single place in Bangkok. Members of the royal family "felt sorry" for the people and said that the relics should be kept outside the capital, that the Fine Arts Department "should return the people's property to its proper place." Since 'knowledge of proper places' is an attribute of kings and monks, not of commoners (Mahavamsa XXXIX.22-26), the Department of Fine Arts could hardly take issue with the king's judgement.

The Distribution of Royal Favours

In the 1960s the king and the government collaborated in creating new contexts in which the king could receive donations from his subjects and demonstrate his virtue by giving alms to worthy causes. In addition to the distribution of ritual privileges at royal temples and his offering of kathin ton, the king granted ranks and titles as a reward for activities performed 'on behalf of the nation.' These awards include:

1. the use of the krut or the garuda bird, given to select banks and businesses as a sign of royal patronage;
2. elaborate titles given to government officials for outstanding service to the nation, titles signifying levels of spiritual attainment;
3. Buddha statues [phraphuttarup bucha] or 'objects for worship' given as a reward for contributions to the royal charities;

4. amulets of Buddhist monks, the most potent of them given to his closest associates, others given in recognition of contributions to the royal charities;
5. patronage of the cremation ceremonies of high-ranking government officials and members of the royal family (usually performed at the Thammayut Wat Thepsirin) and patronage of the cremation ceremonies of soliders at Wat Phra Sri Mahathat;
6. after 1971, when the Village Scouts were formed, sacred scarves that were to be venerated as phraphuuttarup bucha and
7. degrees at graduation ceremonies.¹²

In addition, Sarit employed the monarch extensively to provide what Thak calls "spiritual sanction" for the new elite convergence of the 1960s: a convergence of Chinese businessmen, high-ranking bureaucrats, and military leaders.

In the early period of his reign, the present king performed marriages for members of the royalty and a few members of the political elite. While this has continued, we find that more and more, the king has been performing marriages between sons and daughters of these groups and those of the emerging business elite. Since Thai society is very status conscious, the performance of marriages by the king is seen ipso facto as conferring elite status. Thus the king in effect performs the function of helping to consolidate a complex of alliances between political, royal, bureaucratic, and business families. (Thak 1979:325)

Ideologies of Kingship: Official and Unofficial

The strategy of placing the king at the center of new, development-oriented activities does not derive its effectiveness from beliefs that the king is an ordinary mortal. Hindu deities may be multi-form but the personalities and practices of Buddhist virtuosi are multi-faceted. Their characters are like a diamond, each facet

¹²For a more detailed accounting of the king's charitable activities, see Thak (1976).

symbolizing the perfection of a Buddhist virtue and its accompanying pure mental state. As Michael Ang Thwin's (1983) work on Burmese kingship indicates, the Buddhist king is above all characterized by his multiple natures and powers. I suggest that this multiplicity of natures and powers, expressed in the multiplicity of the royal activities, has become the symbol par excellence of the virtuosity of the modern Thai Buddhist king. Again, one symbol of the king's perfection is munwian or circumambulation. The Thai Buddhist king 'rotates'--turns a perfect circle of practice--as he goes about his royal duties, those practices in turn representing the perfection of one or several of the ten virtues: almsgiving, renunciation, lovingkindness, etc. New activities are continually added to the royal repertoire. Because they are practiced and perfected by the king, they are automatically deemed 'appropriate' expressions of dhamma under the cosmic 'conditions of the moment.' Thus as cosmic conditions fluctuate, new capitalist practices are, like light from a diamond, refracted through the medium of the royal personality (chapter 17), expressions, all, of the perfection of fundamental Buddhist virtues. The king can likewise munwian or 'circulate' through a host of 'political' principles, practicing and perfecting each through the creation of new types of royal activity (or theatre) as part of his progress on the path of purification. That these natures can, for the most part, co-exist without contradiction from the indigenous standpoint has enabled Thai Buddhist kings to respond creatively to antinomy problems--although this in no way alleviates the severity of some of those problems.

The "New Meaning" of Kingship

Officials at the Grand Palace were advancing an explicit ideology of "modern" kingship based on the thotsaphirachatham ideal and emphasizing the king's practical orientation toward helping his subjects. At the same time, they acknowledged that "unofficial" ideologies of kingship prevailed among the general populace.

Was King Bhumibol a Devaraja or a Dhammaraja? One of the royal secretaries emphatically denied that the king was a Devaraja. "The absolute rulers of Ayuthaya were Devarajas," he said. "The Devaraja is more divine or saksit than the Dhammaraja. Saksit means privileged or holy."¹³

According to this "modern" ideology of kingship, the king's sacrality rests solely on his perfection of the Buddhist virtues, on his pure practice and most definitely not his pure blood. "The king is saksit only if he retains the ten-fold practice," the secretary explained. "The Ayuthayan kingdoms maintained the divinity of the king, that he is holy, an absolute monarch. Whatever he said was law," but this was not true of the kingship in the present. Was the king a Cakkavatti (a wheel-rolling monarch)? "No one believes this king is a cakkavatti," he stated. The Devaraja and Cakkavatti ideals were somehow connected in his mind and identified with ideologies concerning the potency of royal blood. "Divinity has nothing to do with bloodline in the present," he explaining, followed immediately with the statement that "Virtues [barami] are inherent" (?).

You don't have to build in bloodline now because of government. The king has no power [amnat]. He has influence [ithiphon], which is to have amnat without having written authority. This is acquired by setting an example [tham tua

¹³Saksit is the Thai equivalent of shakti. Cf. Wadley (1978).

pen tua yang]¹⁴ The best way is to set an example. This is the new meaning of kingship.

(Another informant said the Devaraja was distinguished from the Dhammaraja by the use of magical powers.)

Despite its modernist overtones, the royal secretary automatically assumed that the purification of ritual was central to this "new meaning" of kingship. "It is the king's duty to purify ritual by going back to its origins to see its special purpose and then to emphasize its purpose," he explained.

The secretary acknowledged that the official ideology of kingship was not necessarily that held by the majority of the king's subjects; there was another "unofficial" ideology that was "still the general belief of many Thai people," that the king was a somuttithep or a 'supposed angel.'

On Kings as (Supposed) Angels

"The general belief of people is that all kings are divine," he said in explanation of this concept.

They are angels, phrom or thep. The somuttithep are called in as guardian angels of the kingdoms of Siam. They are called Phra Sayam Thewathirat (The Guardian Angels of the Siamese Kingdom). All combinations of lives of former kings are in groups of angels. Past kings are thewada."

(Another informant said he was wrong. There was only one Phra Sayam Thewathirat.)

According to the secretary, the royal thewada are part of a strict hierarchy of celestial beings and are treated as such by the king's subjects: "Ordinary people wouldn't dare call thep because it's too much to ask."¹⁵ They know their class." Ordinary people

¹⁴Literally, 'to make the body be an example' or body-type.

¹⁵He probably meant the phi or local guardian spirits.

call the family thep. There are guardian angels of the house, city, town, and kingdom. People know that which is low, that which is high [rucak thi tam, thi sung].

As the interview took yet other twists and turns, it became apparent that the king's pure blood was perhaps, after all, the most important feature distinguishing him from his subjects and his close relatives.

The King's Bloodline

The secretary attributed the king's 'privileged position' in society to two factors: his "pure bloodline" (literally, to his "membership in the bloodline of warriors", sai luat-kasat), and to "differences in knowledge" that distinguished him from his subjects. "The king is in a privileged position because he knows about important subjects," he explained. "He has more experience [prasopakan] than others." His royal blood also gave him an advantage over his subjects, however, because "descent from a pure lineage means that one is clever, chalat chaliao. This is an inborn disposition. It means that one can anticipate things" [know the future?]." (According to another informant, 'the ability to know the future,' khat kan ru anakhot, is gained from special knowledge [yan] and meditation.)

By way of explanation, the secretary compared the king's "innate qualities" to the powers acquired by meditation monks. "Meditation monks have knowledge through vipassana. Phutha means 'enlightened, the enlightened one,'" he said (the implication being that the king had such knowledge at birth).¹⁶ As for the distinction between the secretary (himself a member of the royal family) and the monarch: "The king is in a higher class of meditation than I am. He has achieved a stage called wimutti-phon," an achievement which the secretary also seemed to regard as a function of the monarch's more pure blood.

¹⁶It means literally to 'wake up,' to be enlightened.

Wimutthiphon is insight. It can refer to the general happiness one experiences in meditation or to more exalted states such as those reportedly experienced by the great meditation master, Acaan Man. In his biography of Acaan Man, Maha Boowa (1976:139ff.) characterizes Acaan Man's attainment of vimutti as "the condition beyond space and time." Western-educated Thai informants who read the above statement insisted that the king's secretary did not mean that the king had attained extraordinary powers associated with high levels of meditation, but this interpretation seems at variance with Maha Boowa's use of the term in relation to Acaan Man.

One might only conclude that, while the modern ideology of kingship is that the king is the head of the nation, the symbol of national unity, a moral exemplar to his people, and a wise man of superior practical experience, the majority of the nation's citizens view him as a deity or as a man whose pure blood endows him with extraordinary powers of wisdom. His subjects are willing and happy to make great material and personal sacrifices to the king because it enhances their search for merit and moral perfection. They flock to see him because he is like an angel, briefly descended to earth to witness and reward the meritorious work of his subjects.

Virtues may be "inherent" in the king's disposition, but, in the final analysis, it seems that they may inhere literally in his pure blood--that they are enhanced or "released" through ascetic practices and acts of ritual purification. At one point the secretary seemed to suggest that the king's practical orientation (i.e., his "practical reason") was also a function of royal blood: i.e., not only was the king born with more wisdom [pañña] of the religious sort than his

subjects, but in accordance with modern (i.e. Western) values and concepts of utility, he was born with more "practical wisdom" as well.

The Buddha has a dual nature as man and deity and most Thai apparently believe that King Bhumibol does also. I suggest that this duality, as well as the king's multiplicity of natures, may be the basis of an unlooked-for affinity between Buddhism and Western capitalism. It endows the kingship with a natural, Janus-like quality. For example, the Thai idea that the king travels to the countryside spreading barami, giving gifts of practical wisdom to his subjects, and providing them with the opportunity to hen khon prasoet or 'see nobility' articulates with USAID officials' perceptions of the "usefulness" of the Buddhist monarch: his visits to the countryside accelerate rural development and the commercialization of the economy. As the above statements indicate, however, this "practical" orientation is not the operant ideology among the Thai peasantry or even, perhaps, among officials at the Grand Palace.

There was a new twist to the royal traditions of the 1960s. The super-sacred king was also a populist king. One of his most constant objectives was to get as close to many of his subjects as possible: to allow them to 'see nobility' or to constantly hold out the hope that such an event could actually occur. The veneration of the king-deity draws a steady stream of donations into the royal treasuries, donations that arise 'naturally,' sacrifices 'born of dhamma.'

In this chapter I discussed rules for the organization of royal kathin in the modern polity and the ideologies of kingship that support them. In the next chapter I will describe actual royal kathin ceremonies to demonstrate how these rules are put into practice.

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CHAPTER 11

RECREATING THE MYTHICAL PAST

Introduction

The royal secretary's statement notwithstanding, King Bhumibol's progress across the land to perform kathin ceremonies in 1978 and 1979 bore a strong resemblance to the great Cakkavatti king's progress across the mythical continents surrounding Mount Sumeru (Meru). King Lithai describes this event in eloquent detail in the Three Worlds text, written in the fourteenth century and cited above. In this chapter I will compare King Bhumibol's progress across the Thai kingdom with King Lithai's description of the great Cakkavatti king's progress across the continents of Buddhist mythology. The comparison indicates exactly how the sacred kingship was resurrected after thirty years of decline and near extinction. It demonstrates how the royal kathin acts as a problem-solving device with respect to general problems of capitalist development, and specific problems that plague individual interest groups. Finally, it suggests a possible (and crucial) cosmological dimension to interest group formation.

Before examining the great Cakkavatti king's tour of the four continents, however, let us review the concepts of visual power that that structure sacred performances and examine the properties of celestial symbols or the 'symbols of Buddhism' [sanyalac sasanaphut]. Both work on the absence/presence paradigm described by Paul Mus (1935).

Remembering the Dhamma: Objects Which Glow

"Here the whole island shines with the brightness of your bodies; what works have ye done that ye have passed from this world into the world of the gods?" (Mahavamsa XXX.49)

Mental acts of 'seeing' and 'remembering' [cam] dhamma are the basis of Buddhist concepts of moral order. This ideology is supported by a related ideology--of objects, persons, and actions (?) which glow.

King Bhumibol's circumambulation of his kingdom in 1978 and 1979 was not 'reminiscent' of that of the great Dhamma King in a simple sense, or in the sense connoted by the Western term, but in a complex religious sense: When his subjects witness his progress across the land, they are 'seeing dhamma' [hen tham]. The king's positive moral influence is believed to be visually and aurally absorbed ('by the senses') of his lay audience, which then 'remembers' and transforms this experience into a positive chain of act and consequence: into positive kamma.

The king's steady flow of ritual performances is believed to transform the invisible essence [nama] of the Buddha's teachings into its visible, material presence or 'shape' [rupa]. Like the sight of the Buddha or of his relics, the sight of the king, the royal procession, and the symbols and decorations of the Buddhist temple are presumed to have a potent visual-commemorative effect on the men who draw near. Together they recreate the celestial realms of religious purity, drawing men back in time--into the pure past when the Buddha was present. Like the sight of the Buddha and his sacred traces, they are believed to inspire men to devotion.

The Sinhalese chronicle, The Mahavamsa (XIX.58-59), articulates this principle of visual power in the following passage on the planting of the great Bo-tree:

And while they all yet gazed, there grew, springing from it,
eight shoots; and they stood there, young Bodhi-trees

When the king saw the young Bodhi-trees he, with senses all
amazed, worshipped them by the gift of a white parasol
(XIX.58-59)

This Theravada concept of order and social action is derived from and linked to Buddhist concepts of person, and especially to corresponding ideologies of "communication through the senses".

Communicating through the Senses

Like snakes, crocodiles, birds, dogs, and jackals, that gravitate to their own respective resorts, that is to say, anti-hills, water, space, villages, and charnel grounds, so the eye, etc., should be regarded as gravitating to their respective resorts, that is to say, visible data
(Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification)

The Buddhist doctrine of impermanence states that men are but transient 'heaps' of elements, attracted or ('stuck' tit) to the world through the five 'doors' of the senses. The 'eye faculty' is the leading sensory organ. The self-disciplined virtuoso can shut this and other doors of perception in order to cultivate wisdom, but lesser men cannot. As a consequence, volatile, impure beings are believed to be more powerfully attracted to visual stimuli--positive or negative--than are religious virtuosi. This is what makes some of them, at least, 'like animals.'

As a corollary to this formula, Buddhist virtuousi--saints and great Buddhist kings (i.e., men born with the thirty-two marks of the great being)--are believed to acquire extraordinarily attractive physical attributes (e.g., they emit rays of light) when they acquire high levels of purification and wisdom. When King Bhumibol progresses across the land, his subjects are thus believed to be attracted to the powerful sight of the king and his splendid entourage: It 'reminds' them of a great Dhamma King and inclines them toward the practice of dhamma.

This ideology of visual power is based on four interrelated premises: (1) the 'eye faculty' is the leading sensory organ; (2) impure 'attached' beings respond powerfully to visual stimuli (positive or negative); (3) the religious virtuoso acquires increasingly attractive bodily attributes as he progresses on the path of purification; and (4) the sight of pure action, like that of celestial symbols, has powerful, transformative, and magical qualities.

Thus in Theravada societies like Thailand, silent acts of religious piety--"communication through the senses"--not speech, are assumed to be the most potent forms of communication about dhamma, especially communication between religious virtuosi and the impressionable masses: Visible factors¹ take precedence over verbal in the communication process. As Buddhaghosa makes clear, idle "talk" is a form of attachment to the world. It is a kamma-sign [nimitr-kamma], a material event that generates yet further actions and reactions (Buddhaghosa 1976, Vol. I).

In ritual performances like the kathin, auspicious sights work together with magical words and celestial music to recreate the mythical past and to induce a powerful inner state and mental image. All strike at the senses: some at the eye faculty and the others at the ear faculty (cf. Tambiah 1970)

This model of communication through the senses, based on the absence/presence paradigm, structures the actual kathin performance. For example, the pure behavior of Buddhist monks is believed to momentarily (in a flash of time) recreate the Buddha and his teachings, making the absent Buddha present. Their actions transform the invisible

¹For example, the eye faculty takes precedence over the ear faculty and 'bodily intimation' over 'verbal intimation' in Buddhaghosa's (1976, II:489) discussion of materiality.

essence of the dhamma into its physical presence, striking at the senses of the ritual participants. The dhamma is then 'transmitted through the senses' to all ritual participants, and through Pali, the language of truth, to a select few of superior rank or religious attainment.²

The inverse process occurs when lay participants pray. Modern meditation manuals, for example, instruct ritual participants to close their eyes and meditate on a visible object (i.e., the Buddha statue) during merit-making ceremonies. This is called 'taking a material object of dhamma [wathu-tham] into the eye faculty [duang-ta].'¹ This visual image, called a 'preliminary sign,' is then transformed into a mental image in the 'hearts and minds' [cit lae cai] of the ritual participants; the rupa-kaya or relic-body is thus transformed into the dhamma-kaya or teaching-body, the essence of religion (cf. Reynolds). This process is called 'seeing dhamma' and occurs only when the mind is at peace (The Buddhist Center for the Practice of Dhamma n.d.; Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:337-338).

In the following sections I will describe what happens when the inhabitants of the four mythical continents of Jambu witness the progress of the great Cakkavatti king across the heavens, then what happens when King Bhumibol transverses his kingdom in the present.

The Journey of the Great Cakkavatti King

The great Cakkavatti king knows merit and 'dhamma, and teaches the people to know the Dhamma; it is just as if a Lord Buddha had been born and was teaching the people to live according to the Dhamma. (King Lithai)

²The king and members of the royal family chant the offering words in Pali, while representatives at the kathin phrarachathan and ordinary men chant in Thai.

The great Cakkavatti king is living quietly in his palace on the continent of Jambu, scrupulous in his observance of the Buddhist precepts, when the great gem wheel suddenly arises from the ocean, propelled by the power of the king's merit. The wheel flies to a window of the king's palace, and he "goes and sits on the golden seat decorated with the seven gems situated next to the window" to admire it (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:142). Following in the wake of the great gemmed wheel of the law, a dhamma-cak called the Cakkaratana, the king flies through the sky, conquering the universe by the power of his merit. The great wheel rolls before him, propelled through the air the power of his merit. He is followed by his ministers, who raise parasols over their heads to protect themselves from the rays of the sun.

A universal king, the great Cakkavatti king is guarded by devata and yakkha (angels and demons), naga kings and garuda kings. Like the splendid King Dhammasoka (Asoka), "heavenly musicians, the half-bird, half-human species . . . the sorcerers, spirit-dogs, wild dogs, lions . . . and tigers all come to pay their respects and to prostrate themselves before him" (1982:178). The procession passes over the four continents in a blaze of celestial light and music, going first to the east, then to the continents to the south, west, and north amidst the blinding gleam of gold and precious jewels. The inhabitants of the four continents are stunned by the sight of the gem wheel, the symbol of the king's virtuosity. The sight of the wheel causes their wishes to come true (1982:143-145). The procession and the wheel are identified with knowledge of the truth; men have only to see the gem wheel to spontaneously 'know the names' of the courtiers and princes in the royal entourage.

As the great Cakkavatti king passes overhead,

Various people leave their work, including work that is not finished, and suggest to one another that they put on their makeup and dress themselves festively In their hands they have popped rice and flowers in order to worship the gem wheel. Everyone is glad and joyful and goes to accompany the king. (1982:143)

Rewarding the Virtuous

When the great Cakkavatti king arrives, the rulers of the continents come immediately to seek an audience. They prostrate themselves at his feet, pay respect and homage, and dedicate themselves to his service. They have nothing to fear, however, as the Great Dhamma King is not a great tax collector. "I am not going to take any property, wealth, tribute, or taxes whatsoever from any other ruler," he assures the rulers of the first continent he visits. As Lithai explains, "This is because the king already possesses celestial property by virtue of the great power of the gem wheel" (1982:147).

Instead, the great king cautions local rulers against committing the five evils of kings (the breaking of the five Buddhist precepts). After warning them against the taking of life, he preaches a sermon on the evils of theft. "Another kind of evil deed concerns the wealth and property of others that is not given by its owner--such things rulers must never take!" he says. "For another thing, in addition to not taking them yourself, you must not have other people take them for you" (1982:149). The ironies of these statements become apparent in upcoming chapters.

As the great Cakkavatti king makes clear, his duty and theirs was to reward the virtuous. "Another thing concerns the common people like slaves and ordinary men--that is to say any of those who do good deeds that are beneficial to the ruler and the king," the king continues. "They should be rewarded because of those good deeds, and this should be

done in accordance with the greatness or smallness, the heaviness or lightness of their particular virtue and usefulness" (1982:152).

When the great Cakkavatti king has finished instructing the rulers on the continent of Pubbavideha, "the gem wheel soars up into the air and leads the great Cakkavatti king and his army through the air towards the east" (1982:154) and he moves on to conquer the rest of the universe.

After the king has conquered the four continents, the gem wheel illuminates Mount Sumeru, which he sees in its entirety. It then leads him home to the royal city, and comes to rest on a special pavillion for the remainder of his reign.³

Once he has returned, the king's courtiers build him an elephant house, decorating it with popped rice, sweet smelling flowers, tassels, and garlands. On the outside they decorate it with seven kinds of precious gems, and on the inside with pieces of colored cloth that glow with the seven kinds of gems. As Lithai comments, the more one looks, the more the elephant house "glows like the abode of a devata in heaven" (1982:160).

Lithai describes the king's celestial property in loving detail. He possesses a gem elephant and a gem horse, as well as a gem treasurer (his banker). When he observes the eight precepts, he thinks of the glow of the jewels of past Cakkavatti kings, reminders of their great merit.

³This is the equivalent of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok, which adjoins the Grand Palace. As noted in earlier chapters, the Holy Emerald Jewel was captured in the nineteenth century from the Laotian capital of Vientienne. It is the palladium of the modern Thai Buddhist kingdom (Reynolds 1978).

In addition to his gem wife and a gem treasurer, the great Cakkavatti king has gem sons, "the eldest of whom . . . knows the principles of the wise, and is brave." The gem son speaks to the great Cakkavatti king, saying

"Oh, my Royal Father, from now on into the future do not let Your Highness' mind be troubled with the affairs of the towns or cities or by royal duties of any kind leave it to us and we will be responsible for it--We know how to administer everything in accordance with the Dhamma." (1982:169-170).

As he circumambulates his kingdom, King Bhumibol dramatizes a relationship with provincial officials which recalls that of the Great Dhamma King to his tax collectors. He is flooded with tribute from his subjects in scenes similar to those in which the Great Cakkavatti King meets the inhabitants of Jambu. His benevolent attitude towards his poor subjects recalls that of the Buddha towards the wild men of the forest in Buddhist mythology.

King Bhumibol

The king supported, in order of their rank, by many ministers, richly clothed as befitted their office, surrounded by many dancers richly clothed like to celestial nymphs, (he himself) being clad in his state-raiment (sic), attended by forty thousand men, while around him crashed the music (he being) glorious as the king of the gods; in the evening he who had knowledge of fit and unfit places went to the place of the Great Thupa, delighting the people (with the sight).

King Bhumibol lives in a golden palace in the center of Bangkok, located near the Temple of the Holy Emerald Jewel. Like other Southeast Asian capitals, Bangkok is laid out as a microcosm of the greater Buddhist cosmos and the king's palace is built as a replica of palace is Mount Meru (Sumeru), the center of the universe.

In 1978 King Bhumibol performed a kathin luang at Wat That and a kathin ton at Wat Raykhing in Nakorn Pathorn Province, to the southwest

of Bangkok. Wat That (The Temple of the Relic) contains one of Thailand's oldest Buddha relics. The event was preceded by a royal order announcing that the king would 'proceed' [phrarachadamnoen] from Dusit Palace to venerate the Buddha relic at Wat That. (Dusit is the sixth level of the Buddhist heavens, the "heaven full of joy".) The Trai Phum describes it as the residence of the bodhisatta, then Sri Ariya Metteyya, who, in Lithai's words, "will later descend to be the Lord Buddha in this auspicious kappa" (1982:239).) The announcement continues: "After proceeding in a clockwise direction around the cedi, His Majesty will enter the cedi to make offerings of flowers and popped rice to the relic" (Memorial of the Royal Kathin at Wat Raykhing 1978:2).

After offering kathin robes to the monks at the Temple of the Relic, the king traveled by land to Wat Raykhing (The Ginger Temple). The procession transversed the province in a blaze of glory. The king rode in a yellow Rolls Royce, followed closely by his attendants in black Mercedes Benz automobiles. He was flanked by his armies, a police and military escort, the lights of their vehicles flashing as the procession sped across the province. All activities came to a standstill as the king passed through the countryside.

Wat Raykhing

Wat Raykhing is a government-sponsored 'development temple' [wat pattana], so designated because it is considered to be a model [tua yang] of spiritual and civic development for rural peoples (chapter 18) by the central government. As such, it is committed to using architectural plans drawn up by the Department of Religious Affairs. The temple is believed to be a model of dhamma in the same way as is the

king: each has a powerful spiritual effect on those who draw near. They contain spiritual power that attracts men "like bees to honey"--in the case of the development temple, the government determines the physical configurations of these power-filled objects.

The abbot of Wat Raykhing was a local celebrity, famous for his fortune-telling skills and the related success of his temple fairs: His reputation (and the power of his merit) drew men from far and wide. The temple was patronized by a distinguished doctor who raised funds for a nearby medical clinic (and who had graciously relinquished his kathin privileges to the king). A spanking new school stood near the temple grounds, built with funds raised from the fairs. According to one rumour, related by a high-ranking official in the Department of Religious Affairs, the crown prince had visited the abbot and then told his father about his special powers; 'then the king decided to offer kathin ton as special royal alms' (cf. Tambiah 1984).

The temple was specially decorated with flowers and cloth for this most auspicious of occasions. A gate of protection, built in the form of a naga snake, was erected over the roadway leading to the temple on the day of the king's visit, its purpose to 'welcome the monarch.' The gate was draped with cloth in the red, white, and blue colors of the Thai nation. The king's standard, a golden crown against a red background, was displayed on the right, the queen's, a white crown against a blue background, on the left.

A red carpet traced the king's path from the roadway, under the temple gate, through the inner courtyard, and up into the bot. A welcoming altar covered with red and white flowers was set to the left of the gate, which was also draped with cloth in the red, white, and blue colors of the nation and the gold and blue colors of the king and

queen. Flags of the nation and religion (a red dhamma-wheel against a golden background) flew from the temple walls. Dhammacak or 'wheels of the law' were built into the temple walls, encircling the sacred space.

To enter Wat Raykhing was to enter the world of the ancient cosmology, a world populated by the beasts and beings of Buddhist mythology. Stone lion-dogs and snake-birds guarded the entrance to the bot (one protecting against evil men, one against evil spirits). The roofs of the bot and the gate shading the entranceway were built in the shape of the naga, the snake which raised its coils over the Buddha when he achieved enlightenment, protecting him from Mara (desire).

The garuda bird [krut] was also present, decorating the royal regalia. The krut, the fierce man-bird which 'circles in the air' and 'knows all signs,' is the symbol of the Thai monarchy and of the Royal Thai Government. As King Lithai describes the garuda kings:

Animals like the garuda kings are similar to other animals, but the food they eat and the places where they dwell are like those of the devata in heaven. They have influence and are quite powerful and majestic; and like the devata in heaven they know basic principles, and understand the signs that indicate what will happen in the future. (1982:88)

The garuda and the naga snake are natural enemies who unite to protect King Rama in the Hindu-Buddhist Ramayana epic (Tambiah 1970; Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:89).

A prominent mural depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha was painted in glowing colors over the temple entranceway. It was flanked on either side by plaster thewada, their hands in a praying position and guarded below by fierce-looking black demons [yakkha] who guard the gates of the Buddhist hells. A halo of wisdom [ratsami] glowed over the Buddha's head,⁴ lesser halos over the heads of his attendants. In one

⁴The Mahavamsa, for example, mentions that the Buddha was "adorned with the crown of flames" (v. 97), as does the Thai version of the Life

scene, the Buddha stood near a forest [pa], his followers at his side. Wild-looking men dressed in animal skins crouched at his feet, their hands held in a praying position.

Were these the 'animal-like men' described in the Trai Phum? "No," a Western-educated informant insisted. "These are chao ban, villagers." The demons⁵ glared down at the humans below, daring the unworthy to enter the temple's inner precincts.

Like all Thai Buddhist temples, Wat Raykhing was laid out in a series of concentric circles which represent the levels of the Buddhist cosmos. The outer wall separates the rajanacak, the 'king's domain' (or circle of influence), from the sasanacak, the 'domain of religion.' The high-inside space of the bot was reminiscent of the Buddhist heavens, the low-outside space and the wilds beyond the temple walls of the world of men and the realms of the Buddhist hells: inhabited by men who are like 'suffering ghosts' and 'men who are like animals'--who have done wrong in the past.

The inner-outer opposition corresponds to that of omniscience and ignorance, purity and danger. It codes the relative degrees of perfection or barami of ritual participants: their qualities of gentleness and generosity, self-restraint and wisdom. In addition, each circle, with its gates of protection and boundary stones, represents relative degrees of moral-perceptual power, of insight and ignorance that distinguish men from each other.

of Buddha (Wales 1931:97).

⁵Such demons play an important role in the life of the famous Isan meditation saint, Acaan Man. They symbolize suffering and illusion; they threaten only those who cannot see past their facade into their inner sufferings, into the chain of act and consequence that caused their rebirth situation (Life of Accan Man).

The seating order of participants in the kathin ton was based on the same principle of rank that governs the placement of devata at the palace of the devata king in the Trai Phum. The most meritorious were placed inside the walls, those who had performed lesser deeds in past lives outside the walls.

The men inside the temple are often called men 'inside the precepts' [yu nai sin]. Such men supposedly practice higher degrees of avoidance of the five sins--lying, stealing and the taking of life, sexual misconduct and the drinking of alcohol--than do ordinary men. These are the sins against which the great Cakkavatti King cautions the rulers of the four continents. Men outside the walls are situated in space which identifies them as being 'outside the precepts' and civilized society. A Thai anthropologist said this opposition was too extreme: the inner/outer distinction indicates a contrast of 'important' to 'common' men [khon samkhan, khon saman].

The Perfect Temple

Wat Raykhing was described by a former scholar-monk as a perfect temple, 'full of merit' [sombun]. Like the king and the Buddhist heavens, it was an "eye-delight" that perfectly recreated moments in the life of the Buddha and had a powerful sensory impact on all who beheld it.

It was perfect because it was clean and bright. Its monks 'had discipline' [mi rabiap] and were 'in order' [riap roi]. Like many Buddhist temples, it was situated near a river, symbolic of life and prosperity. It had trees and shade which were symbolic of the 'coolness' of religion, of the respite that occurs when one withdraws from the world. The former monk described the running water and trees

as symbols [sanyalac] of happiness and of the 'cool' or 'peaceful heart' [cai yen, cai sangop] that one experiences in Buddhist meditation. The temple had a powerful emotional impact; he associated the entire complex with the mental relief he had experienced as a monk before disrobing to reenter the world.

Wat Rahkhing was perfect (complete) because it had a full complement of monastic buildings: monks's quarters, meeting room, and viharn or building housing the Buddha relics. Each building represented a moment in the life of the Buddha or a part of the Buddhist heavens. The temple had a new-looking bot where formal activities of the full Sangha⁶ [sangha-kam] take place. The bot represents the bodhi tree under which the Buddha first achieved enlightenment. It was surrounded by boundary stones [sima], shaped like the leaves of the bodhi tree. Overhead, temple bells tinkled in the wind, recalling the moment of the Buddha's enlightenment. They, too, were shaped like the leaves of the bodhi tree.

The temple had a crematorium called a men (Meru) which stood out against the skyline. It was built in the shape of the heavens, symbolic of men's wish to achieve better rebirth in the next life (cf. Tambiah 1970).

Inside the Bot

A golden Buddha statue was the highest and most pure object inside the bot. It was set high on an altar decorated with flowers, candles, and incense. Smaller Buddha statues were placed below in order of sacrality [khvam saksit]. As is traditional, the Buddha statue was placed in the west, the direction of death. It faced east, the

⁶They include the kathin, ordination, and the bi-monthly chanting of the Patimoksa or rules of the order.

direction of life and enlightenment. The Buddha was guarded below by a golden mangkhn, the dragon of Chinese mythology, engraved in the base of the altar.

The monks were the highest and most detached sentient beings in the ceremony. They were seated on an elevated platform in the south, on the right-hand side of the Buddha statue,⁷ sitting in the position known as samruam, the posture of total indifference to worldly affairs. They were totally still, eyes downcast: the 'five doors' (of the senses) closed to sensory stimuli.

The highest-ranking monks were seated near the Buddha statue, the lowest furthest away, distinguished from each other by fans shaped like flames of enlightenment or the leaves of the bodhi tree indicating their respective ecclesiastical ranks.⁸ Ecclesiastical titles correspond to different cosmological realms and beings. The titles descend from the levels of phrom⁹ and thep [angels] down to royal level [chan rat] (1982:217ff.). The monks hold these fans before their faces when they chant the words of the Buddha: they are 'seeing dhamma.'

The royal regalia were placed to the right of the altar, on the left-hand side of the Buddha statue: a golden chair, fly whisk, sword, golden implements for chewing betel nut, silk pillows to 'receive guests,' a garuda bird embroidered in red against a white background

⁷According to a former scholar-monk, monks do not 'sit' [nang] in a ceremony as do ordinary men, they are 'established' or 'set' on the platform [prathap bon asana song] in the same way a Buddha statue is placed on an altar. According to McFarland's Thai-English dictionary, this verb refers only to the activities of royalty (1944:01].)

⁸For a discussion of the categories of ecclesiastical rank, see O'Connor (1978:131ff.).

⁹Phrom or brahman are "the divine beings who inhabit the world with only a remnant of material factors and the world without material factors" (1982:31).

(cf. Wales 1931). The king, sometimes called a somuttithep or 'supposed angel,' sits on a golden chair in the north, on the left-hand side of the Buddha statue.

According to King Lithai, a sommutithep is an angel by 'common agreement.' Sommuthithep rank lower on the celestial scale than do 'angels by birth' (men reborn in the Buddhist heavens) or 'angels by purity' [wisuttithep] (the Buddha, the Pacceka Buddha, and fully realized saints) (1982:16, 31, 217).

The royal astrologer elaborated on the spatial code (which, in theory, placed the king in a more auspicious direction than Buddhist monks). "North is higher than south and east is higher than west," he explained. "Right is higher than left, and near (the Buddha statue) is higher than far."¹⁰ In Hindu and Sinhalese traditions, east is the most auspicious of all directions, called Indra diga, 'the direction of Indra,' the king of the gods.

Ancient taboos on the royal person are observed during the ceremony. The king's chair was placed on gold and silver cloth so the royal feet never touched the ground. The window behind the king remained closed to protect the monarch, shielding his ritual activities from the eyes of the general populace.

At Wat Raykhing as at all royal kathin, the king's main kathin gift, a silk traï ciwon ('full' set of three robes), was set high on the 'jeweled sky tray' [phan waen fa] or 'tray which is a piece of the sky' near the altar, ready for presentation. It was set in the 'middle space' separating the Sangha from the lay community, space symbolic of monks' and laity's 'disinterest' in each other's affairs. As specified

¹⁰This valuation of the north as the most auspicious direction is borne out in the Mahavamsa (cf. Geiger 1964:194).

by the kathin rules (Bechert 1968), it was set in front of the whole Sangha and not in front of a particular monk to indicate that the monks, not the lay donor, select the monk most worthy of receiving the annual kathin robe.

In the words of an official in the Department of Religious Affairs, the placing of the robes on the jeweled sky tray indicates that they 'fell from the sky' [loi fa]. They are ownerless, magically appearing in response to the monks' perfect observance of the Lenten retreat (in the same way that the gem wheel appears in response to the merit of the great Cakkavatti king).

Awaiting the King

Outside the temple gate a reception committee of high-ranking officials from Bangkok in full dress uniform chatted quietly among themselves, awaiting the king. Inside the courtyard, another group of local officials and temple committee members waited, the women dressed in their best silk finery. They were seated under an awning near the entrance to the bot, their heads shaded from the sun.

The officials outside represented each branch of the government and the armed services--the 'whole' of the king's government. Their uniforms were covered with decorations for public service which, like the ecclesiastical fans of the monks, corresponded to positions in the celestial hierarchy and to states of enlightenment. The highest government order was the Order of the White Elephant (the animal that belongs to the Great King). Another was the Nine Stars [noppakhq].

Out in the roadway, men wearing the red uniforms of the palace guard marked the spot where the royal procession would descend on the wat. Fierce-looking men in the drab brown and green uniforms of the Thai

police and army were stationed along the roadway and temple walls, guarding the temple precincts from the crowds lining the roadway.

The abbot came out of the bot and a hush fell over the crowd. He checked to see if everything was in order, paying special attention to the flowers on the welcoming altar. He exchanged a few words with the visitors from Bangkok (some of whom were deeply reverent towards him) and disappeared inside.

Dust Beneath the Royal Feet

Outside the temple, hundreds of peasants waited in the hot sun to catch a glimpse of the monarch, crouching in the dust near the roadway. Many wore the scarves of the Village Scouts and held flags inscribed with the words "Long Live the King."

In Thailand, men's place in the celestial hierarchy--their level of dignity--is indicated by verbs of travel. The Bangkok officials who attended the king had received formal notice of the event. They arrived at the temple well in advance of the ceremony, at a dignified pace, in time to take their appointed places. Similarly, local officials and dignitaries had received invitations well in advance of the event and they, too, arrived well in time to take their designated places. In contrast, the peasants who had 'heard the news' of the king's visit 'flocked' to the temple in an anonymous group--rushing to catch a glimpse of the king. Their was the undifferentiated movement of highly impressionable beings, the king's a measured progress across the land [phrarachadamnoen].

Poor people were placed far from the temple walls, in space identified with the lower celestial realms. The formal name of the Village [Tiger Cub] Scouts [Luk Sna Chao Ban] identifies them as

potentially unruly and dangerous beings. Like miscellaneous passers-by, most scouts were situated near the forest, implicitly identified as 'men who are like animals' (1982:123) in the Trai Phum, barely able to observe the precepts but nonetheless inspired to virtue by the sight of a great monarch. As Seneviratne (1978:2) notes, rebels and "victims of political intrigue" are associated with the jungle in Theravada politics.

In a departure from the traditions of the 1930s (and possibly before), several dozen villagers, mostly women and children, were seated on the ground inside the temple courtyard on either side of the red carpet leading into the bot. Few wore shoes, and all wore the traditional pha nung (cloth wrapped around the waist). Many wore the scarves of the Village Scouts and those seated closest to the carpet held floral offerings for the king.

Two leaders of the local scout troop stood outside near the temple gate with other high-ranking provincials in the reception committee. One held a golden tray with a white envelope on top.

Welcoming the Deity

As the royal procession appeared in the distance, everyone snapped to attention. The entourage swept past the new school, under the specially-built gate of protection, and up to the temple gate as the military band played the national anthem announcing the king's arrival.

The king was treated like a deity, or a Great Cakkavatti King; those who could get close to him offered white garlands [phuangmalai] or white envelopes.¹¹ The offerings were dokmai khong khruang bucha, 'offerings to the deity,' or ngoen boricak khong prachachon thawai nai

¹¹The giving of bribes is called the 'giving of white envelopes.'

luang, 'money sacrificed by the people to the king' or 'sacrifice' to the nation. (Western-educated informants had great difficulty in deciding which words were appropriate to describe the offerings, avoiding the implication that the king was a deity? Given the prohibitions on the royal person that survived into the nineteenth century, the custom certainly cannot be an old one. on the royal person that applied in the nineteenth century.) The offerings were placed 'high' on white cloth set atop miniature golden offering trays, pure [borisut], untouched by human hands. As one informant insisted, they were not 'given' to the monarch, they were 'offered' [thawai] to him.

The villagers crouched off in the distance brought their hands up in a praying position like the 'villagers' in the mural over the temple entranceway. Grim-looking police, guns pointing outward, stood between them and the temple, their faces bearing an uncanny resemblance to those of the demons guarding the Buddha from his enemies, depicted in the mural overhead,¹²

The king descended from his car and stepped onto the red carpet. A palace attendant in the uniform of the ancient Siamese court held an umbrella over his head to shield him from the sun (cf. Wales 1931). Except for the clicking of the rifles of the honour guard, there was dead silence as he set forth to greet his subjects, followed closely by his personal attendants.

¹²yakkhas are men who have 'done some good and some bad' and therefore are reborn as guardians, brutalizing those people who sought to escape from the Buddhist hells. (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:145). The creatures could also have been yama guardians, sometimes likened to Thai police. The great king speaks of these guardians when he lectures local rulers on the sins of adultery. Yama guardians "hold lances, and poke and stab" men who transgress the precepts (1982:149).

He first passed through a reception line of local officials and their wives at the temple gate. Eyes downcast, the women curtsied and held out floral offerings to 'welcome' the monarch; they were thrilled. The king paused to accept the gifts, occasionally murmuring a quiet word. A scraggly looking dog slept peacefully beneath a bench, ignored by the participants. Just before entering the courtyard the king accepted the white envelope of the village scoutmaster, who was stiff with awe and embarrassment.

The procession moved past the welcoming alter into the inner courtyard where the king's arrival was heralded by a burst of celestial music and the blare of conch shells announcing his impending ascent to the heavens. On his way up to the bot, the monarch stooped benevolently to receive the garlands of the poor villagers seated on the ground, and the scene was almost an exact replica of that on the mural at the temple entranceway depicting the Buddha with the 'wild men' of the forest. Occasionally he touched his subjects on the head, a rare 'kindness.' "They must ask [khō, lit., 'beg'] the king for the 'gift of the hand,'" a Thai anthropologist insisted.

He passed the seated members of the temple committee on his way to the bot, their heads, like his, shaded from the sun, then disappeared with his close attendants into the bot, into the heavens. The sounds of the celestial music and the chanting of monks wafted through courtyard.

Like the Great Cakkavatti king who " . . . goes and sits on the golden seat decorated with the seven gems situated next to the window," once inside the temple King Bhumibol took his place on a golden throne in the north where he was surrounded by royal regalia. His attendants were seated on chairs in the east, facing the altar in the west.

The monarch knelt on silk pillows before the altar and lit candles and incense recreating the world of sensory delight which is the Buddhist heavens. This act is also referred to as 'calling the angels' to witness the ceremony.¹³

The king recited the namo (homage to the Buddha, the Sangha, and the Dhamma), and the ceremony commenced.

The Gem Son

After King Bhumibol entered the temple, more 'protection' arrived, his son. An army vehicle bearing the crown prince and other army officers pulled up suddenly in front of the temple. The crown prince stepped out wearing the drab olive green uniform of an army officer. While everyone froze to attention, he patrolled the perimeter of the temple, "guarding his father" as the newspapers reported the next day.

Rewarding the Faithful

After the kathin ceremony proper was completed, the king often performed another ceremony "rewarding the faithful," distributing amulets or small Buddha statues to temple supporters. This occurred at almost every first class royal temple where he or members of his family offered the kathin robes.

Palace officials lined up local temple supporters by the dozens and instructed them on how to comport themselves in the royal presence.

¹³As Lithai notes, the angels "patrol and observe everywhere through the dwellings, territories, villages, and cities . . . in every part of this human world." If anyone makes merit and practices the dhamma, "they write the name of that person on the table made of pure gold," noting that some persons have practiced the dhamma "by giving cloth at the kathin festival," others "by erecting cetiya . . ." etc. (1982:236-237). The angels, 'attracted' to the ceremony by the light and incense, contact the dead who receive the merit transferred by a mental 'wish' at the end of the ceremony.

They filed into the bot where they knelt and received their phraphuttarup bucha 'from the hands of the king.'

Palace officials somewhat nervously said this was "not kathin," disregard it.

And Into the Sky

When the ceremony was over, the celestial music sounded once again, announcing the king's descent from the heavens. He and his entourage circled behind the bot, past tables laden with fruit--gifts from local orchard owners--and he once again entered the Rolls Royce. The procession swept away in a cloud of dust, back to the City of the Angels and the Dusit Palace.

Afterwards the wives of officials rushed into the temple to take flowers from the altar. They were auspicious [mongkhon] and brought luck.

The Kathin as a Problem-Solving Device

In Sherpas through Their Rituals (1978), Sherry Ortner refers to ritual as a problem-solving medium and describes how Sherpa rituals address problems common to individuals at points in the life cycle. I argue that the royal kathin ceremony acts as a problem-solving medium in Thailand in that it addresses the most serious problems in the Thai communal order, those related to recent capitalist development. In so doing, it also solves problems specific to different interest groups, which, for the powerful, mostly concern antinomy issues, and for the weak concern anxiety about change and a sense of dislocation.

How does the kathin address these issues? As S. J. Tambiah (1970:3) writes:

Cosmological and supernatural categories are embedded in . . . rituals . . . they chart the geography and define the architecture of sacred space and are expressed in the material symbols that are manipulated in the rituals. In the rituals we see cosmology in action.

Western political and economic categories and symbols are superimposed and intertwined with cosmological categories and material symbols in the royal kathin where they become sacralized, "cosmology in action." Sacred symbols are not ordinary symbols [khruang sadaeng or 'things which show'], however, they are sanyalac sasana phut or 'the symbols of Buddhism' which have celestial properties and magical effects on those who view them. Thus new values are not merely introduced in the ceremony, they are introduced as part of a magical schema and projected onto the celestial plane.

Problem One: The Loss of National Autonomy

One of the most basic problems created by recent, intensive capitalist development is anxiety over loss of national autonomy and the erosion of sacred traditions. In particular, the proliferation of so-called "Western" customs is seen as a threat to religious values and institutions like the kingship and Buddhist ritual--institutions which maintain the Thai state as a viable soteriological state. (This is entirely understandable, since free market ideologies portray expenditures on both as a "waste" of time and money.)

The 1960 government responded promptly to such fears by creating a state ritual policy which restored the royal kathin, an ancient royal ceremony, in all its splendor. The kathin luang portrays the king as a great cosmocrator, the center of cosmic process. The ceremony conjoins royal, cosmological, and nationalistic themes in a dramatization of a return to the mythical past--suppressing recognition of change in the celebration of tradition.

If nothing else, the kathin at Wat Raykhing enacted the restoration of national autonomy by by celebrating the three pillars of Thai

nationhood--king, nation, and religion--with emphasis on the king. Much of the ritual's effect was achieved through the use of 'celestial' cloth in decorating the temple, cloth of the type which, in Lithai's words, "The more one looks, the more it glows like the abode of a devata in heaven" (1981:160; cf. 174). In particular, the juxtaposition of civic and sacred themes is achieved through the use of color. Amidst the golden glow of temple rooftops, shaped like naga snakes, the beasts and beings of the Three Worlds Cosmology, and the colors and shapes of religious wisdom were found the red, white, and blue colors of Thai nationhood.

For example, a former monk said the colour red in the national flag stood for the nation, 'for people's desire to sacrifice their lives and blood if necessary to protect the king and the nation.' White stood for religion, 'for purity,' and blue for the monarchy because it was 'the colour of the sky.'¹⁴ The flowers on the altar welcoming the king were white 'for purity and for the monarchy' (not religion?) and red 'showed people's willingness to sacrifice their lives for the monarch.' These were the themes of the Village Scout movement, projected onto the celestial plane.

The sight of the Cakkavatti king and his gemmed wheel, the transfer of merit at the end of the ceremony--all are Buddhist "wishing vehicles." In the Mahavamsa, the great king, "the ruler of the earth," is referred to as the "wish-fulfiller" (XIX.9).

And, as the above data indicate, the royal kathin were emotionally effective, more so for peasants and local officials than for the somewhat cynical officials who spent many hours at such events. The

¹⁴Blue is referred to as the "lotus color" in the Sinhalese text, the Mahavamsa. It refers to the god Visnu, who is "the god who is in color like the lotus" (Seneviratne 1978:105).

ceremony answered to the deeply felt wishes and needs of the rural populace, not only for a better life, but for a better life portrayed as a return to the mythical (pre-capitalist) past, when wealth flowed naturally from the heavens, and was given to a great Cakkavatti king by his loyal subjects.

Problem Two: Where's the Tax Money?

The proper use of tax money is a major antinomy issue that afflicts the modern polity, especially its highest-ranking bureaucrats, the nation's tax-collectors. If officials distribute tax monies according to the guidelines established in the government's five and ten-year development plans, they have no money to distribute to ('care for') their loyal followers. More importantly, they have no money to invest in private business ventures and therefore to finance military coups; they cannot acquire or maintain power. On the other hand, if officials do use tax money for 'private' purposes they are eventually accused of korruption, the fate of almost every high-level public official to hold office since 1932. In the 1960s an additional complication arose: If the economy was expanding as the nation's leaders were claiming it was, where was the additional tax revenue? Where were the promised new schools and improved public services?

One government response to the issue of the vanishing tax funds was the creation of a civic religion that emphasized religious volunteerism as a means of supporting public services. 'Sacrifice to the nation' through private support of schools and hospitals was portrayed as a form of religious purification. The king and the royal charities were hailed as exemplars of this religion: Inspired by the king's selfless behavior, ordinary citizens, rich and poor, would donate money to the

royal charities. The king would then circulate through the countryside, donating this money to worthy projects (using his superior wisdom to determine which projects were indeed 'worthy'). The idea that such civic donations were religious in character had yet to "take" amongst many segments of the population, particularly its older members, and the government's kathin ton policies took account of this fact. As one informant said, the "highest merit" is made through contributions to the temple; if people were to donate monies to schools and hospitals and still see it as merit, they wanted to do so through the wat.

In many respects the king's charitable activities are very much in the ancient tradition of kingship. This tradition is represented in the Sinhalese chronicles, for example, which holds kings directly responsible for benevolence to the poor, reform and conciliation of the Sangha, and building almshouses and hospitals. For example, the great King Parakkamabahu of Ceylon, "whose intelligence was sharp as the thunderbolt," performed all these duties and made the small town of Pulatthinagara (decimated by his conquest), (as) "splendidly adorned as the city of the Tavatimsa gods" (Mahavamsa LXXIII.164)--except that the text notes explicitly that the funds for King Parakkamabahu's civic projects come from the royal treasury.

Why was Wat Rahkhing selected to receive the royal kathin robes? First, the abbot was rumoured to have magical powers. Second, it was a development temple: the government believes its monks exhibit proper religious discipline. These facts have important ramifications insofar as the king's ritual donations there can be said to resolve antinomy problems regarding tax money.

According to traditional religious ideology, the barami of virtuous monks attracts sacrifices 'naturally' from the Buddhist laity--without

force. At Wat Raykhing, the virtue of the abbot attracted men to the temple fairs, and their donations to the temple coffers. The abbot and members of the temple committee then channeled these funds to community projects, bypassing the tax structure altogether. These exploits then came to the ears of the king, who responded by rewarding the civic-and-religious faithful: by personally offering the temple kathin gift at the end of the Lenten season. An explicit purpose of the kathin ton at Wat Raykhing was to celebrate the magically-funded school (and hospital) located near the temple grounds. According to traditional ideologies of merit, these projects spontaneously 'appeared' [prakot] near the wat in response to the magical powers of the abbot, who inspired extraordinary religious faith among his followers. An official at the Department of Religious Affairs said that the purpose of the kathin was not to raise money for the school or the hospital, however; the king was there because he had 'heard of the piety' of the abbot. If the school needed money, it could 'latch on to the barami of the wat.'

The kathin thus dramatizes a perfect world of the past and present (an interstitial space-time) in which a school system rises up as part of cosmic process. The new school appears not as a function of the government's "rationally planned" distribution of tax funds, but as a function of the religious piety of great monks and their followers: the latter further inspired by the sight of a great Dhamma King and fittingly rewarded for their virtue.

The kathin ton is a form of visual discourse about moral responsibility that deflects attention away from government officials' misuse of tax monies and instead focuses it on the quality of religious faith of local people as an explanation for the quality of their school system.

Problem Three: Communists and Other Wild Beasts

Neither the ogres, nor the evil spirits, nor any kind of beasts that can kill and bring death to human beings harbor any evil intentions against the great Cakkavatti king. The reason is that they stand in awe of the merit and the power of this great Cakkavatti king. (King Lithai)

A third major problem of capitalist development concerns the spread of communism. From the government's perspective, at least, this poses the most significant threat to the traditional social order and to Buddhist ideologies which link wealth and merit. Communist ideologies advocate the abolition of royal and monastic traditions which support the tradition of a magical hierarchy. More important, they threaten as well related traditions of discourse. They encourage poor people to appropriate language and perform analytic exercises that are traditionally reserved for the sacred elite, to scrutinize the relation between work, wealth, and ideologies of power.

Sarit and his successors responded immediately to this threat in the early 1960s by launching an all-out war against 'communists,' a project which received wholehearted support from the king and the United States. Over the years, successive governments have promoted and refined an ideology of religious nationalism which assimilates nationalistic and pro-capitalistic themes to those of religious salvation. Worship of the king is central to these themes; he is the potent visual-moral antidote against evil.

The government's anti-communist ideology has explicit and implicit Buddhist components. In general, it explicitly identifies wealth with moral probity, with merit and good kamma. If farmers are poor, it is because they lack wisdom and knowledge of proper conduct, in the marketplace and out. The ideology explicitly portrays communism as a

threat to religion and king, to the existing moral order and to the existence of any moral order at all. It is most effective in its subliminal, ritually-portrayed reinforcement of these themes, however, as demonstrated in the ritual performance at Wat Raykhing.

"Supreme in the world is mind" said the great Isan meditation monk, Acaan Man, and government officials are vehement in their belief that communism is a type of mental impurity. Men's failure to believe in the obvious righteousness of the king verges on insanity. In the words of an Isan bureaucrat:

We have a few in the nation who are not sincere in respecting the king. In forty-four million people, not up to one million do not respect him. This occurs because of something in your mind.¹⁵ Those who do not respect the king are abnormal. They got ideas from Karl Marx or his relatives [laughter].

Anti-communist themes thus derive their emotional impact from assimilation to doctrinal messages, from Buddhist concepts of person, and most of all from their articulation in terms of Lithai's ancient cosmological schema. Communist ideologies or 'wrong views' are portrayed by the government as deceptive and falsely attractive ideas that derive from and lead to greed, anger, and delusion: lobha, moha and dosa. They portend danger [khwam antarai], violence, and brutality, characteristics of the Buddhist hells. Communist leaders are men with views 'not straight with dhamma' [may trong kap thamma]. They and their followers are animal-like men who inhabit the jungles, violate the most basic of precepts, and are reborn in the Buddhist hells.

Officials view poor farmers as likely candidates for proselytization because they have a poor kammic heritage as confirmed by the fact that they perform manual labour for a living. Because they are men of little moral purity, they are believed to be highly susceptible to deception,

¹⁵That is it impure or deluded.

easily fooled by appearance, and governed by the sensory influences of the moment. These same qualities, however, are what make them susceptible to the presence of a great king, which is what the new civic religion is all about.

The 'communist problem' grew steadily worse as the Thai economy modernized, and in 1971 the Thai Border Patrol, funded in part by the CIA, organized the Village Scout movement (literally the Luk Sua Chao Ban or Village [Tiger Cub] Scouts) to counter it (Muecke 1980). The themes and rituals of the scout movements are drawn from the above-discussed ideology of religious nationalism which stresses the importance of the monarchy.

Officials explicitly regard the scout movement as a way of drawing farmers' attention away from economic hardship. For example, in a 1979 interview a former prime minister made the following rather cryptic remark in explanation of the Scout movement: "Even though villagers are in debt after the harvest, they still respect religion."

The king is the patron of this movement. He and members of the royal family distribute pins and scarves to be treated as sacred objects [khong bucha] to outstanding scout members. They travel around the countryside accepting donations from local troops and distributing awards to the most zealous of their members. As I shall demonstrate below, the major principle underlying the scout movement is that the sight and touch of a great being, like the presence of the Buddha, will purge wild men of illusion and erroneous beliefs, and incline them towards (pro-government, pro-capitalist) dhamma.

The Village Scouts appeared to be the main target audience of the kathin luang and kathin ton of 1978 and 1979. They ringed most if not all of the sixteen first-class royal temples where members of the royal

family offered official kathin as well as the temples where they offered private kathin. The above-quoted monk's exegesis of the meaning of the red, white, and blue "celestial cloth" draped from the temple is an almost verbatim recounting of the major themes of the scout movement. It is in the performance of kathin luang and kathin ton, however, that anti-communism takes on the status of a religious experience.

Through seating arrangements and the dramatization of scenarios that were analogues of those portrayed in the mural painted over the temple gate, the kathin was organized so that traditional messages about purity and danger, salvation and damnation, were assimilated to messages about nationalism, communism, and democracy. The predominant message of the ritual performance was the validity of the traditional sacred hierarchy, however. For example, the golden crown depicted on the king's standard radiated white rays of light, the ratsami. The monk-informant said this was the symbol of the king's wisdom [pañña] and his purity [khwaṃ borisut). The ratsami over the crowns on the king's and queen's standards were identical to those that glowed over the Buddha's head in the temple murals. In contrast, poor villagers were placed far away from the temple, in spatial positions that marked them as men of ignorance, unable to see past the 'appearance of things' into their underlying realities.

As noted above, religious purity is equated with safety, with the protection of mythical beasts, and with freedom from suffering--with the high-inside temple space. In kathin luang and kathin ton, this space was occupied by the king, his entourage, powerful local officials, and wealthy temple supporters. On the other hand, communism is equated with impurity, with mindless grasping after material things, with danger and with suffering--with the space outside the temple where poor people and

Village Scouts were seated in the dust. The placement of farmers and less fervent Village ('Tiger') Scouts at the periphery of the temple near the forest reflects the elite's view of farmers as potentially dangerous men. In contrast, the king's attendants occupied positions that likened them to the haloed servers of the Buddha-figure in the murals overhead.

Before the ceremony began, the king interacted with villagers in a way that was similar, if not identical, to that portrayed in the interaction between the Buddha and the 'wild men of the forest' in the temple mural over the entrance gate. A Western-educated informant told the following story about this mural, about the Buddha and the men from the forest:

The Buddha's cousin, the evil Devadatta, sent ignorant men to kill the Buddha. Once in the sight of the great being, they recognized the error of their ways (i.e., they saw that they had been misled), and prostrated themselves at his feet begging forgiveness. The Buddha [exemplifying the virtues of the great being] forgave them [i.e., he 'ruled by kindness'].

The government's anti-communist ideology works on this same principle--that the sight of the king will cause men to see the error of their ways. The spatial positioning of villagers and Village Scouts determines a graduated set of (mostly) visual rewards for the faithful. It also reinforces the ideology of the indeterminacy of kamma, an ideology which is central to the government's ideology of wealth, an ideal which holds out hope of salvation for the downtrodden. Men cannot know their kammic potential; the rewards for good deeds done in the past may manifest themselves at any moment, even for 'men who are like animals' (as, for example, when a great Cakkavatti king suddenly descends in their midst).

Thus the men seated most distant from Wat Rahkhing hen khon prasoet, 'saw nobility,' as the king's entourage flashed by. A very few of them, the old and the pious, had the good fortune to be seated inside the temple courtyard where they could offer bucha to the deity and receive the royal touch. The head of the scout movement, the most virulent anti-communist of all, received the biggest reward. He stood (nervously) among the elite of the province and offered a gift to the king, entering, no matter how briefly, the royal circle.

The royal kathin conveyed another message similar to that conveyed in the mural, in the Ramayana epic, and in stories about Isan meditation monks who confront wild tigers. When fierce beasts or animal-like men come into the presence of a great religious figure their passions are stilled, their hearts are made pure, and they are transformed from enemies into protectors of the pious. This ideology was enacted in the bloody coup of 1976. Village Scouts (probably including those from Ayuthaya) were 'incensed' by radio reports that students at Thammasat University were insulting the crown prince. They 'flocked' to Bangkok in an anonymous mass to defend the monarchy, killing several students in the process. The government fell and chaos reigned until the king stepped in to restore order, thereby ending a brief period of democratic rule (chapter 16).

Problem Four: Work and the Quest for Religious Purity

A fourth major problem of capitalist development from the perspective of the new merchant elite concerns the inculcation of a work ethic among the rural peasantry, men who now comprise the nation's supply of "free" labour. How are they to overcome the negative religious and cosmological associations traditionally linked to manual labour? How

are they to identify hard work with religious purity and a tradition of nationalism?

This is a non-trivial issue of capitalist development, once that brought Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia and past kings of Theravada kingdoms to grief.¹⁶ The Thai elite's success in this endeavor could very well reflect on their ability to attract foreign aid; the U.S. bestows benefits on developing nations whose citizens are energetic their pursuit of profit.

In the Theravada societies, work--physical labour--is not a sign of virtue or honesty as it is in some Protestant religions and in American political traditions. There are no analogues to mythologies of the type that attend the lives of presidents such as "Honest Abe" Lincoln, for example, for whom the splitting of fence posts--"honest labour"--conveys information about his veracity and fitness for public office. In fact, the Theravada has the opposite symbolic associations. Physical labour is the sign of bad kamma, of evil deeds done in the past. It signifies men's inability to know truth. In Theravada doctrine and mythology, the splendid rebirth situations of Buddhist kings, angels, and the Buddha

¹⁶Sihanouk's response to French pressures to demonstrate that Cambodians were diligent, hard-working citizens deserving of full independence was to "enritualize" labor. He identified a work ethic as part of a national ideal by personally initiating a public works project, himself digging the first shovelfull of earth (Osborne 1973). This inverted the traditional order. Instead of the people emulating a Buddhist king, made powerful by his conspicuous acts of almsgiving, the Buddhist king was emulating a Cambodian farmer, portraying an ideal in which men were urged to strive after the lowest, rather than the highest the most attached rather than detached, mode of behavior. King Bhumibol, perhaps taking a lesson from Sihanouk's public works campaign, rarely if ever puts a hand to plow or picks up a shovel to demonstrate the virtues of physical labor. The only objects he holds or lifts are ceremonial objects. Instead, he progresses across the land, inspecting and patronizing experimental industrial and agricultural projects. He descends from the heavens like a great Cakkavatti king, in American-made helicopters, distributes sacred rewards, and disappears back into the sky.

himself are in no way attributable to the quality of the physical labour they performed in past lives, only to that of their ascetic labours and religious piety. In none of the Jataka tales is the Buddha born as a hard-working farmer. Hard work indicates nothing positive about men's chances for salvation.

For Thai leaders to promote a universal work ethic or to urge the nation's citizens to work harder (rather than to abstain from evil in the manner of the Great Cakkavatti King) is thus to urge them to commit soteriological suicide: to foster greater worldly attachment, upadana, rather than detachment, dana. If taken seriously, such exhortations could destroy the moral fabric of society. Conveyed verbally and explicitly, they would automatically delegitimize their proclaimers.

The introduction of a work ethic in the Protestant mode involves yet additional antinomy issues for the nation's rulers concerning the nature of 'sacred' discourse. First, if hard work is to be represented as a value (lit. as a 'high' practice), the message must be conveyed in the ritual medium, as a visual manifestation of a new principle of order. Second, i.e., they are such changes are acts of ritual purification, the prerogatives of monarchs. For anyone else to introduce new values in the ritual medium is to commit the error of Luang Phibun, to invite charges of destroying the moral order. (Such men are portrayed by their enemies as greedily grasping onto prerogatives not theirs by birth.) Third, new values must be dramatized in such a way as to indicate that influence is "flowing" in the proper direction, from the Sangha to the laity, and not the reverse.

The modern royal kathin ritual addresses all of these issues in a most ingenious way. As King Lithai notes in the Trai Phum, the established tradition is that the Great Brahma takes the eight

requisites needed by a monk up to the brahma world. He keeps them there "until the time the Lord Bodhisatta goes out to take up the life of a mendicant in order to be enlightened . . . " When the Lord Bodhisatta goes out on his quest, "the Mahabrahma brings them down to present as an offering." These eight requisites are "one set of three robes, one alms bowl, one razor, one needle, one sash, and one water strainer" (1982:313).

However, the most intrusive of the king's gifts to the Sangha at the royal kathin of 1978 and 1979¹⁷ were larger-than-life carpentry tools, set high atop mother-of-pearl offering trays and offered to the monks as part of the eight requisites. These gifts represented a total break from royal tradition.¹⁸ They were set 'high' with the golden silk ciwon (set on the jeweled sky tray), with extra monastic robes (set on golden offering trays), and with the rest of the traditional eight requisites, the atthaborikhan, likewise set on mother-of-pearl offering trays.

As King Lithai describes the situation, the Great Brahma descends from the heavens to offer the eight requisites to the bodhisatta. He does not bring them hammers, saws, and screw drivers.

The message was ambiguous. Was the king telling the monks to worker harder and become self-sufficient, thus allowing the Buddhist laity to invest their money elsewhere? A young, Western-educated Thai informant exclaimed aloud when he saw pictures of the king's unusual gifts. He had never heard of such things being offered. His automatic response: "The king is telling the people to work harder!"

¹⁷And of every kathin phrarachathan offered at first-class royal temples.

¹⁸A Thai anthropologist said the giving of carpentry tools in the kathin gift is mentioned in the last ten of the Jataka tales and is practiced in Thai villages.

This new twist in the king's ritual offerings is part of a broader semiotic pattern in which a religious idiom is turned into an economic idiom and vice versa--in the visual mode. In a sense it is a continuation of an ancient tradition in which monks are represented as models of religious devotees who work without wages in support of religion (cf. Geiger 1964:199-200), but, as the Sinhalese chronicles make clear, this notion applies to the building of stupas, not to the tilling of fields.

Because this message was conveyed by the king in the ritual mode, it remained outside the domain of public (and critical) discourse. Because it was conveyed in the Buddhist temple, the flow of influence was correct, from Sangha to lay society. Because the king had personally adjusted the ritual details 'to suit time and place,' these new values were perceived as part of the purification of the polity.

Problem Five: The Picture and Its Missing Parts

None of the rulers, neither the great ones nor the small ones, are able to bring their weapons to do battle with the great Cakkavatti king--this they simply cannot do. Instead they are generally drawn to the great Cakkavatti king by love and adoration, and they suggest to one another that they come to pay their respects to him, have an audience with him, and gather around to pay him homage. (King Lithai)

When the great Cakkavatti king tours the universe, all of its inhabitants come forth to pay homage. When King Bhumibol tours Thailand, some of the nation's inhabitants come forth to pay homage, but some remain out of sight, for good reason.

A fifth major issue of development concerns fears over the growing power of Thai 'trading generals'--that they are rapacious and do not genuinely respect king and religion. In modern royal kathin ceremonies, the king is not surrounded by a phalanx of powerful military figures as

he was for his coronation and as kings were in the past. The most powerful of them keep out of sight, or attend him one at a time in a subordinate role at different royal temples. He is attended, instead, by members of his privy council and representatives from each branch of the armed forces and government ministries.

The major relation that is dramatized in the kathin is that between the king and his people; he protects them from the military, who are portrayed as his subordinate and loyal servants.

This issue is addressed through the idea of the royal perfection--through the idea that the kathin luang and kathin ton present the 'whole' of the social order in miniature--and then through mild distortions in the representation of that order (chapter 20).

In fact, palace and government officials portrayed the inclusion of farmers and traders in the royal kathin ceremony as a form of democracy. Ritual newcomers were offered the chance to peep into the celestial realms to see how social relations were really constructed there, and they were relieved by what they saw.

Problem Six: The King as a Pious Man

"At the conquering of the Damilas this people was oppressed by me. It is not possible to levy a tax; yet if without a tax I build the Great Thupa how shall I be able to have bricks duly made?" (King Dutthagamani, "The Obtaining of the Wherewithal To Build the Great Thupa" [Mahavamsa XXVIII.4-5])

"How shall I have the bricks transported without laying burdens on the people?" [Mahavamsa XXX.15]

And he made it known: "Work shall not be done here without wage." (King Dutthagamani, "The Making of the Relic-Chamber" [Mahavamsa XXX.17])

A sixth issue of capitalist development concerns the king's wealth. What are the legitimate sources of income for a modern Buddhist king and what are legitimate ways of spending it? How is he to raise money to support the Sangha and to build and repair great (royal) temples?

As the above passages from the Sinhalese chronicles indicate, this is not the first time the issue has arisen in a Theravada Buddhist kingdom. In Thailand in the last hundred years, however, it has taken on the status of an antinomy issue. As Dumézil so aptly points out, the universal king may be a rich man, but above all he must be a pious man, a great giver of alms. Southeast Asian kings who 'rob' the state of funds for 'selfish' religious performances have long been viewed with distaste by their subjects--with almost as much distaste as kings who do not demonstrate ritual purity.

From the Western perspective, the king's selling of trade monopolies or any similar method of deriving income is "unfair advantage" in the marketplace, the violation of free market principles. The use of tax money to support a royal lifestyle (i.e., the indigenous "farming rice off the backs of peasants") is the sign of "Oriental despotism" par excellence. Likewise, a monarch's building of great religious monuments, already a sensitive issue, counts as a sign of incipient despotism, the monarch's "waste" of the tax-payers' money. If done with private funds, it indicates some extraordinary source of income--which raises even worse problems.

King Duttgamani's problems in getting the wherewithall to build the Great Thupa were resolved with celestial help. The devata of the (royal) parasol "observed his thought, and thereupon arose a tumult among the gods." Sakka, king of the gods, stepped in and ordered Vissakama, the god of skill, to prepare the bricks. Precious objects--gold nuggets, copper, and precious stones--then appeared throughout the kingdom and the king's subjects were informed that "Our king intends to build the Great Thupa." They helped build the Thupa by donating their precious stones to the royal treasury.

King Bhumibol's offering of splendid kathin gifts to the Sangha or building of conspicuous monuments may or may not be profligacy, evil and attachment [upadana] or detachment [dana], in the eyes of his modern subjects, but it is easily depicted either way, and the king is nothing if not sensitive to these ramifications of his merit-making activities. His solution to the problem of the royal treasury have been resolved in stages, without the help of the thewada, but in a manner that likewise circumvents the issue of the source of the royal wealth.

In or around 1975 a new royal temple plan was devised to establish procedures by which the king's wealthy subjects could offer temples to him in exchange for royal patronage; these gifts were to become the nation's new royal temples (chapter 18). The royal temples are given to the king, he does not build them himself.

Pre-ritual donation scenes such as occurred at Wat Raykhing were not unusual; they occurred at every royal kathin, including those performed by members of the royal family in 1978 and 1979. The king and members of his family accepted these gifts, 'added' them to their own, and immediately offered the whole to the Sangha. The king himself gave an untraditionally small amount of cash to the temple, however, \$150. "Aiyee!" exclaimed one informant. "The king does not want people to think he is a rich man."¹⁹

This solves the king's antinomy problems with regard to the presentation of his yearly kathin gift, but what about year-round support of royal temples, traditionally a non-negotiable attribute of the true Dhammaraja? And how is the king to reward men who contribute to the royal charities? These two problems were solved simultaneously

¹⁹As one educated informant explained, in the old days the king gave the 'full amount' of money, but now the Department of Religious Affairs does and there is no need for the king to.

in the new ritual process.

Like the pre-ritual donation scene, the post-ritual scene in which the king distributes Buddha statues and amulets to temple supporters was a common one. In 1978, for example, palace officials lined up over a hundred people in the courtyard at Wat Arun to receive religious objects from the king. All members of the royal family performed the ceremony after their kathin ceremonies. The Crown Princess Sirinthorn distributed small Buddha statues to men and women wearing the uniform of the Village Scout at a royal temple in Ayuthaya. The youngest princess, Chulabhorn, distributed amulets in velvet cases to elegantly dressed people after she performed the kathin at Wat Thepsirin. These men helped support the royal temples (or the royal charities associated with those temples) and the king rewarded the monks there with a kathin gift and their lay supporters with sacred objects for worship.

These post-ritual ceremonies involved large numbers of people and apparently large amounts of cash as well. For example, the king offered kathin at Wat Chaichanasongkhram in Yawarat, Chinatown or the business district of Bangkok, in 1979. After the ceremony, over 120 people lined up to receive phraphuttarup bucha from the hands of the king. A palace official said that each person had contributed \$1,000 or more to the royal charities. If this figure were correct, that scene alone accounted for more than \$120,000 worth of contributions to the royal treasuries (or to the 'nation')! One way of rewarding men for their contributions to the royal charities is to elevate their temples to royal status: The king visited Wat Chaichanasongkram in 1979 because it had recently been elevated to royal status, third-class.

In many respects this but is a continuation of the traditional Thai royal temple system. As O'Connor writes, when men "built a wat to offer

to the king, they converted their money to social recognition and manpower" (1978:169). There is a difference, however. As O'Connor writes of the same tradition, "only royalty and senior nobility could summon the wealth and manpower to build a major wat" (1978:169). This was no longer true in the 1970s.

Who were these people receiving gifts from the king? A Thai scholar said that, judging from their dress, the people who lined up to receive Buddha statues at Wat Arun were be middle-class Chinese merchants. A second informant identified the recipients of the amulets distributed by Princess Chulabhorn at Wat Thepsirin as 'Chinese 100%' [khon cin roi percent]. One recipient of royal alms, a woman wearing a silk dress, diamonds, and pearls, handed me her business card, with Chinese characters on one side, Thai on the other. Her family owned a large business and she had just received the gift from the princess in recognition of her family's contributions to the royal charities. In addition, Chinese merchants have been joining the Village Scout Movement in droves to indicate their loyalty to the nation (and, as one cynical observer in Khon Kaen said, to acquire customers for their businesses), and they, too, were among the recipients of awards at post-ritual ceremonies.

If, as appears to be the case, a new civic religion devoted almost exclusively to the development of the state is springing up around the ancient royal temple system, then middle-class Chinese merchants appear to be among its primary practitioners. As the above data indicate, newstyle royal kathin ceremonies and the visible flow of wealth that is depicted there go a long ways towards resolving the antinomy problems of "evil" Chinese merchants.

Problem Seven: Greedy Merchants

The reshaping of the economy has generated yet other fears, those of 'Thai' people about the growing influence of Chinese merchants, and reciprocal fears on the part of lower- and middle-class Chinese merchants, who must ward off persecution from the military and right-wing baramilitary groups. These issues are similarly resolved in the kathin luang. Middle-class Chinese were conspicuously present at kathin luang and kathin ton: making donations to religion, king, or nation, or receiving "rewards to the faithful," amulets and Buddha statues, from the king. Such activities transform Chinese from men 'outside religion' to men who respect king, nation, and religion--all in a single act.

What are the principles upon which this integrative system operates? Like the greedy propensities and impure mental states of animal-like farmers, the propensities of Chinese traders can be erased by the sight and touch of royalty. Their bad qualities can also be purified in the ceremony in the same way as can any man's: For great kings and Chinese merchants alike, donations to the Sangha transform upadana into dana, attachment into detachment.

I suggest that integration of this sort is based on new Theravada ideologies of 'spiritual lineage,' membership in which is now being portrayed as entirely a function of pure action rather than of pure blood (chapter 20). In the case of local merchants, this principle is writ small; their relatively minor contributions just barely set them on the path of purification, transforming them from men of 'little merit' to men of 'some merit' in accordance with the classificatory schema of the Trai Phum, or perhaps from men 'outside the precepts' to men 'inside the precepts.'

According to ancient Theravada doctrine, the 'change of lineage' is a mental phenomenon, best illustrated in the extreme instance of the yogin reaching nibbana through meditation as described by King Lithai in the Traiphum (1982:344). As his meditation takes him to higher levels of insight,

the change of lineage . . . arises for one moment, and Nibbana is taken as the object of consciousness; there the lineage of an ordinary person is eliminated, and the lineage of a noble person arises, and then the lineage consciousness arises.

Men destined to be fully perfected saints at birth, the highest-ranking members of the spiritual lineage, are called 'sons of Buddha' (1982:121), while lesser men are more on the level of men 'inside the precepts.'

However, the most significant feature of the ritual insofar as it concerned the problems of Chinese is that of the missing guests. Thai farmers do not fear small merchants, who are often their friends, as much as they fear the nation's most powerful Chinese merchants, especially those who own commercial banks. These men have business contacts and family members which span Southeast Asia; their primary loyalties may very well lie outside the polity. The extent of their wealth and power is almost impossible to ascertain. (Thai generals play on these fears even as they contracts alliances with the wealthiest of the Chinese.)

Like the most powerful leaders of the military, the most powerful Chinese business merchants were absent altogether from the royal kathin and the kathin ton. With the exception of his "gem treasurer", the lord chamberlain (who is in charge of the royal properties and is the director of a major commercial bank), there were no commercial bankers in the royal entourage.

As in the case of the rapacious trading generals, the Chinese problem was solved through the use of proportions and through the convention that the royal kathin ceremony draws together the 'whole' of the Thai social order. The major exchange relationship depicted in the activities following the kathin were those between the king and ordinary merchants. The Chinese-middle class was publicly absorbed into the lower- to middle-levels of the celestial hierarchy. Thus when ordinary men (farmers) were allowed to peep into the celestial realms to glance at the king's business associates, they were likewise reassured by what they saw. The more powerful counterparts of these merchants, initially invisible in the ritual order, made their gradual public appearance in the upper celestial realms in the late 1960s (chapters 19, 20).

Such ritual solutions to antinomy problems are not without contradictions. Chinese are not Theravada Buddhists, at least in the traditional sense, and thus may very likely be making donations to king and religion out of suspect intentions, to secure their position in the marketplace.

Such ethnic incongruities in the new ritual order do not go unnoticed--although they are generally unspoken of in public. A low-ranking palace worker laughed aloud when he saw slides of Boy Scouts awaiting the king in the courtyard of Wat Bowoniwet. 'Chinese Boy Scout!' he snorted in response to one picture, before he was hushed by his superior.

Problem Eight: The Archaic Economy

The royal kathin addresses yet another set of anxieties brought on by capitalist development--fears over the loss of economy autonomy and the negative results of increasing and irreversible dependence on the world

market system. The picture of a flow of tribute passing from small farmers and traders to the treasuries of the king and the nation may have been reassuring, but it was a false one insofar as it concerned the true source of wealth of the king, or the true flow of wealth in and out of the country. The king, powerful military figures, and the king's commercial bankers now control the flow of wealth, and many of their business connections are extranational. This business structure began to take definitive shape early in the Sarit era.

The new royal ritual system presents images of an (1) autonomous regional economy (2) that is based on the production of rice and agricultural products--the opposite of that envisioned by Sarit's planning ministers. (3) The sacred economy (and society) that is featured in the ritual, which portrays the 'whole' of Thai society in the sacred cosmos, is one independent of outside forces, not increasingly industrialized and dependent on price fluctuations in the international marketplace. One function of the new ritual system is thus to delay perception--and criticism--of economic change long enough for new economic arrangements to be set in place.

The Celestial Economy

King Bhumibol's antinomy problems with regard to the sources of the royal income have been resolved in stages, without the help of the thewadas but in a manner that likewise circumvents the issue of where the king really gets his money. The historical stages are roughly the following: One of Sarit's first acts as prime minister was to dissolve the parliament, an act which drew attention away from the expenditures of the royal household and the cost of the king's ritual performances. The royal budget was no longer in danger of being debated in public.

Sarit then jailed dissident Isan politicians and anyone else who might have had both the inclination and the moral authority to criticize the costs of maintaining the monarchy, the source of the king's income, the size of the king's ritual expenditures, or any of the king's business activities. It was about this time, the early 1960s, that intensive capitalist development began in earnest.

These repressive measures drew a veil of secrecy over the business activities of the king, as well as those of his business partners, the nation's most powerful entrepreneurs. They allowed new business coalitions (of powerful generals, Chinese bankers, high-ranking bureaucrats, and representatives of the royal properties, silent business partners) to form in peace, without fear of public scrutiny. The glow of barami, acquired through close ritual proximity to the king and the royal monks, helped prevent this new class of entrepreneurs from being publicly 'condemned' (chapter 16) for their actions, and allowed business coalitions to contract alliances with yet another set of silent business partners--American, Chinese, and perhaps Japanese multinational corporations--without fear of incurring public censure, or raising questions about whether such business transactions were in the national interest.

I suggest that King Bhumibol's solution to the antinomy problem with regard to the source of his his own wealth (and Chinese merchants' antinomy problems with regard to their "ethnic" identity) culminated in the creation of a fully blown celestial economy that was dramatized in the newly-purified ritual cycle of the 1960s andn 1970s. The process began with the revitalization of the First Ploughing Ceremony, which reasserted the traditional cosmological connection between kingship and fertility, ritual and rainfall, and was followed by the creation of new

civic rituals which revolved around a system of voluntary donations to royal charities and royal projects (some identified with the royal temples). This solved King Bhumibol's problems with regard to wealth in a way similar to which the same problem was resolved for King Duttagamani: it fell from the sky in response to the royal virtue. The wherewithal for his meritorious activities, like the wherewithal for the building of King Duttagamani's great Thupa, appeared naturally, in a flow of voluntary contributions from his inspired subjects. As the years passed, new agricultural and industrial practices were gradually integrated into the celestial economy. New practices, and the men who performed them, were sacralized by the royal touch, as were growing numbers of Chinese merchants.

By 1979 this celestial economy entailed a tremendous flow of cash (cf. Thak 1976). from his subjects to the king. There was something mildly deceptive about such donation scenarios as occurred at Wat Chaichanasongkram, however. Although this and similar exchanges between the king and temple supporters appeared to involve a major transfer of wealth--contributions to the royal charities being much publicized--in fact they are nowhere near the order of the flow of wealth that occurs elsewhere in the economy, and the flow of wealth and economic relations depicted in the ritual economy bears little resemblance to that which occurs in the "real" and in many respects "invisible" national economy.

I suggest that this celestial economy depicts a deceptive flow of wealth which, in turn, disguises the invisible, private flow of wealth, inside and outside the country. It also presents a mildly distorted picture of social relations, a temporary respite from sometimes harsh new realities. It is a forum for the introduction of new ideas, a means of sacralizing new modes of production, for example, but its most

important function with regard to capitalist development is that it controls the timing of public perceptions of new power structures and new economic arrangements--after the fact of their formation.

The outlines of these new economic and class structures emerge gradually in the ritual system. In the case of the Sino-Thai, reassuringly small (and subordinate) numbers of middle-class merchants are incorporated into the bottom rungs of the ritual and celestial orders. Their more powerful counterparts appeared gradually at the top, as heads of powerful "corporations," by dint of their close identification with the king, freed from their ethnic associations.

The gradual incorporation of new actors in the ritual system thus builds a time lag into perceptions of change in the social order; it allows new 'big men' and new economic structures to emerge gradually in the public consciousness, occasionally through a prior and deceptive representation in the ritual and cosmological orders.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the contrast between a visible, apparent social, economic, and moral reality such as that portrayed in the kathin phrarachathan and an underlying, hidden set of causal dynamics fits perfectly with traditional cosmic paradigms and with the ideology of kamma. New interest groups (and economic structures) are formed as a concatenation of visible and invisible power structures, represented in (or absent from) the ritual order. The steady transformation of the ritual system (and the gradual exposure of the 'apparent' hierarchy of merit) follows the laws of kamma, which postulate an opposition of visible to invisible, spiritual to material [nama to rupa) factors at work in the creation of the social order. The new order emerges gradually, over time, its invisible dimensions made known by the material fruits of the actions of the participants.

This dynamic is but the continuation of ancient cosmological traditions that postulate the existence of visible and invisible worlds or domains of activity, and of great kings who can see into both.

Communication of the the Senses: The Creation of a New Social Order

In modern Thailand as in the medieval kingdoms of Western Europe gift-giving and hospitality networks are integral to the transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist economy (cf. Bourdieu 1977). Exchange takes on new significance with the advent of specialization of production of the material needs of the community (cf. Ortner 1978:65). Gift-giving networks--spheres of moral influence--and markets expand simultaneously. Gift exchanges transform strangers into guests and conquerors into moral exemplars. They create contexts in which strangers are unified, bound together in a web of unspoken 'voluntary' obligations.

I suggest that this phenomenon has a particularly Buddhist twist to it in Thailand, one concerning the magical properties of symbols and the interchangeability of men and objects in the ritual order. The Western idea of a gift is often that it is a physical object whereas in the Buddhist case, the gift is often that of an auspicious sight or the assignation of a more auspicious place in the ritual order.

What is the function of kathin with regard to hospitality? As noted above, the ceremony operates as a multi-sensory communication device that recreates the world of the heavens wherein objects, activities, and persons take on parallel functions, the communication included. For example, men and objects 'speak' at different moments in the ritual: the parade to the temple, the ho kathin, 'announces merit' [bok bun] in the same way that people and invitations are said to 'announce merit'

before the ceremony. Flowers, altars, pillows and the wives of local officials are all situated so as to 'receive' the king or 'receive guests' [rap khaek]. (The welcoming altar is set up only on the occasion of a royal visit, to "pay respects" to the king.) The light from the candles, the smell of the incense, and the words of the namo have similar functions is that they 'call' or 'invite' [choen] the angels to witness the ceremony, or awaken the Buddha statue so the Buddha can 'witness' the merit-making of the faithful.

Similarly, the welcoming function of the ritual--the integrative and absorptive function of the exchange--is effected not just through the giving of gifts to the king--produce, khong thawai, and monetary donations--but by altars, lights, music, decorations and persons, gifts and sounds of auspicious sights which 'receive' and 'welcome' the monarch and his representatives. The giving is thus not just that of objects--but of sights and sounds. Men give gifts of sensory experience which recreate the heavens and recall the dhamma. In return, the king offers royal 'gifts' [khong phrarachathan] including his kathin offerings to the monks. He brings another kind of meritorious gift, however, 'opportunities' [okat] to see the royal person, hear his benevolent words, and 'beg' for 'the royal touch' [phrarachathan prahat samphat he literally 'offers the hand to touch']). These are all phrarachathan, 'royal alms' which unite, inspire, and quiet potentially violent men, the particular mechanisms by which the Buddhist stranger causes not disruption, but universal harmony.

The assignment of a place in the royal ritual order or the assignment of new ritual duties are other expressions of the royal gift. In response to the above passages, a Thai anthropologist commented that "In the old days, we never had anything special for guests," including

chairs for the guest of honor. These are now commonly found in village kathin ceremonies which are sponsored by outsiders from provincial capitals or Bangkok. Similarly, village kathin were traditionally preceded by an informal celebration called the chalong rather than the somphot. The somphot is a pre-ritual celebration on a royal scale, a recent innovation of the government with respect to the performance of all types of 'official' kathin [kathin cangwat, kathin phrarachathan, etc.] Traditionally, the somphot preceded royal ceremonies only (and quite large public merit-making ceremonies) (see chapters 14 and 15).

Transformations: Ritual Distortion

The price of assuaging modern day anxieties in this manner is high; it builds significant distortions into the ritual process. I argue that the nature and degree of this distortion represents a new historical and religious phenomenon in Thailand. The difference between kathin past and present can be appreciated by comparing King Mongkut's situation with that of his great-great-grandson. Mongkut was a prince of the blood who turned monk. His biographers make much of the parallels between his life and that of Sidhatta--another prince turned ascetic. From Mongkut's perspective, that of his advisors, and certainly that of the majority of his subjects, his assumption of the Dhammaraja role and performance of rituals such as the kathin luang were but steps along the path of purification, a path which he and his biographers believed would end in enlightenment.

In contrast, King Bhumibol was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts and his closest advisors were educated in the West. It is questionable whether these advisors view the kathin as a powerful act of religious piety or as a necessary evil, an obsolete tradition which has its practical uses in developing the nation's economy.

Traditional modes of criticism can be applied to kathin gone wrong on the grand scale as they can to any other type of suspect 'ritual action' [pithi-kan]. They demonstrate 'overreliance on the performance of ritual' to achieve salvation, a critique that dates back to the earliest dialogues between Buddhism and Hinduism and is fundamental to understanding the 'fettters' that must be broken for the monk to proceed on the path of purification (cf. Maha Boowa 1976a:31).

Doubts about the purity of the modern ritual go far beyond such situations in the past, however. In the past, such criticisms were voiced by rival princes engaged in disputes over the throne or by monks engaged in sectarian disputes. They were raised in times of natural disaster, when plague, pestilence, or disease spread throughout the land, or in response to intra- or inter-kingdom disputes, when hostile armies were at the border. The kingdom was defenceless against evil because the king was performing rituals improperly or the purity of his lineage was suspect.

Beginning in the 1960s, the perfect kathin gift was not that given with 'no thought of material return'; it was that given with a view towards developing rural areas and inculcating capitalist values among the rural peasantry. The ceremony now responds to extranational factors or signs of the cosmic decline--to the forces of the international marketplace.

Conclusion

After achieving these eight attainments one can see everything, both in the heavens and the earth, and one can also see the happiness in the heavenly levels and the earthly levels, and the levels of Indra and the brahma and these things can be seen as if they were in the palm of one's hand--that is, they can be seen as if they were a makhampom fruit in the center of one's hand. (King Lithai)

At the conclusion of the journey around the four continents, the gem wheel returns to the sea. "The great Cakkavatti king and the army that accompanies him . . . rise up in the air by the power of the gem wheel. From their position they can see every place and district" (1982:158).

The great king's journey endows him with special knowledge, similar to that gained by a meditation monk who has mastered the eight spiritual attainments: all things can be seen "as if they were in the palm of one's hand." In the next chapter I will describe two other journeys, one taken by the king, the other by Sarit, and demonstrate how they helped facilitate the adoption of new social practices in the early 1960s.

CHAPTER 12

PILGRIMAGE AND PROSPERITY: 'DEVELOPMENT' BEGINS

In the "domino" view of Southeast Asia, Thailand, under the Sarit regime, always stood firm, surrounded by wavering neighbors in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma.

When Communist guerrillas increased their campaign of subversion in the poor northeast provinces of Thailand, Sarit launched a \$300 million program of economic, medical and educational development that undercut the Communist threat there (Corinne Phuankasem, Thailand and SEATO)

Introduction

From 1959 to 1961 Sarit's economic advisory board (the National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB]), wrote a National Development Plan, the recommendations of which were stated in a five-year plan (1961-1966). Following the advice of the World Bank report, its members argued that Thailand's infrastructure should be built up before emphasis could be placed on industrial development. One of the first objectives of the program was to promote agricultural production and industrial development with a goal of raising gross national product by six percent per annum¹ (Silcock 1967:280-283). Community or rural development, called pattana chonabot, would follow.

Sarit and his development ministers had ambitious plans for developing the polity but they lacked the foreign capital and expertise necessary to implement them. The nation had a prime minister who was feared and effective at home, but hardly likely to make a favorable impression abroad, especially in the United States. Fortunately, it

¹The six percent figure became part of the mythology of capitalist development in later years (see chapter 14).

also had a king who was born in the United States, educated in Europe, who spoke several foreign languages, and who could therefore help cement the international alliances necessary for Thailand to receive foreign aid.

In 1960 and 1961 the partnership between the king and Sarit was mobilized to put Thailand on the road to development, American-style. The king and Sarit each went on journeys that marked major transitions in their lives and the economic life of the polity. The king was sent to observe social practices in the developed nations of the West and Sarit went out to inspect the Northeast.

As Thak² (1979:351) and Girling (1981) have noted, the political bases for the economic boom of the 1960s were laid out during the early years of the Sarit regime. As I suggested in chapter 10, the ritual bases of development were also laid out during this period. In this chapter I suggest that pilgrimages of the king and Sarit eased the transition from one to another set of capitalist practices and helped sacralize development.

This chapter focuses on the epistemological dimensions of Thai Buddhist pilgrimages and the glossing exercises they entail. It suggests how the king and Sarit's early trips enhanced their moral authority and strengthened their (and the elite's) control over language and the interpretation of experience.

The pilgrimages of the early 1960s set the stage for development, but they also inadvertently set the stage for a new wave of antinomy problems, primarily through the pilgrims' equation of 'democracy' with

²Thak (1979) is quoted extensively in this and other chapters because his is the only comprehensive work on the Sarit era in English or Thai. Anderson (1978) discusses the dearth of sources on modern Thai politics. Wilson (1962), Turton (1978), Elliott (1978), Puangkasem (1973) and Lomax (1967) contain information of interest to the discussion.

sacred (and implicitly hierarchical) traditions of 'unity' [khwam samakhi]. Sarit's interpretation of democracy in particular contravened conventional Western understandings of the term.

As with most pilgrimages, King Bhumibol's journey to the West had a personal and communal dimension (cf. Turner 1973). King Bhumibol began to assume the most fundamental prerogatives of the Dhammaraja. He began offering the royal (sacred) advice to his subjects as a form of khong phrarachathan or royal gift. He began exercising the naming prerogatives of kings, making "the great classifications" of Thai social life by naming and renaming its territories, its inhabitants, and its social and religious activities, assigning each a place within his kingdom or dhamma-realm, within the new moral order. His journey also marked a transition in Thailand's role in the world market system and the nation's assumption of a new (and increasingly contradictory) identity as a Buddhist soteriological state.

In many respects, King Bhumibol's journey to the West was the continuation of an ancient cosmological tradition (a king's touring the cosmos or his kingdom to understand the truth of suffering and methods for gaining release from suffering), but it also represented a break from that tradition. It took place in the international climate described above by Puangkasem: the United States had begun to take an active interest in Laos, Thailand began to play an active role in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and the "domino" theory was about to take root in the hearts and minds of American political leaders. Thus the original impetus for development may have come from the king, Sarit, and his planning ministers, but it soon became heavily militarized, which is what governed Isan people's experience of change. Their assumption of new identities in the Thai Buddhist kingdom and new

roles as producers in the world market system took place in an atmosphere of violence.

Buddhist Pilgrimage: Travel, Sight and Insight

One day the king was riding through his kingdom with his ministers when he observed two mango trees. The one that had been full of mangoes was broken and torn by the people who had come to pick the fruit, while the other, though barren, stood green and whole. Thus he came to understand that possessions bring only sorrow, and he determined to put aside his kingdom and take up the life of an ascetic. (Mahajanaka the Lost Prince [The Mahajanaka Jataka])

King Bhumibol's trip to America differs in fundamental ways from King Janaka's journey through his kingdom, but the basic interpretive paradigm is the same. In this section I identify features common to the travel of Buddhist religious virtuosi of all types (Siddhatta, kings, princes, saints, monks) to illuminate this interpretive paradigm and to reveal implicit assumptions about King Bhumibol and Sarit's journeys in the early 1960s.

Sacred travel has a tripartite structure. The virtuoso³ leaves the capital, symbolic of the established order, and goes to the forest (or visit other kingdoms or worlds), symbolic of chaos and new knowledge, where he acquires the information or insight that is the basis of the new moral order. In the second movement, he sees new sights, has adventures, practices austerities, and otherwise meditates on the 'meaning' of his experience: how they exemplify the eternal truths of anicca, anatta, and dukkha. In the third movement, he returns to the capital, transformed, to introduce new principles of order. The return of princes from the forest often signals the changing of the guard, the king's renunciation of the throne and his son's assumption of it (cf.

³E.g., Prince Siddhatta, whose biography constitutes the master paradigm of sacred travel.

Falk 1973; Monod 1943:143-159), for example, or the transformation of the existing monastic order.

In the Thai-Buddhist royal tradition, the new principles of order are often presented as a 'middle way' of moderation, the Buddhist paradigm of knowledge and virtuosity.⁴ The middle way synthesizes old and new experiences, past and present practices--or Buddhist and Western values.

"Leaving the capital" signifies the beginning of the pilgrim's progress on the path of purification. The boundaries [sima] of the city and/or kingdom are metaphors for the parameters of ordinary knowledge and discourse (and illusion), their crossing (cf. Eck 1981b) a symbol of the pilgrim's 'going beyond' the parameters of ordinary knowledge. With each new adventure, the pilgrim acquires greater experience [prasopakan] and attains new levels of purity and insight. The biography of the famous Isan saint, Acaan Man (Maha Boowa 1976a-b), for example, is based on a literary convention in which each of the Acaan's jungle adventures signifies his breaking of successive 'fetters' of attachment and delusion, and his attainment of the levels of sanctity which precede the attainment of nibbana.

With each new level of sanctity, the saint-pilgrim acquires greater powers of perception and communication. In the Isan hagiographic tradition, this is indicated by the saint's communication with (and pacification of) the various beasts and beings of the cosmos, visible and invisible, or, as in the case of of Acaan Man, with 'angels from

⁴The final synthesis of knowledge and practice incorporates the previous two moments in the pilgrim's experience as its main contrastive elements. Each stage of the journey represents a contrasting mode of behavior: exaggerated attachment to worldly pleasures or the practice of overly-severe austerities in the forest. This paradigm structures the biographies of King Mongkut and forms the narrative structure for stories of his Sangha reforms (Gray 1978).

Germany⁵ (Maha Boowa 1976a:156-158). In this respect, Acaan Man's adventures in the jungles, Phra Malay's visit to the heavens, and King Nimi's tour of the hells are structurally parallel.

The ability to see and communicate with all the beasts and beings in the cosmos is a metaphor of virtuosity in the Isan hagiographic tradition and in the biography of the Buddha. Of importance is the fact that these beasts and beings are beyond the sight of ordinary folk the dialogues thus signify the acquisition of knowledge that is beyond the grasp of ordinary mortals.

The pilgrim's adventures on the outskirts of civilization also symbolize (and enhance) his superior understanding of causal conditions; his transgression of spatial boundaries allows him to discern causal states. It thus symbolizes his ability to see past and future, a feat of which ordinary men are incapable. For example, the following is what occurs when Matali, King Nimi's charioteer (Wray 1972:49), drives the king through the Buddhist hells:

Matali plunged the chariot into the blackness of the various worlds of hell. Fires blazed, and soon they saw below them the burning River Vetarani, covered with brine that erodes the flesh Nimi wept to see such suffering and cried out to Matali, "Matali, what did those men do to be cast into such a river?" Matali told him in what ways they had become cruel and how their wrongdoing had begotten other evils. (Nimi the Noble King [The Nimi Jataka])

When Nimi returns to his kingdom, he understand the truth of suffering, its causes and consequences, and can explain it to his subjects. Thus this 'complete' knowledge--of spatial, temporal, and causal factors in the cosmos--enables the traveler to later interpret events to his

⁵In one story, Acaan Man soothes the anger of a fierce black demon (and his own fears as well) by he using his mental powers to see into 'the conditions of the arising' of the demon's suffering. His insight into the causes of the demon's hostility--i.e., his penetrating insight--enables him to see past the apparent (and fearsome) face of the beast (and the experience) into into its causal (and invisible) roots.

followers in ways they are presumed incapable of doing for themselves.

There is a way of seeing and interpretive tradition that is central to Buddhist traditions of sacred travel as well. Like King Nimi, the pilgrim seeks to understand the causal conditions and underlying moral significance of an event, how it exemplifies the Four Noble Truths. Like King Janaka, the virtuoso may "read" the landscape as he would a Buddhist text: each sight is a moral lesson that exemplifies a religious truth. Or, like a meditation monk, the pilgrim may use distinct 'methods' [withi] of seeing whereby his experiences are 'eye data' which he breaks down into constituent parts to ascertain the causal conditions of their 'arising,' their characteristics as sensory stimuli, and their consequences (cf. Buddhaghosa 1976).

The Thai king's leaving the capital to inspect his kingdom on a frequent basis is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the past, kings left their palaces and capitals to perform pilgrimage in the classical sense, to visit sacred sites, venerate relics, or to take up the yellow robes. As Turner (1973:204) points out, the Buddhist concept of sacred journeys is derived from Hindu practices. The Pali form of the Sanskrit word for pilgrimage (pravrajya: Pali pabbajja) means literally "a going forth," "retreat from the world" (the technical term for admission to the Sangha).

In the past, the king's ministers, his 'eyes and ears,' ventured forth to inspect the kingdom with regard to secular matters. When they returned, the king evaluated existing conditions (from their reports) and prescribed new laws or correctives accordingly. When Sarit and the king inspected the Thai kingdom in the 1960s, they similarly compared what they saw--existing conditions--to the characteristics of dhamma, and prescribed changes accordingly (like monks scrutinizing religious

texts for inconsistencies with the dhamma). The prescriptions that result from such forays are presumed to be context- and time-specific, subject to change (purification) in accordance with changes in cosmic (or social) conditions.

In addition to the above, the travel patterns of Buddhist virtuosos have a vertical structure. For example, the bodhisatta descends from the heavens to preach to his mother, returns, and is reborn as the Buddha. The king descends from his palace in the capital (the Buddhist heavens) inspects his kingdom (the earthly realms of ordinary men), venerates sacred relics and rewards men for their virtue, and then ascends to his palace in the sky.

Like King Janaka, the pilgrim experiences a sharp change in status when he returns to the capital. He is transformed from a seeker to a disseminator of knowledge. He changes from a student to a teacher, from an observer and participant in socio-material conditions into a detached interpreter of those conditions. Having stilled the questions and doubts in his own 'disturbed heart' [cai kongwon] doubts that prompted (i.e., were the 'causal-roots' [het-phon] of) the pilgrimage, the virtuoso can still the disturbed hearts of others.

The epistemological dimensions of pilgrimage are crucial to an understanding of the intensification of development which occurred in the early 1960s. I suggest that the symbolism of travel--of 'going beyond' existing boundaries of space, time, knowledge, and apparent causal conditions--endowed Sarit and the king with the moral authority to introduce new practices. It reinforced the idea that ordinary mortals lacked the skills and wisdom necessary to make judgements about the morality of these new practices and to predict their outcomes.

This is an crucial point for the study of capitalist development in Thailand as the conjoined symbolism of travel and knowledge is what prevents ordinary men from immediately challenging the morality of new capitalist practices, to hesitate to predict their outcomes. The pilgrimage also reinforces sacred traditions of hierarchy, the belief that men at the top have purity and insight, and can see beyond the material 'face' of events into their causal structures, that men at the bottom must 'wait and see' the material consequences of these events before making critical judgements. Furthermore, in increasing the sacred-perception distance between leaders and followers, policy-makers and citizens, modern versions of the Buddhist pilgrimage prevents ordinary men from questioning the (inner, invisible) intentions of the men who create the nation's new economic policies.

The pilgrimage thus assigns a temporal structure to development. It builds a time lag into critical discourse about the morality of capitalist development--thereby allowing new social arrangements to be set in place, uncriticized and publicly 'unobserved' until the physical consequences begin to manifest themselves.

The King's Pilgrimage to America

The king stated that he had travelled across the sea to visit foreign lands, to observe the customs of the more advanced nations, and to select those practices which might prove of value and use to Thailand. The foreign origin of the advisory bodies themselves was emphasized by the transliterated English phrases "council of state" and "privy council" used in the proclamation. (David Engel on King Chulalongkorn's establishment of new advisory councils, Law and Kingship in Thailand During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn)

In 1959 and early 1960, Sarit sent the king to neighboring countries to improve diplomatic relations. These visits were successful, enhancing the prestige of Sarit, the king, and the nation, and Sarit

next arranged a six-month tour for the king and queen to the major powers of the West, taking special care that he visit the European countries with monarchies (Thak 1979:312-313). In 1960, King Bhumibol addressed the U.S. Congress in a speech which marked the turning point in U.S.-Thai relations. This speech incorporated many traditional Buddhist pilgrimage themes, of little significance to the American audience but of great significance to the indigenous audience.⁶ It also marked the beginning of an era of close cooperation between the two countries, and established the principles of their relationship.

The King as a Seeker of Knowledge

The king represented himself to the U.S. Congress as a seeker of knowledge. "I have long desired to see and learn more of your country," he said. "When I hear of intolerance and oppression in so many parts of the world, I want to know how, in this country, millions of people, differing in race, tradition and belief, can live together freely and in happy harmony."

The paradoxical nature of modern Thai nationalism emerged: "I expect some of you here were also born in Boston," he said, "or, like my father, were educated at Harvard."

King Bhumibol said that freedom and democracy were the most important 'principles' [lak tham]⁷ of world order and that belief in these principles formed a common link between Thai and Americans. "Although the Americans and the Thai live on opposite sides of the globe," the

⁶This and other of the king's speeches are taken from the Royal Addresses and Speeches, a volume published by Prime Minister Kukrit Pramote's office in both Thai (1975a) and English (1975b) for distribution to foreign and indigenous audiences. The volume was officially endorsed by the palace.

⁷Lak tham means, literally, 'pillars of dhamma.'

king said, "yet there is one thing in common to them. It is the love of freedom. Indeed, the word 'Thai' actually means 'free'" (1975:5)--an interpretation at variance with that of the 1958 Revolutionary Council.

The king referred to equality as another universal principle of order and noted that Thailand, a "new nation" in the world community, was seeking to implement this principle. According to the king, the words of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

laid down basic principles which should inspire the conduct of all nations and all Governments. One of those principles is contained in the following words: "A new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

His more significant theme, however, concerned the U.S.-dominated Southeast Asian Treaty Alliance (SEATO). SEATO is "the international alliance which is the pillar (lak tham) of my country's security," said the king. "When a country feels reasonably confident of its own security, it can devote more attention to economic development" (1975:6).

The monarch invoked the precepts of the Buddha in support of his request for aid.

American assistance is to enable the Thai to achieve their objectives through their own efforts Indeed, there is a precept of the Lord Buddha which says: "Thou art thine own refuge." We are grateful for American aid; but we intend one day to do without it

In view of the present world tension and the feeling of uncertainty apparent everywhere, it is my sincere feeling that the time is ripe for an even closer cooperation. It will demonstrate to the world that we are one in purpose and conviction and it can only lead to one thing--mutual benefit. (1975:6-7; emphasis in original)

Sarit's Pilgrimage to the Northeast

While the king was abroad, Sarit was doing his part on the home front to promote development and strong ties with the United States. He

arrested or otherwise intimidated those who he or his ministers saw as obstructing development: independent Isan monks and politicians. He saw the attraction of foreign capital as a long-run guarantor of his regime. His way of attracting such capital was to "ban strikes, dissolve labor unions, and give tax breaks to foreign firms, who were permitted to buy land" (Thak 1979:351).

Sarit also made several inspection trips to the Northeast, a pilgrim in search of knowledge. What he observed on these trips was, specifically, "the need for water and roads" (Thak 1979:207), the infrastructural improvements recommended by the 1957-58 World Bank report.

Sarit as a Seeker of Knowledge

In March and April of 1960 Sarit made several highly-publicized trips to the North and Northeast. He observed the vertical modes of travel of the religious virtuoso. Days before the event, rumours would spread that Sarit was coming to speak to the people. He descended in his American-made helicopter, exhorted the people to righteousness, and disappeared once more into the sky.⁸

Eye symbolism predominates in Sarit's speeches as in those of the king. "I left Bangkok with the desire to inspect the living conditions of local areas with my own eyes so that it could be food for my thoughts," he said in an address in Isan (1960 I:154, translated in Thak [1979:206]), "and so that I would be able to provide happiness for the people" he repeated the same theme in a radio address (1960 I:158, translated in Thak [1979:207]) following the trip: the purpose of his trip was "to see for myself the true conditions of the country"

⁸Personal communication, Professor A. Thomas Kirsch.

and to find out "the real needs of the people" (Thanarat 1960 I:154)--an allusion to the perceptual and moral failings of Field Marshal Phin Chanhawan, who had inspected the Northeast in 1956 but who had been blind to the sufferings of its inhabitants.

Sarit likened himself to royalty during his travels, in particular, to King Ramkhamhaeng, the 'father of the Thai people.' The official objective of the trips was to explain the two-phase National Economic Development Plan and Sarit explained it--in the manner of a father speaking to his children. His observations on the necessity of infrastructural improvements were intermingled with exhortations to the Isan people: to observe the Buddhist precepts, to be patient, work hard, and look after the well-being of their families.

The unpublicized objectives of the trip were to replace Phibun's provincial officers with Sarit's and to identify local leaders who might object to the government's development programs: men who had alternative definitions of democracy and the moral authority to disseminate them.

The king out of the country and Sarit drew heavily on royal symbolism, raising questions about the eventual fate of the monarchy if development were to prove too successful. For example, in a March 1960 address (1960 I:147, translated in Thak [1979:162-163]) to governors and regional police chiefs, Sarit constructed a biological metaphor of the state in which he was the whole body politic. "Our ancient Thai concept of government considered local officers to be the ears and eyes of the government," he said. "This ancient saying 'ears and eyes' does not only involve 'ears and eyes'; ancient administration also has the position of khaluang tangcai [the king's governor] which means that the governor has to be the heart of the government in the remote areas."

Sarit continues. "It is the same in this period," he said, "especially in the time of the revolutionary government in which I hold the position of Prime Minister." I feel that

you are my ears, eyes, and heart which I have given to the people I ask you to represent my heart which wants to give love and concern for the people. Help me hear, help me see, and most important, help me think of the ways to bring happiness to the people. Always remember that you are my *khaluang tangchai* representing my heart

Sarit also offered 'royal kathin' of an ambiguous nature at temples in Khon Kaen. Several of his ministers were sensitive about the implications of this ceremony and, twenty years after the event, were quick to assert that these kathin were performed in the king's absence, with Sarit acting as his representative (chapter 13). (One informant described Sarit as a phu kham yai or 'man of big words,' meaning that he spoke in a way that was 'not proper' for his face or his role.)

The Return of the Pilgrim

During the Phibun regime, King Bhumibol rarely mentioned the government or showed outward support for its policies. If the volume on the royal addresses is any indicator, he rarely, if ever, offered royal advice to his subjects. This changed when he returned from his world tour of 1960.

In his 1960 speech to the U.S. Congress, the king established the ideological basis of Thailand's future interactions with the United States. In his 1960 speech to his subjects he translated his experiences abroad into observations that supported Sarit's ideologies of national development and moral purification.

After returning to Bangkok, the king first 'inquired benevolently' (in the speech style of the Buddha) about the welfare of his subjects, Sarit having had yet another coup in his absence. "When We were

informed . . . that the country was in a normal state of affairs, Our worries were eased" he said. The king then observed that the Sarit government had been trying to promote development "in a most competent way" in his absence.

The king announced that his official trip to Europe and the United States had achieved its objective (i.e., it was a 'complete' or perfect action), to promote "promising relations, closeness, and understanding between those countries and the Thai nation." The observation that impressed him the most during his trip, however, was that

those countries whose people were closely united and well disciplined [mi rabiap vinai]⁹ were those which were advanced and well-off. The more closely united, the more advanced. So it can be seen that unity within the people of a nation, and understanding and acceptance of discipline, must be important factors in leading a country towards lasting development. I wish to leave that observation with you.

The key terms of his address were those of Sarit's development ideologies: unity, discipline, development, and progress [khvam caroen].

The interpretive paradigm was traditional. The king described the visible characteristics of Western democracies and industrialized nations to his less enlightened subjects and then postulated their underlying causal dynamics--'unity' and 'discipline' (rather than adherence to the principles of free enterprise, freedom or equality).

⁹In this context, Rabiap vinai means rules or discipline. In its formal sense, the vinaya refers to the body of rules governing the Buddhist Sangha. Once embodied in the behavior or 'practice' [kan pathibat] of Buddhist monks, the monks, like the king, become a sensory 'model' [tua yang] of propriety for the Buddhist laity. Rabiap also means order: of speaking (juniors to seniors); of discourse, in which monks 'suggest' new practices or precepts to the Sangha; and of approval of precepts, usually in order of seniority. The Sangha is the model of order for lay society. The reverse order of influence, from laity to Sangha, signifies the proliferation of chaos, the loss of the Buddha's teachings, and therefore loss of the means of organizing the kingdom as a soteriological state.

The Thai people should follow these principles if they wished the Thai kingdom to prosper in a similar manner.

He ended the address with a traditional Buddhist blessing: "May the four blessings redound on you all" (1975:8). The four blessings are strength, long life, happiness, and health--the traditional four blessings of merit. To his own people the king spoke of development, not democracy, discipline, not freedom.

Nation, Religion and Military Strongman: Perfect Unity

And he made the Order as uniform as milk and water so that it could last in purity for five thousand years. (Mahavamsa LXXIII.23).

When Sarit returned to Bangkok he began to implement his advisors' development plans in serious. New kathin phrarachathan plans were drawn up. He (or the later Thanom government) formalized a new type of official provincial kathin ceremony, the kathin cangwat, that led by provincial governors (chapter 14). These rituals were designed to exemplify the first and second principles of Sarit's revolution, 'moral unity' or 'unity in dhamma' [samakhitham] and 'development' [kan pattana] (cf. Thak 1979:156).

Sarit reportedly became obsessed with the idea of development. For him, more so than for his Western-trained economic advisors, the term referred to material changes rising 'naturally' from moral purity, changes 'born of dhamma' [thamma-chat], the indigenous equivalent to the Western concept of "nature." He viewed 'heart development' [pattana thang cit-cai] and 'material development' [pattana thang wathu] as interdependent phenomena (with mental factors or 'mind' probably dominant) in the new "economic" schema. Together the two modes of purification would generate the perfect 'civilized nation' [ariya

prathet]. According to Thak, Sarit believed that implementation of his planning ministers' five-year development plan would allow Thailand to become an ariya pratheet, a 'civilized nation' whose "inhabitants' way of life would be no less 'civilized' than that of people in the West" (1979:224).

As the above statements indicate, Sarit's idea of a civilized nation was based on the idea of a perfect Sangha (i.e., it assimilated Western economic reforms with traditional concepts of civilization). Ariya is a Pali word that means 'entering into the Stream' of wisdom, i.e., becoming enlightened. The term is used most often to refer to the Sangha as a 'noble Sangha' whose members are perfectly united in the practice of the dhamma. It also refers to the noble class of warrior-kings whose birth situation 'inclines' them towards the practice of the dhamma. Monks in a perfect Sangha have perfect 'unity' [mi khwam samakhi]. They agree or 'see together' [hen duai] on issues of doctrine and practice.¹⁰

Like a civilized Sangha, the outer, visible characteristics [laksana] of a civilized nation should reflect the mental purity of its inhabitants and Sarit thus became obsessed with instilling the values of cleanliness [khwam sa at] and propriety [khwam riap roi] amongst the rural populace. As members of a "developed" nation, he felt that they should have running water, bright lights, good roads and regular jobs (Thak 1979:163). If "monks' strict observance of the vinaya" is substituted for "regular jobs" in the above passage, Sarit's description of a civilized nation exactly follows the previously quoted monk's

¹⁰In 1957 an ex-official of Pridi Phanomyong's government founded the Sri Ariya Metrai Party. This leftist party was named after the future Buddha (Metteya) and the ideal society associated with his coming (Sarkisyanz 1967).

description of Wat Raykhing as a perfect temple (chapter 11).

Sarit's concept of Thai democracy shared few of the assumptions about free speech, veracity, or dissent that characterize Western understandings of the term. For him, democracy and moral unity were conjoined values which were the basis of his ideology of modern nationhood (i.e., noble Thai nationhood) and the noble bureaucracy (JAS book review 1980?).

The concepts of person and unity which underlie these ideologies of national development are based on a Thai-Buddhist concept of moral-visual experience that is alien to Western thought. For Sarit and his ministers, the visual impact of Sarit's pilgrimages was of equal or greater importance than the words he spoke. For example, several of his ministers said in interviews that the purpose of his trips upcountry, like that of the kathin ceremonies he performed there, was to 'show people how to behave with propriety.'

Similarly, Sarit's concept of the perfect nation was conceived on a hierarchical model. Civil servants would observe the behavior of a dedicated and selfless leader, emulate it, and 'make their bodies into body-examples' [tham tua pen tua yang]. 'The people' [prachachon] would in turn model their behavior after that of dedicated bureaucrats, 'slaves of the royal work,' and the principles of the revolution would thus be transformed into social practice, into a positive kammic chain.

Khwan samakhi was the social index of the flowering of morality (mental purity) throughout the nation. Thus Thak (1979:163) writes that Sarit considered the ideal bureaucracy as one characterized by perfect unity, that it "should be uniform in thought and action . . . it should have samakhitham within itself and it should be 'socialized/educated' to see things from the viewpoint of the government".

The United States Steps In: the Militarization of Development

The original impetus for economic development may have come from the Sarit group, but the United States soon began to determine the exact form that it would take. Since U.S. interests were primarily military, the early stages of development, were marked by intimidation, violence, and the use of force. The United States began pouring large amounts of aid money and development personnel into the country. Much of the aid money was distributed through the United States Operations Mission (USOM), which was geared towards what U.S. personnel called the "security" aspects of development: building roads, air bases, etc., for use by military personnel.

From 1954 to 1962 alone the United States spent 97 million dollars on military-related construction, thirty-five million of which came from the Military Assistance Programs and sixty-two million of which came from the Economic Assistance Program (U.S. Senate, 1969:613). Much of the money was spent on construction of roads and bridges and on the Friendship Highway leading from Bangkok to the Laotian border.

In 1961 a Community Development Department, heavily financed by USOM, was created to supervise implementation of the cabinet's National Community Development Plan. The program initially proposed to reach the village population and secure its loyalty through the extension of services (Ministry of the Interior 1963) but it soon became militarized. After 1961 the government made a decision to "accelerate" development and the army took a direct role in the development of the Northeast. The army formed three Mobile Development Units (MDU) (also heavily financed by the United States) to spearhead development in critical areas.

Another specialized program, also heavily funded by the United States, was developed early in the 1960s: the Accelerated Rural Development Program (ARD). According to a former director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), this program was "based on the assumption that bringing additional development resources to the villages could and would increase identification of the villager with his government" (Sheppard n.d.:2).

These programs had negative effects on the villagers who were supposed to benefit from them, one of which was that the government often failed to pay for valuable rice paddy taken for the roads.

Farmers along the roads lost their lands and hence a part of their income without compensation, though they were led to believe that they would be paid. Villagers had little or no opportunity to participate in planning for the roads. (Thak 1979:266)

To add insult to injury, taxes were raised to pay for costs and maintenance of the roads. These amounted roughly to an average of 500 baht (\$25) annually for those families living within four kilometers of the roads (Cf. Thak 1979:266; New York Times, 27 December 1966; USOM Second Joint Thai-USOM Evaluation, I:174).

Where did the king stand in all this? He represented counterinsurgency programs as 'path action' (action on the path of purification) that would teach public officials new ways to alleviate the suffering and ignorance of rural peoples.

Counterinsurgency as Path Action

In August 1962 the king spoke to a group of district headmen [kamnan] and 'big men' or villager leaders [phu yai ban] of the Northeast who were gathered at a government-sponsored counterinsurgency training session. This speech marked the beginning of the king's assumption of

the fundamental duties of the Dhammaraja; he began to prescribe the code of conduct or the 'duty' [na thi, i.e., the dhamma] of the nation's citizens.

"I am pleased to learn that the Ministry of Interior is now organizing a training programme for kamnans and puyaibans of the border areas," he stated. "Now that our neighbouring countries are undergoing many fundamental changes, we must . . . be on the look-out for threats to our national security which may surreptitiously endanger our unity and instigate the people, thus undermining the security of our nation" (1975:10).

The king reinforced hierarchical traditions when he emphasized the danger facing the polity. Translated literally, 'To instigate the (innocent or uninformed) people'¹¹ means 'to rouse people to know differently.' To 'lose one's way' (or to be misguided)¹² means 'to admire and to be inclined towards deceptive and enticing words.'

This speech evokes a moral geography of the nation which is similar to that of Wat Raykhing. Controlled, moral beings are at the civilized center of the kingdom, in the capital, and uncontrolled, chaotic beings are at the uncivilized edges. The implication was that Thai villagers, living near the forest where communists were suspected of hiding, were at best uninformed in their views and at worst animal-like in their characteristics, easily roused, easily deceived.

Like Sarit, the king also implicitly represented the ideal order as one in which all men were unified in their perceptions, in which they all agreed or 'saw together' [hen duai], a social state indicating the flowering of dhamma (a state originating, one assumes, from the perfect

¹¹Pluk pan hai phu ru thao mai theung kan.

¹²Long phit niyom khloi tam kham lak luang].

behavior of a great king rather than from that of a great dictator). The king described the meeting as an opportunity for local officials to become united in their thoughts: "This is most opportune and will afford you the opportunity of meeting one another and exchanging ideas"¹³ (1975a:16).

The address implicitly characterized these lower-ranking government servants as being more volatile, hot-hearted, and less knowledgeable than their superiors in Bangkok. As the sensory-emotional antennae of the government, their duty was to understand and communicate the suffering and happiness of farmers to their superiors. "Not only are you administrators, residing with the people of your locality and ministering to their wants and requirements,"¹⁴ the king said,

but you are also their elected and trusted representatives, acting as their link with the government . . . Having shared in the people's responsibilities,¹⁵ you are in a position to understand more fully their feelings and requirements and help them in their afflictions.

As Seneviratne (1978:12) notes, dukkha has many meanings besides suffering (or affliction). The term connotes imperfection, impermanence, emptiness and insubstantiality as well, states caused by thirst or 'craving' [tanha].

One of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhism is that men's nature is to 'stick' or 'cling to' (be inclined towards) sensory stimuli. Translated idiomatically, "acting as their link with the government" means 'to help them connect [stick] with the path of the royal

¹³Lek plian khwam khit khwam hen, lit., 'to mix-and-change thoughts and sights' with each other.

¹⁴Chuai du lae thuk-suk, lit., 'helping to see-and-observe their suffering-and-happiness.'

¹⁵Ruam thuk ruam suk, lit., having been 'together in suffering, together in happiness' with them.

activities.' The underlying premise of the speech was that if civil servants observed their duty, which was to 'make their bodies into body-examples' [tham tua pen tua eng], Thai peasants would 'cling' to these examples as a positive form of visual/sensory stimulus.

The king told the village headmen and district officers to act worthy of the mottos adorning the caps of their uniforms: "Eliminate suffering; promote happiness." In conclusion:

I ask you all to carry out your entrusted function with sincerity. Maintain your unity and orderliness. Be prudent lest you allow others to cause dissension [sic] and disunity. The Thai people, whatever their religion, regional customs or dialects, are one and indivisible. They share in their sufferings and aspirations.

The king ended with a traditional blessing: "I now invoke the blessings of the Triple Gems that you shall all enjoy greater happiness and prosperity" (1975:10).

Sangha Reforms

Another of Sarit's early steps in promoting development was to unify the Sangha, purging it of dissident monks. As noted in chapter 8, he was reportedly disturbed about monks' fighting over the positions of sangha nayok and supreme patriarch in the late 1950s and issued a warning to that effect. When the fighting continued, he passed the Sangha Reform Act of 1962 to 'restore order.'

Phibun's Reform Act of 1941 had distributed control of the Sangha among three ecclesiastical executive councils, allowing Mahanikai monks more equal representation in the Sangha administrative hierarchy and it limiting the power of the supreme patriarch, who was appointed by the king. It also allowed independent Isan monks like Phra Phimonlatham, bright men from rural backgrounds, to rise within the Sangha hierarchy.

Sarit's 1962 act changed all this. He disbanded the democratic Sangha Council and concentrated power in the hands of a single authoritative (and government controlled) Mahathera Sangkhom or Council of Elder Monks. It allowed the supreme patriarch (appointed by the king) to exercise greater control over the Sangha. It divided power relatively equally between the king and the prime minister, in roughly the same distribution of power reflected in the new kathin phrarachathan rules.

New types of historical situations began to unfold as a result of the dual system of leadership. Sarit proposed the act, the king endorsed it, and Sarit enforced it. When controversy arose, the king ('above politics') was dissociated from it and other oppressive or unpopular actions of the government while the men who enforced the act, Sarit and his successors, were subject to censure for wrongfully interfering in Sangha affairs.

Phimonlatham on Trial

The 1962 act sealed the fate of independent Isan monks like Phra Phimonlatham, who was jailed almost immediately as a direct consequence of its passage (clearing the way for Sarit's candidate to become supreme patriarch).

In an infamous incident, Phimonlatham was called before an ecclesiastical court and accused of a curious mixture of crimes: breaking the vinaya code in the matter of dress,¹⁶ improper sexual conduct, and being a 'suspected communist.' The court found him guilty and ordered him to disrobe. He refused and was forcibly disrobed and jailed in an incident that is still remembered as a national scandal.

¹⁶He had reportedly worn a helmet and protective garments while inspecting a mine on a visit to Germany.

Phimonlatham stood as a symbol of Isan identity because of his religiousity and because of his independence from the central Thai government. He was also a master politician. Of the large contingent of military and civil police sent by Sarit to arrest him, he said in an interview with the Bangkok Post (Razak 6 September 1966): "It was like using an elephant to catch a grasshopper. If they had just telephoned me, I would have gone to them." While in jail, he wore white robes and lived the life of a monk, thereby refusing to acknowledge the civil authority's right to disrobe him and forcing the king (and Sarit's) hand with regard to the new balance of power: if he were to be "legitimately disrobed"--if that were even possible--it would have to be at the direct order of a Dhammaraja, not that of a military strongman of humble origins.

Phimonlatham used his time in jail to write two books on religion, one for monks and one for laity (i.e., the 'whole' of the polity), and to gather an even larger contingent of followers from among the political dissidents detained at the prison. As he said later of his experience, "I had complete freedom of meditation and have spent the most happy time I ever had."

The king endorsed Sarit's actions by withholding personal patronage from Wat Mahathaath and never offering the kathin robes there in person. He sponsored Sarit's cremation rites, which were held at Wat Thepsarin, a Thammayut temple whose former abbot was Somdet Uan and which had a large contingent of pro-government Isan monks. By the time of Sarit's death he had awarded him all but the highest order in the land in recognition of his development activities.

The Fruits of Development

The economic impact of government development programs was mixed at best. New taxes and soaring land costs led to land speculation and growing absentee landlordism in the Northeast. Frequent visits to Isan villages by police, military teams, and government officials did not generate strong support for the government. On the contrary, their conduct vis-à-vis villagers "left a strengthened sense of the steep hierarchical differences of officials and the common people" (Thak 1979:266-267).

The Thai economy grew in the 1960s, but this was due less to the implementation of the National Development Plan or the growth of free enterprise than it was to the world-wide economic boom of the 1960s and the presence of U.S. troops. In 1963, total American aid to Thailand amounted to \$42.9 million (U.S. Senate 1969). Growth in the economy was due to the construction of U.S. air bases and military installations and the steady flow of American servicemen into Bangkok. This led to the expansion of service industries and low-level manufacturing industries. Tourism and prostitution became multi-million dollar businesses. Who (or what) benefitted most from development? The royal enterprises and businesses organized by the military elite.

The king and Sarit established separate spheres of influence in the Northeast. The king built a palace in the northeast province of Sakorn Nakorn. Sarit staked out Khon Kaen, Phra Phimonlatham's natal province, as the center for regional development in Isan and as the center of his personal sphere of influence. Natives of that province speak of his plans to rename the city Nakorn Sarit or 'Saritville,' but he died before they could be implemented. Thai Farmers Bank, one of whose former directors was the present Lord Chamberlain, was the first bank in Khon Kaen.

The Succession

The almost inevitable clash between Sarit and the king never occurred as Sarit died of a stroke in December 1963. His deputy, Thanom Kittikachorn, became prime minister, and Praphat Charusatien, Thanom's right-hand man, became deputy prime minister.

The king made a personal visit to Sarit's hospital bed, at which time an incident symbolic of their entire relationship took place. Sarit, lying on his deathbed, took the hand of the king and placed it on his head. (A photographer was there to snap the picture.) Accounts differ as to whether the king placed it there voluntarily or whether Sarit grabbed it.

Sarit's career ended on what might charitably be called a sour note. The haggling of his heirs over his estate revealed that he had (mis)appropriated a large amount of government funds for personal entertainment and investment in business ventures. While it had long been an open secret that the prime minister "had an insatiable appetite for sex," which apparently only enhanced his reputation as a strong leader, the public was unaware of the extent of his personal fortune.

The content of Sarit's estate indicates how the principles of "free enterprise" were actually implemented in the early 1960s. Sarit and his wife held an interest in forty-five companies. One of their largest holdings was in the Bangkok Gunny Sack Company. Much of his estate consisted of profits from this company because the rice industry had been forced by law to buy their gunny sacks (Phicit 1964; Dom 1964).

In the court battles following Sarit's death, his widow modestly estimated his estate at \$600,000 while his sons estimated it at 140 million dollars (Thak 1979:337). In this first post-Sarit succession drama, Thanom stepped in to 'heal' the dispute--by confiscating part of

the estate. Turning on his former mentor, he established an investigation committee "to determine the extent of Sarit's corruption" (1979:337), but the final terms of the settlement were never made public.

A new succession battle among military leaders allowed the king to continue his rise to power unobstructed while the new prime minister had to begin searching for ways to legitimate himself.

After Sarit

Sarit was a violent man who intimidated most of his closest associates and whose repressive actions had driven small-scale Chinese merchants and 'the people' straight into the arms of the king. Contributions to the royal charities picked up considerably during the Sarit era and by the time Sarit died, the king's financial base was secured. It is unlikely that the king had the same cash-flow problems in 1964 that he had in 1954. He no longer needed to rely on government funds to embody the perfections of the Dhammaraja because his business ventures were thriving under the new free enterprise system.

After Sarit's death, Thanom and Praphat divided Sarit's government portfolios between themselves. Thanom became supreme commander and minister of defense. Praphat became army commander-in-chief and retained the position of minister of the interior (a post he had held since 1957). As minister of the interior, Praphat controlled the entire provincial administration of the country, including governors and district officers, the police department, the labor department, social welfare, and (from 1966 to 1980) rural elementary education (Girling 1981:113).

The Thanom-Prapath government was notorious for its corruption. Massive deforestation occurred, especially in the Northeast. District officers or provincial governors either received payoffs from the owners of illegal logging operations or they issued land titles or permits making these controversial operations legal.

In 1964 Thanom was in no position to challenge the king. He made a point of conspicuously seeking the royal advice in the early days of his government. Thailand was becoming embroiled in the Vietnam War and U.S.-inspired "development projects with security aspects" were not winning the loyalty of the peasantry.

Three years after Sarit's death the supreme court cleared Phimonlatham of the charges of communism and anti-government activities. He returned to Wat Mahathat, "shorn of his titles and offices" (Tambiah 1978:258) but not yet finished with his role as a major figure in Thai political dramas.

In 1966 the king began to tour his kingdom, to munwian or 'rotate' throughout the land on a regular basis. He offered royal advice on agricultural methods and patronized the newly-created development projects financed by the U.S. government. He established himself as a consultant on development affairs and built strong independent ties with AID officials. He established an anti-communist royal charity (Thak 1979:330).

The king continued to expand his unofficial activities. He 'discovered' and venerated a new line of meditation monks in the Northeast, monks who traced their ordination line through Acaan Man of Ubol, Acaan Fan of Sakorn Nakorn, and back to Mongkut's dahlikamma ordination on the raft at Wat Samorai (C. Reynolds 1973:82-83). In so doing, he assumed a role open to no other layperson in the kingdom: His

royal blood and thus more 'enlightened' patronage was public verification of the inner purity of formerly obscure monks, opaque to the rest of the populace. The king's patronage attracted other members of the elite to these Isan monks like a magnet, restructuring the religious networks of the Northeast.

The Qualities of the King

As the decade wore on, the government developed ideologies of kingship which placed the king squarely at the mid-center of soteriological process. A former Mahanikai monk from Isan recapitulates the main themes of these ideologies in the following statement:

The king believes two things, duty and sincerity. He has the feel of holy things united in the same person. This is because the king does anything (sic) for the benefit of the Thai people. The king is the leader in making merit. All the rest are followers.

He repeated a biological metaphor of the state which places the king at the center of the body politic:

The king is royal, kasat, head of the nation, pramuk chat, the center of unity, the high-center of the hearts and minds of the Thai people, sun-klang khang citcai khon thai. He is the soldier who has the highest rank. He is phra og, saksit, not an ordinary person.

Why is he called the 'head' of the nation?

That is where the mind is located. The mind is highest and most important because all actions follow from it. The head is more important than the rest of the body. The mind has the power to purify defilements.

A high-ranking official offered an alternate biological metaphor. "The king is compared with srisa,"¹⁷ he said, "the government with the limbs, the people with the body, rangkai, and dhamma with the leaut or lohit (Pali), the blood of the nation."

¹⁷The Sanskrit word for head.

Another high-ranking government leader offered yet a third biological metaphor for the state. Quoting from what he remembered of a radio sermon by Buddhathat, he said "The king is like the mind. Religion is like the blood. The nation is like the body. The three go together to make the perfect country."

Conclusion

The soteriological structure of the Thai state had begun to change by the end of the Sarit regime. The Sangha lost autonomy from the central government and the king gained it. The newly purified Sangha (its most troublesome leaders silenced) provided a national network through which the new elite could make merit and build prestige in rural areas.

Bureaucratic and military elite expanded their (often rapacious) business activities as competition for rural markets increased. And, the revolution had indeed been revolutionary in that the technocrats became more open about advocating capitalist ideologies that contravened indigenous ideals.

Future antinomy problems were foreshadowed in the following statement of the NESDB (1964:9).

The primary objective of the National Economic Development plan is to raise the standard of living of the people of Thailand. This succinct statement appears to suggest a purely material goal, without regard to social, cultural and aesthetic values. But while material well-being may be an end in itself, it is also, and more importantly, a means to a further end in so far as it enables all citizens to lead fuller, more creative and happier lives. "Raising the standard of living" must, therefore, be construed in a wider sense.

The new leadership had their hands full transforming an ideology of materialism and pure self-interest into an ideology of Buddhist salvation. Was unmitigated market competition a virtue? They took an intermediary step and developed an ideology of worldly merit, lok kuson,

which substituted Thai 'culture' and nationalism for religion as an appropriate object of personal sacrifice.

The new technocrats became embroiled in contradictions. They were not sure if they wanted Buddhist monks involved in their rationally-planned development projects, but these projects had little chance of succeeding in rural areas if Buddhist monks were not involved. If, on the other hand, the leadership involved teaching monks too directly in development programs, they risked delegitimizing their top Sangha officials, drawing them into worldly affairs. Somewhat ironically, this was the fate of many of Phra Phimonlathams' rivals in the Sangha, monks eager to help the elite advance their rural development programs (cf. Piker 1973).

If bureaucratic entrepreneurs participated in merit-making ceremonies with the explicit intent to advance their development-related business interests, their rivals could accuse them of using religion for immoral, deceptive or misleading purposes. By the end of the Thanom-Praphat regime, the king himself had raised the question: who were the more dangerous deceivers in the kingdom, communists or capitalists?

New tensions were building. The technocrats had no desire to present budgetary plans to U.S. or international lending agencies recommending that investment capital be used to build Buddhist temples. If many had their way, monks would be kept in monasteries where they belonged so economists could do their work unobstructed, freed from the well-meaning advice of non-specialists (even including, as some dared to whisper, the king). Even a palace office was heard to grumble: "The king should stay in the sky where he belongs."

Twelve years after his speech to the U.S. Congress the king was questioning whether the kammic fruits [phon] of Thailand's close

alliance with the United States were positive or negative. He did an about-face in his 1960 interpretation of the meaning of the words 'Thai' and emphasis on democratic values, and a radical reevaluation of free speech. Without directly repudiating the U.S. alliance, he began to interpret its effects as signs of cosmic decline.

In the following chapters I will trace the course of these antinomy problems as they developed during the elite's initial penetration of the Northeast in the early and mid-1960s.

CHAPTER 13

THE NEW LORDS OF THE NORTHEAST: IDEOLOGIES AND ISSUES

Money is the most abstract and 'impersonal' element that exists in human life. The more the world of the modern capitalist economy follows its own immanent laws, the less accessible it is to any imaginable relationship with a religious ethic of brotherliness.

A rational economy is a functional organization oriented to money-prices which originates in the interest-struggles of men in the market. Calculation is not possible without estimation in money prices and hence without market struggles. (Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions")

Introduction

The king had graciously granted members of the Sarit clique the privilege of developing the Northeast in his name. What did they do with this privilege? They became the new lords of the land, buying, selling, and taxing it. They became the new lords, or perhaps more accurately, the chairmen of industrial and agricultural production.

The development of Isan was characterized by a paradox of sorts. The more the regional economy was aggressively reshaped, oriented towards money-prices and the interest-struggles of men in the market, the more the elite linked such changes with a Buddhist ethic of (selfless) brotherliness--of detachment.

This chapter argues that there are peculiar, and unlooked for, affinities between Buddhism and capitalism in the early, intensive stages of expansion in the Northeast. In Buddhism--its cosmology, beliefs, rituals, and temple networks--we find specific preconditions and limitations of modern capitalist development.

As Weber (1946:331) writes of capitalist development,

In the past it was possible to regulate ethically the personal relations between master and slave precisely because they were personal relations. But it is not possible to regulate--at least not in the same sense or with the same success--the relations between the shifting holders of mortgages and the shifting debtors of the banks that issue these mortgages: for in this case, no personal bonds of any sort exists.

In Isan, bonds between "the shifting holders of mortgages" and "the shifting debtors of the banks that issue these mortgages" were often first established in merit-making ceremonies. The technocrats of the 1960s, many of whom were bankers, deliberately set out to replace the old-fashioned and inefficient bonds of "master and slave," or more accurately, its modern equivalent, those of "leader and follower" [phu nam lae phu tam], with the friendly yet impersonal bonds of banker and customer (or of debt-holder and debtor). The new ritual structures, including the kathin phrarachathan, provided a perfect means of achieving this aim--because they instantiated indigenous ideologies of sacrality. The kathin processions seems to spring out of nowhere. Ritual participants were often anonymous--i.e., monks and laity were thus properly 'disinterested' in each other's affairs. The laity's travelling long distances to make merit with unknown monks indicated the barami of both parties--the former's diligence in search of dhamma [tapa] and the latter's extraordinary virtue. The government stressed the idea that the best kathin gift was that given to monks with whom laity had no personal ties--in poor villages in distant, undeveloped parts of the country.

This was in somewhat the same spirit as Rama I's Sangha reforms. He advanced the idea that monks who maintained a proper distance from their kinsmen "would receive expressions of devotion from men and gods alike." And, as an incentive for the Buddhist laity, "[such] a monk's state [bhumi] is a most esteemed state" (C. Reynolds 1973:41); they were powerful "fields of merit."

This new ritual structure and religious ethos allowed ritual participants to "misrecognize" the calculation that was involved in the ritual exchange. Thus the "impersonal relations" of which Weber speaks, those freed from traditional ethical bonds and obligations, were created as part of the fulfillment of a reformulated religious ethic of detachment.

Two other types of kathin exhibiting the same features played important roles in developing the Northeast in the 1960s, the kathin cangwat or provincial kathin formalized by Sarit and the 'unity kathin' [kathin samakhi] performed by business cliques in rural areas. As merit-making networks leading into the Northeast were activated, Buddhist monks inadvertently became the "silent partners" of these new business cliques.

The Silent Partners

The received academic wisdom about the formation of the business groups of the 1960s is that they were patron-client cliques of the type described by Hanks (1962). These cliques are supposedly formed on the basis of "personal ties" created at universities and in military training schools and through intermarriage (Riggs 1966; Girling 1981).

More recent political studies such as those by Thak and Girling grant perfunctory recognition to the importance of the reformed Sangha in promoting the Sarit government's development projects (usually in the form of a nod to Tambiah's World Conqueror, World Renouncer) but they do not specify exactly how these reforms advanced the government's projects, nor do they acknowledge the importance of religious ties in the formation of interregional business cliques.

Personal cliques can also be based on "religious" ties: those shared by men who venerate the same monks, have been ordained by the same preceptor, or who have ordained in the same monastic lineage. I suggest that such ties were a major factor in business groups' expansion into rural areas in the 1960s, in the formation of the new "long-distance" cliques.

For example, members of Sarit's inner circle, the heads of the nation's most powerful business organizations, maintained strong ties with the abbots of royal temples. When they attended the king at kathin luang they attended him at those temples where they knew the abbot.¹ When they were ready to extend their interests into Isan, they had only to 'borrow' the barami of these royal monks--use their influence to gain cooperation from rural peoples--to advance their business and/or professional interests in the same way they had borrowed the king's barami to do the same.

The influence of these abbots extended throughout the nation, from Bangkok to the Isan provincial capitals of Korat, Ubon, Khon Kaen, Udorn and Nongkhai, and from there to the most remote rural areas, to the forests habitats of magical meditation monks. The abbots of royal temples supported development by creating pro-capitalist and pro-government religious ideologies, and by encouraging their rural clients to cooperate with their supporters from Bangkok.

Penetration of capital in rural areas therefore followed the "radial lines" described by Tambiah, in reverse. Business groups extended their activities from Bangkok to regional capitals and from there to rural areas. In making their contacts, they followed pre-existing monastic

¹For example, Thanom Kittikachorn attended the king at Wat Bowoniwet, Wat Arun, Wat Pho and Wat Prathethikhon, Sunthorn Hongladarom, Wat Rachapathikan.

networks based on monastic [sai phra] ordination lines or parampara. These lines extend from royal temples in Bangkok to royal temples in provincial capitals and from there to temples in remote rural areas.

The parampara is a self-generating mechanism that can be extended infinitely. Phra Phimonlatham's parampara extended throughout the nation and beyond. In Isan, partnerships between ganthathura or 'town monks' in provincial capitals and vipassanathura or forest or 'meditation monks' in remote provincial areas were strengthened by the support of ambitious entrepreneurs: with town monks directing ritual traffic to meditation monks in their forest retreats.

Buddhist monks thus became the important and unacknowledged business intermediaries of the era, men who helped powerful entrepreneurs from Bangkok to form ties with influential rural monks and their followers. This perfectly suited the aspirations of powerful religious leaders in Bangkok and in provincial capitals: they keng barami or competed against each other by attracting powerful patrons to their rural clients and by extending their ordination lines into distant parts of rural provinces.

Because these new connections were made in merit-making ceremonies, because monks and religious activities are traditionally viewed as being unrelated to business activities, and because speech norms prohibit public criticism of powerful monks, this monastic dynamic went generally unrecognized and therefore was effective in promoting the expansion of capital. From the Western perspective, the avowed disinterest of monks in worldly affairs articulates perfectly with ideas that the pure social order is that based on a strict separation of politics, economics, and religion (cf. Schneider 1968).

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the general issues--tensions and paradoxes--that characterized development in its early transitional stages. This discussion provides the cultural background for the following chapter, which describes four stages of penetration of the Northeast, based on excerpts of interviews with Sarit's planning ministers. Together these data illustrate the Buddhist backgrounds of capitalist development and the economic backgrounds of religious change.

Sarit's Cremation Volumes: The Birth of Corporate Capitalism?

Members of the Sarit clique set out almost immediately to raise the soteriological value of corporate and industrial commercial activity.² They addressed the problem of the historically low valuation of commercial activity by equating mercantile with religious activities. This was initially done through linguistic manipulation, by using the word pattana to refer to material and spiritual activities--to effect a transfer of meaning from religious to economic domains.

Sarit's cremation volumes demonstrate the curious blend of Buddhist concepts of purification with ideas about industrial development that resulted. The Ministry of the Interior (headed by Field Marshal Praphat Charusathien), the Forestry Department, the Air Force, the Grand Palace, the Cabinet (headed by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn), the Preserved Food Organization, the Ministry of Development, the abbot of Wat Arun, and Mahamakut Academy (the monks' academy at Wat Bowoniwet) all published cremation volumes, the total effect of which was to intermix sermons on moral development with essays on industrial and infrastructural development (some volumes contained both).

²I.e., equalizing the status of warriors and merchants.

For example, Mahamakut Academy's volume was entitled "Developing the Heart" (Pattana Cai) and the Grand Palace volume contained sermons by the monk Cuan.³ Other volumes contained essays which reflected the business interests of the Sarit clique: on "The Budget" (written by the Cabinet), "Industrial Development," "The Annual Budget," and "On the History of the Development Board." The Ministry of Interior's volume was entitled "Checking Work in the Northeast" and the Forestry Department wrote an essay on forestry. The Air Force volume was entitled "Social Policy."

Enterprise: Public or Private?

How does one accurately describe the ideological and economic changes which occurred during this period, and the complex relationships between ideology and practice? The Thai elite's ideology of economic change during the period of the Five-year Plan corresponds almost exactly to most Western economic analyses of the Sarit years: the development of industry was "left as a private sector to the laws of a capitalist economy" (The Office of the Prime Minister 1980). This putative "private sector" was controlled by informal cliques of businessmen, bureaucrats and military leaders. As Pote Sarasin, a member of Sarit's planning board, said, socialist cooperatives of the type organized by Field Marshal Phin Chanhawan in the 1950s "did nothing for the nation." Free enterprise, on the other hand, did. "The economy grew six per cent," he stated proudly.

The nature of much of the "free enterprise" of the 1960s is reflected in Sarit's estate: his public and private activities were complementary to the extreme, as were Phin Chanhawan's (Skinner 1957:346-347)." It is

³He succeeded Uan to the title of Somdet Phra Mahawirawongse and eventually became supreme patriarch.

perhaps more accurate to say that the Sarit government began its transformation of the economy by creating ideologies which made a clear (and non-indigenous) distinction between "public" and "private" enterprise, portraying both as the fulfillment of religious duty. The process began when the elite began to rename their entrepreneurial activities, calling them 'capitalist' rather than 'socialist,' and to restructure their religious activities accordingly. In practical terms, the "expansion of the economy" meant that the near monopolistic control of the Northeast exercised by men such as Field Marshal Phin became a thing of the past. A more open system of military-dominated competition evolved and a greater number of military-backed business enterprises began to compete for Isan markets.

New conceptual issues were worked out in the ritual domain and a parallel and similarly blurred distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' kathin ceremonies emerged during this same period. Official kathin were those supposedly performed as part of the civic 'duty' of public officials (to the Sangha and the nation) in their capacity as part of the whole body politic. Unofficial kathin ceremonies were those performed in a 'personal' capacity, suan tua or by 'one's own body,' with friends, family and close business associates. Informants claimed personal responsibility for initiating unofficial kathin ceremonies⁴ and thus claimed credit for their positive outcomes. They referred to 'unofficial' kathin ceremonies as being 'their own idea' khwan khit tua-eng, literally, 'the thoughts of their own body.'

⁴They were the positive 'first cause' [het phon] of those meritorious events.

The visible/invisible, public/private distinction also corresponds to a male/female distinction which is almost always overlooked by political scientists and economists in their analyses of Thai society. As in the case of Sarit, many leaders' visible public activities were complemented by an invisible set of market activities. Men ruled the polity and their wives, traditionally portrayed as more 'attached' and this-worldly in their orientation in the Buddhist tradition (cf. Keyes 1984; Kirsch 1985), managed the "private" market transactions.

I suggest that the following paradigm accounts in part for the relation between Buddhism and capitalist activity in Isan during the 1960s.

Dhamma Realms as Transitional Structures

The Isan economy of the nineteenth century consisted of multiple circles of economic cum moral influence controlled by King Chulalongkorn's half-brothers and government officials. Surplus was divided three ways: as tribute to the king, taxes to the state, and tribute to individual lords who controlled the new administrative circles as private fiefdoms.

In the 1950s, Field Marshal Phin Chunhawan's 'socialist' cooperative established Isan as one large, private circle of economic influence with regard to the marketing of rice, its major crop. Through the use of force and control of transportation and milling facilities, the cooperative took on the role of an extra middleman, appropriating surplus by taking direct control of the distribution process. Farmers sold their rice to Chinese middlemen who were forced to sell to the cooperative.⁵ The cooperative bought low in Isan and sold high in

⁵Skinner (1958:199) notes that in 1946 Chinese millers "were having trouble getting their rice to market because of the size of the bribes

Bangkok, on the world market.

In the 1960s, during the initial push into the area, Isan was once again carved into private spheres of economic cum religious circles of influence controlled by ranking members of the military, all of whom had personal ties to commercial banks (one of which was personally chartered by Sarit).⁶ These new circles of influence were but transitional structures, however, dhamma realms that allowed new financial institutions and new types of industrial activities to gain a foothold in provincial areas. Given the inevitable coup cycle, however, these large private circles of influence eventually dissolved, leaving the new financial structures firmly in place. As the years passed, new capitalist modes of production gradually became dominant over pre-capitalist; the preliminary religio-social arrangements had paved the way for radical changes--in the system of land ownership, production, wage labour, et cetera.

The early 1960s was also a period of intense ideological experimentation. Conflicts were inevitably generated as the elite intensified their efforts to reconcile Buddhist and capitalist values; a new cycle of social issues began. These issues share a common rhetoric (metaphors of decline of religion) and a common structure; they are generated by fundamental incompatibilities between Western and Thai Buddhist concepts of causality.

paid to railway officials." By 1947 or 1948, however, the Saha Samakhi had full control of the freight cars on the Northeast railway line.

⁶Skinner (1958:193), for example, notes that Thai Farmers Bank was controlled by then Major Thanom and Hakka leaders in the 1950s.

Ideologies of Change and Causal Paradigms

Superior in the world is mind. (Acaan Man)

In general members of Sarit's inner circle subscribed to one of two variants of capitalist ideology. The first was underscored by a Buddhist-spiritual cosmological scheme and concepts of causality and the second by a Western-pragmatic scheme.

Sarit and his closest associates, powerful military capitalists (most of whom were educated in Thailand) subscribed to the former; they saw economic change as a function of religious purity in the same way that Acaan Man saw spiritual as being determinant over material factors. This ideology was based on a concept of indirect or "inefficient causality" (inefficient from a Western perspective), in which personal morality and pure ritual performances provide the spiritual infrastructure from which all material benefits will flow naturally. For these men, 'economics,' like democracy, was but another, perhaps temporary, 'method' of purifying the polity.

In the second variant, held by the Western-trained and predominantly Sino-Thai technocrats, religion was seen as the most direct (and, for the most part, regrettably necessary) means to an end, that of promoting rapid economic change. Religion was "good for business." Whether it was also good for achieving salvation in chat na, the 'next life' (or whether there was any such thing as a next life), was open to question.

Sarit thus believed that the Thai people had to realize the rules of moral solidarity (solidarity in dhamma) before development could begin. According to Thak (1979:167), he believed he

had to stage a revolution so that the old system of government could be changed and the nation could pick itself up by the boot-straps and devote all its energies to development. Yet it appeared to him that before modernizing, a developing country must realize the rules which form the natural basis

for national existence, and make them obligatory elements of governance.

His rules took the form of moral precepts.⁷

Sunthorn Hongladarom, a member of his planning board, confirmed that Sarit's initial interest in development had little to do with modern economic theory; the planning ministers had to "convince"⁸ Sarit to sponsor a comprehensive national development plan. As Sarit's speeches to his subjects indicate, there may have been some question about whose transcendent virtue would generate order in the land, his or the king's, but there is no doubt that he saw economic development as being a function of men's barami.

As would be expected, Sarit's Western-trained development ministers had different ideas about the nature of development and about national priorities. These men elevated the "impersonal bonds" of which Weber speaks to the level of an encompassing social ideal. They believed that economic change would be achieved by strict adherence to the principles of free-market capitalism rather than by strict adherence to 'duty' as traditionally defined. When they referred to 'duty' [na thi] in a negative sense, they meant both that traditionally owed by subordinates to superiors and even that owed by Buddhist laity to Buddhist monks. (This was indeed an antinomy issue: Thai and Western meanings of the term were not just different, they were mutually negating.) The planning ministers were not concerned with "brotherliness" except

⁷This emphasis on spiritual over material factors as being conducive to a 'victory' in the marketplace bears striking similarities to Japanese ideologies of victory in World War II (cf. Benedict 1946).

⁸Sunthorn implicitly referred to Sarit as a type of wild beast or animal-like man when he explained the origins of the first Five Year National Development Plan. "Some people feared Sarit, but I could reason with him," he said. "People thought he was bigoted and obstinate but he would go along with good reasons."

insofar as it advanced national (or personal) interests, nor did they feel that they should be.

The aim of the increasingly influential technocrats was to encourage free market forces and discourage state intervention in the economy, especially on welfare grounds. They believed that taxation of the rich would only inhibit free enterprise, that substantial profits should be guaranteed to provide funds for investment, and, above all, that that "efficiency was paramount" (cf. Girling 1981:143).

Although the technocrats privately believed in the efficacy of "economic" over "religious" methods of modernizing the polity, they knew from experience that to say so publicly would destroy their credibility. They could hardly enter rural areas as men of honour if they exhorted rural populations to disregard merit for the ancestors and maximize profits instead. Like members of parliament who attempted to implement Western political ideals, technocrats who tried to implement Western economic ideals could easily be discredited by their enemies as being short-sighted or 'selfish' men. That the nation had leaders who exhorted the rest of the populace to do likewise was indeed a chilling spectre from a traditional religious viewpoint.

Ritual and the Expansion of Capital

Ideology to the contrary, the most prominent of the government's leaders had to perform conspicuous acts of renunciation to gain the merit necessary to lead the nation, to rename social practice, and to suppress critical observations about new practices. In the early days of development, they made merit:

1. to announce new ideologies and to explain development to rural people;

2. to take control of Isan religious networks and displace prominent local leaders; and from there
3. to create alliances with rural people (monks and laity) and build discrete circles of influence in which to conduct their "private" business operations.

As the decade wore on, they needed ritual to achieve more refined goals. Businessmen needed fame and a 'good name' to attract new business and thus to compete against each other in the marketplace. And then the real work began: Bureaucrats and business leaders, especially bankers, set out to use the interpretive prerogatives associated with ritual purity to change the ideologies and practices of rural farmers, to convince them to save their money instead of 'wasting' it on Buddhist rituals.

Antinomy: Merit or Force and Deceit?

Regardless of which was the dominant ideology, both traditional and non-traditional elite encountered antinomy problems in of their performance of religious ritual. By traditional standards, Thai-educated military leaders performed the kathin with (at least partially) 'pure intentions'--they at least believed in the cosmic efficacy of the gift. They nonetheless violated merit-making ideals. The pure gift is that given with a 'voluntary heart'; it is not one given out of fear, as part of villagers' obligatory attendance at the kathin ceremonies of men who, in other contexts, had forced their way into villages at gunpoint.

Non-traditional elite had different problems. If they participated in merit-making ceremonies without 'pure intention'--without believing in what they were doing (making merit for the 'next life')--or with the

explicit intent to use the ritual for material gain (to advance their business interests), they were hypocrites who 'abused religion for personal gain' or, worse yet, they were men who 'used religion to hide evil intentions.'

Furthermore, their use of monks in development projects also created a classical antinomy problem. By Western standards, involving Buddhist monks in economic development was an "inefficient" means of promoting change.⁹ By Thai standards, willfully subordinating the activities of Buddhist monks to economic aims was an act of moral calumny. A Buddhist layman who explicitly and openly advocates using Buddhist monks and merit-making ceremonies for material gain, of whatever sort, is neither a good Buddhist nor a great leader. At issue are two concepts of pragmatism and conflicting ideologies of causality.

The Buddhist monks who participated in government-sponsored development projects perhaps encountered the worst antinomy problems. A monk who uses his energy and patience [khanti] towards advancing this-worldly goals is brought low on the purity scale. Worse yet, he might be a 'false' or deceptive monk.

The government established two public programs to train monks to promote development in the 1960s, the Thammathut (Dhamma Ambassadors) and the Thammacarik (Wandering Dhamma)--with little success. In the Thammathut program, Buddhist monks were sent to the Northeast and other rural areas to preach the dhamma, encourage village support of development activities, and teach villagers about sanitation, etc. In the latter, Buddhist monks were sent out to civilize hill people, to

⁹Men who were newly returned from the United States with M.B.A.'s did not envision themselves training Buddhist monks or attending Buddhist merit ceremonies as ways of applying their newly acquired knowledge of economics.

teach them about Buddhism and development simultaneously. Both programs had publicly-debated budgets, involved monks in the teaching of worldly matters, and were controversial to the extreme (cf. Keyes 1971; Piker 1973), in some cases generating outright hostility.

The Issues: The Invitation

Not surprisingly, the two burning religious issues of the decade were whether Buddhist monks were government spies (agents of deceit) and whether Buddhist laity had 'forced' their way into rural villages to make merit (force and deceit being metaphors of decline of religion). Both issues revolve around the Buddhist idea of the invitation.

The Buddhist laity nimon phra they 'invite monks' to chant at their merit-making ceremonies. Pure monks do not invite themselves into villages to perform merit ceremonies, nor do they 'wander' [thudong] in at gunpoint, backed by units such as the MDU. Similarly, villagers traditionally 'invite' outsiders, generally close kinsmen from neighboring villages, to join their kathin ceremonies or to act as their sponsors. Outsiders do not force their way in to make merit.

The New Economic Ethos and Its Cosmological Correlates

These new economic ideologies and related characterizations of modern Isan "economic" history had their roots in ancient mythological paradigms and in the Three Worlds cosmology of King Lithai. The moral geography of the Thai nation is essentially the same as that of the Buddhist temple.¹⁰ and it was thus inevitable that new economic ideologies would locate Isan as the low, outside, and chaotic space of

¹⁰The kingdom is structured as an opposition of high to low, pure to impure beings. The sacred high space of the capital, built as Mount contrasts with the chaotic low space of the forest at the ill-defined edges of the kingdom.

the nation. Thak (1979:205), a Western-educated Thai, unconsciously utilizes the traditional cosmological schema when he writes the following of the economic situation of Isan before Sarit:

In Thailand, the wealth of the country is centered in the capital and immediate surrounding areas while the standard of living in the other areas . . . is far below that of the metropolis . . . the people of the Central area tend to look down upon [du thuk] those from the outer provinces as country bumpkins. The Isan area is the poorest of all the regions of Thailand and the people from Isan bear the brunt of insults and social put-down. Before Sarit, no government had sincerely considered the welfare of the Northeast region.

This model set the stage for the characterization of the protagonists of development. The identification of Isan with forest meant that it was inhabited by two radically different types of characters: magical 'wandering' meditation monks and hot-hearted Thai villagers, sometimes referred to as khon pa or 'forest people' (an insult). This schema leaves room for yet a third type of character, the tricky and evil Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin who constantly attempted to lead men astray.

If the Isan area was perceived by government leaders as wild forest, inhabited by animal-like men, then the Devadatta's of the region were powerful local leaders, Phra Phimonlatham and Socialist M.P.'s. These apparently righteous beings could be secretly intent on leading lesser beings astray. Or, they could be extremely deluded in their views. Just like Devadatta, who misled gullible monks by asking pointed questions which cast doubt on the Buddha's wisdom, Isan M.P.'s and especially Phra Phimonlatham were men who could mislead Isan farmers into asking pointed questions about the government's development programs.

Obstructions to Development

In the Theravada tradition, wrong views 'not straight with dhamma' are associated with what is called a 'tangle' of passionate attractions, with tanha or craving. In the meditation process, wrong views are called 'fetters' or 'obstructions' because they block [pen upasak] progress on the path of purification. 'Obstruction' became the government's metaphor for anti-capitalist forces.

One of the most crucial issues of modern Isan "economic" history concerned Thailand's membership in SEATO. In 1960, members of the Kennedy administration and Thai leaders active in SEATO joined together in classifying the Northeast as a "security risk," a potential hotbed of communism, conducting their military and economic affairs there accordingly. This is where the trouble began. Isan leaders objected to Thailand's membership in SEATO, to this negative characterization of their region, and to the SEATO-related military exercises that Sarit performed in Isan.

Thus when asked why Police General Phao had killed the four Isan M.P.'s in 1947 and why the Isan leadership opposed Thailand's membership in SEATO, Sunthorn Hongladarom said it was because they had called for succession of the Northeast. "The Isan leadership did not truly speak for the people," he said. "The Isan people weren't opposed to SEATO. SEATO was opposed by leftists because they felt SEATO would be in the way of their gaining power"--trouble arose because SEATO was blocking Isan leaders' aspirations to power.

Pote Sarasin, Sarit's caretaker prime minister of 1957 and the first secretary-general of SEATO, described Phra Phimonlatham as a controversial monk who "fooled around with politics." He said Sarit jailed Phimonlatham because he believed that the monk was (secretly)

cooperating with communists. "Sarit wouldn't dare put a monk a jail without proof," Pote said. In his opinion, the perceptions of Phimonlatham and his Isan socialist supporters were fatally flawed: "They opposed SEATO because they did not believe communists were real enemies," i.e., they could not distinguish true from false phenomena.

Thus Thak notes that Sarit's development ministers complained that Isan politicians were 'obstructing' [khat khang kan pattana or pen upasak to kan pattana] development.¹¹ Colonel Somchai Thannarat, Sarit's son, said in a 1980 interview that Khlaew Norapati (a prominent socialist leader from Khon Kaen) and the monk Phimonlatham "stood in the way of development" and Praphat Charusathien characterized Isan leaders as being tricky and Isan people gullible. In Praphat's opinion, Isan socialists were "against the government because the government was democratic." And, he said somewhat ominously in a 1980 interview, they were 'influenced' and received support from the 'outside.'

Thus the Sarit cabinet did not simply set out to 'develop' the infrastructure of the Northeast in ways implied by American use of the term; they set out to purify it, to totally transform its social practices, and to incorporate it into the greater civilized Thai Buddhist nation, the ariya prathet. Anything that blocked development was eliminated or 'cut' in the way mental impurities were cut in the meditation process.

In the following chapter I will discuss what members of Sarit's cabinet thought of Sarit's trips to Isan. Their accounts of these trips indicate the role played by kathin ceremonies and Buddhist monks at successive stages of capitalist development. There was an elective

¹¹Khat khwang is a verb, used to refer to monastic schism. Pen upasak is the noun form, lit. 'to be a blockage.'

affinity between indigenous concepts of sacred events as the anonymous 'coming together' of elements, dhammas, in accordance with cosmic law (cf. Stcherbatsky 1923), and the imperatives of capitalist expansion.

CHAPTER 14
THE CHAIRMEN MAKE MERIT

The penetration of Isan markets occurred roughly in four overlapping stages and the ritual strategies of the Sarit clique changed accordingly.

In the first stage (1960-1962), the government made its grand entrance in the Northeast prior to developing the infrastructure. In the second (1962-1968), "private" business groups led by powerful military leaders began to stake out separate spheres of influence. In the third (1962-1965), government leaders began consolidating control over provincial capitals, in part by jailing Isan leaders. In the fourth (1968-present), the sheer number of business competitors increased. Military and bureaucratic-dominated capitalism spread to remote rural areas. The militarized business elite began to race for merit and land near the forests of Isan.

These four stages of development coincided with four stages of religious change and change in the relationship between Isan monks and the government. In the first stage of expansion the Sarit group used kathin ceremonies to announce their new development plans to the rural populace. They solicited ranking Buddhist monks and their rural affiliates (and subordinates), the abbots of Isan temples, to help 'explain' their development goals.

In the second stage, business cliques offered 'unity kathin' in the rural villages and towns over which they sought personal control. In the third stage the elite began utilizing the new kathin phrarachathan

system to take control of royal temples in Isan capitals, the most prestigious in the region: their abbots had contacts that spanned the province. At about this same time, the government began to regulate formerly spontaneous religious activities of monks and laity: kathin ceremonies, the 'wandering' of meditation monks, the curricula of Buddhist temples, the building of temples and religious monuments, etc.

In the fourth stage of development, provincial governors offered kathin cangwat (provincial kathin) at Buddhist temples in the richest or most troublesome districts of their provinces--spearheading the drive into the most remote rural areas of the nation, where some of the richest and least developed farmland is located. It was about this time, in the late 1960s, that the Bangkok power elite began to hear 'rumours' of the miraculous exploits of meditation monks in the forests of Isan. The elite entered into a subtle competition to venerate these monks, collect their amulets, and control their relics after their deaths. This movement was led by the Buddhist king.

This chapter describes four stages of development and religious change from the personal viewpoints of the four men most responsible for them: the two military strongmen, Field Marshals Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien, and the two bankers and planning ministers Pote Sarasin and Sunthorn Hongladarom.

The four men interviewed did not see themselves as the new lords of the Northeast, as the Prince Prachak Sittiprachak's of the modern era. They saw themselves as the 'chairmen' [prathan] of benevolent development groups which 'drifted' from district to district, making merit and introduced Isan farmers to the mysteries of 'economics' and new agricultural methods. For the military men especially, new types of capitalist activity were suffused with religious overtones because their

ritual and development activities were all of a piece. Planning ministers were more hesitant to make these connections.

Stage I: The Penetration of the Northeast, Monks and Development

The Technocrats

Pote Sarasin: Thai Thanu Bank

Pote Sarasin was the first secretary-general of SEATO, a position he resigned in 1957 to become Sarit's interim prime minister. In the early 1960s, Pote was one of Sarit's planning ministers and the first rector of Khon Kaen University.¹ In 1979 he was the director of Thai Thanu Bank, a position he had held for many years.² He was treated royally, in the old style of deference, at the bank; his secretary served him refreshments from her knees.

Pote was a prototypical technocrat. He identified himself as an economist who was "Thai second or third generation," but added "now the Chinese in Thailand never think of China. They intermarry and stop speaking Chinese." He thought Thai people were lazy (as compared to the Chinese?), but that Isan people were energetic [khayan] and hard working.

Pote said the purpose of Sarit's early trips to the Northeast was to bolster the morale of the people and to see that the governors did their work properly. "Before the 1960s, travel to the Northeast was difficult," he explained. "The country was divided up into little kingdoms and Isan was this way until development." Yes, Sarit and his

¹Sarit personally laid the boundary stones of the university in much the same way Buddhist monks lay the boundary stones of Buddhist temples.

²For further information on Pote Sarasin's role in the Sarit government, see Girling (1981:161). For information on his role in SEATO, see Puangkasem (1973).

closest advisors offered kathin on those early trips to the Northeast. "The kathin we offered had the purpose of promoting development of schools and hospitals, but the actual decision to allocate the funds was left up to the abbot."

Pote described the government's programs to develop the Northeast from a practical, Western perspective. By "development" he meant the development of infrastructure--roads, irrigation systems, dams, etc.--not mental development.

He explained the objectives of the National Economic Development Board thus: "We compared the Northeast region to your Deep South," he said. "By determination, good planning, and sufficient financial support, you have transformed the Deep South into a prosperous area. We felt we could do the same for the Northeast."

The planning board chose Khon Kaen as the most suitable center for development because it was the geographical center of the Isan region. He objected to anyone singling out the development of the Northeast for special attention or analysis. "Since the 1950s, the government does not separate government of the North, Northeast and South," he explained. "All areas became national projects. There were dams in the Northeast, fishing industries in the South," etc.³

The technocrats and the generals had almost opposite opinions about the usefulness of monks in development programs. In Pote Sarasin's words, "Religion didn't help too much in development. Monks in Thailand don't have influence."⁴ We respect good monks, and make a point of

³Pote distinguished the parts of the nation by their productive potential, a capitalist mode of 'naming' the kingdom and its parts. When he exercised the same privilege, Somdet Uan named the parts of the nation in terms of the characteristics of its people those from the North were 'beautiful,' the Northeast, 'respected religion,' and those from the South were 'rich.'

keeping religion unconnected with politics in Thailand,⁵ both inside and outside the country."

Religion may not have helped development very much, but he was greatly concerned about the disruptive potential of 'false monks' who would lead other monks go find votes.⁶ to help the temple. They [opposition politicians] would make a deal with the abbot to help get votes. In return they would promise to donate to the wat.

He felt this entire orientation--towards monks and religion as a cure for the nation's political or economic ills--was wrong: "We should raise the standard of living," he said, "not concentrate on duty."

Sunthorn Hongladarom: The Bank of Thailand

Sunthorn Hongladarom, a charming and businesslike man who wrote the first Five Year National Economic Plan was another of Sarit's closest associates. In 1980 Sunthorn was the director of the Bank of Thailand.

The following is a government description of this bank.

The Bank of Thailand enjoys the status of a government enterprise. Its management is vested in a Board of Directors composed of nine members, with the Bank's Governor as ex-officio chairman. The Governor is appointed by the King on the advice of the Cabinet, while the other members of the Board are appointed by the Cabinet on the recommendation of the Minister of Finance. (.us Thailand into the 80's 1979:189)

Like Pote Sarasin, Sunthorn was a professional bureaucrat and technocrat of Chinese ancestry although he did not refer to his ancestry during the interview nor did he seem sensitive about it. (A Thai student said one could tell "by his name" that he was Chinese.)

⁴Phra nai mung thai mai mi ithiphon.

⁵Mai kiao khong kap kan mung khong prathet.

⁶Pai kho ha siang means literally to 'go find voices' or to find people to 'speak up' in the polity.

Sunthorn had always been involved in planning the nation's economy, regardless of which military government was in power. In 1950 he was secretary-general of the National Economic Council under the government of Phibunsongkram. In 1958 he was minister of economic affairs and in 1959 he was appointed minister of finance by Sarit. In September of 1960 he headed the Thai delegation to the World Bank Conference in the United States and in 1965 he was reappointed minister of economic affairs by Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn. In 1967 he was ambassador to the Court of St. James and in 1972 he became secretary-general of SEATO. In 1979 he was Thai Ambassador to the United States.

Sunthorn played an key role in creating close ties between Thailand and the U.S. In the 1960s the Bank of Thailand was heavily involved with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Its officers were instrumental in the decision to improve the nation's (and Isan's) infrastructure before promoting industrial development (cf. Girling 1981:81).

Sunthorn was more forthcoming than Pote Sarasin on the subject of Sarit's relations with Isan monks. As did Pote and the other two informants, Sunthorn prefaced the interview by saying that he knew nothing about religion. "My background is in economics," he said. Nevertheless, he had ordained twice as a Buddhist monk, once to make merit for a grandparent and once for his mother. He was familiar with the goings on at Wat Mahathat because his brother had been a monk there for many years. He guided the conversation away from religion and back to economics, saying that he felt writing of the Five Year Plan for Development of the Northeast in 1960 and 1961 was the major accomplishment of his career.

Sunthorn accompanied Sarit on his camping trips to the Northeast in 1960 and 1961 prior to writing the plan. Once the Development Board decided that Khon Kaen "had all the basic factors" necessary to make it a good regional development capital, Sarit's entire cabinet offered kathin there. All major ministries--finance, communications, industry, economic affairs and agriculture--were in attendance (i.e., they attended Sarit in much the same way they attended the king at kathin luang). "Twice he (Sarit) offered kathin in the Northeast," said Sunthorn "just in Khon Kaen, not in other places." "Meanwhile the king was visiting abroad," he added. (Was ritual on this scale a royal prerogative?)

There was ambiguity as to whether Sarit's kathin in Khon Kaen were royal [luang] or non-royal, particularly since there were no royal temples in Khon Kaen in 1960 or 1961. Sunthorn described these kathin as a "combination" of kathin ratsadorn (kathin performed at commoner temples) and kathin luang.

Like Pote Sarasin, Sunthorn was most comfortable when speaking of development in Western terms. He was not concerned with the details of monastic in-fighting, but did note that Phra Phimonlatham was genuinely skilled as a preacher. He could not remember the names of the temples that Sarit's inspection group visited, nor could he remember whether the temples where they offered kathin were Thammayut or Mahanikai. Sarit's trips stood out in his mind because the Bank of Thailand was "begun" at about that same time. "We concentrated our efforts on the Northeast, building roads and power plants," he said, "and we also offered kathin to one or two temples."

The Bank of Thailand was actually established in 1942 to act as the country's central bank. Sunthorn was referring to the Commercial

Banking Act of 1962. Under the terms of this act, the Bank of Thailand was entrusted with supervising all commercial banks in the country--prescribing the cash reserve ratio, the maximum rates for loans and deposits, the ratio of capital funds to risk assets, etc. (Office of the Prime Minister 1979:189).

In Sunthorn's opinion, the duty of good Buddhist monks was to impart teaching. Despite his general lack of enthusiasm for involving monks in rationally planned development projects, Sunthorn acknowledged that "Yes, Sarit did make a point of meeting priests," Somdet Mahawirawongse (Cuan) among them. This was because Sarit

realized the people in the Northeast have high respect for the abbot and he paid respect to the abbot. Sarit believed if he explained to Mahawirawongse or the abbot they would tell the people that the government was trying to develop the Northeast . . . and the people would go along with it.

Like the Prince Patriarch Wachirayan, Sunthorn saw Buddhist monks as a useful (in the Western sense) link between the government and the people and as a information conduit. After much soul-searching in the face of Western criticism about the uselessness of Buddhist monks, Wachirayan had decided that they were useful because "they provided a tight binding between the government and the people" (translated in C. Reynolds 1979:37). In Sunthorn's words, "Sarit told Mahawirawongse what he was trying to do and Mahawirawongse told the people."

Sunthorn was positive that Sarit and his development projects had the full support of the king.

The king and Sarit were close. Sarit had all of the orders issued by the king except the Nopparat, the highest order of all. The orders are connected with royalty. The Crown of Thailand is like the Order of the Garter in England. The king gave the order that the government would sponsor Sarit's cremation rites.

When Sunthorn reminisced about Sarit's trips to the Northeast, he recalled the discomforts of camping on the lake near Khon Kaen. (Sarit made a point of ignoring local officials on this trip, and replaced many of them with his own men soon after.) Isan people tell another story about Sarit's trips, however.

Sarit reportedly flew into the airport at Khon Kaen one day and asked why there were no crowds waiting to greet him. He became enraged when he was told that they were at the train station greeting Phra Phimonlatham (who also had a penchant for having people 'stand and await' him on his travels). In the opinion of many Isan people, that was the real reason why Sarit jailed Phimonlatham (cf. Tambiah 1976:257-260).

The Military Men

Field Marshal Praphat Charusathien

Praphat Charusathien had pursued a long, successful and dangerous career as a soldier and businessman, emerging virtually unscathed through twenty years of military coups. He became the deputy-commander of the First Army after the coup of 1951. In 1958 he replaced Phao Sriyanon as minister of the interior. From 1964 to 1973 Praphat was deputy prime minister under Thanom Kittikachorn's government. All in all, he was minister of the interior or its equivalent for fifteen years, which gave him tremendous power over the civil government.

Despite his dedication to government service, Praphat was no novice when it came to business affairs. By the mid-1950s, he sat on eleven boards of major industrial, commercial and financial enterprises. These included the boards of Bangkok Bank, Thai Military Bank, the Provincial

Bank, Rajata Shipping, Thai Soldiers Bank, Thai Tham Distillery, and United Shiplines (Riggs 1966:256-264). This was before he became deputy prime minister and before 'development.'⁷

Praphat was exiled in 1973 along with Prime Minister Thanom when the king 'suggested' they leave the country after Praphat ordered government troops to fire on unarmed students who were protesting the U.S. presence in Thailand and the corruption of the Thanom government.⁸

Even though he was supposedly in disgrace after the events of 1976, Praphat was at home in April 1980 in a beautiful and heavily-guarded compound located near the National Parliament. The compound was like an empty palace, its silence punctuated by occasional laughter from the guards at the gate.

Praphat was seated in the dark gloom of a reception area filled with expensive teak furniture. Nicknamed 'Piggy' by his detractors, he was so rotund he could not reach his feet to tie his golfing shoes and called his tiny grandson in to perform the task. Praphat was distant and evasive throughout most of the interview. (Was I going to ask about the events of 1976 or his business dealings?) He prefaced the interview by saying, that he, too, 'did not know much about religion.' If I wanted to ask difficult questions on the subject I should go ask Buddhathat Bhikkhu in the south.

Unlike Pote Sarasin, Praphat was totally unambivalent about using monks in development projects. He described Isan people as people "who like to drink alcohol, are lazy, and do not like to work" then added

⁷For more information on Praphat's career, see Wilson (1962:60), Riggs (1966), and Girling (1981).

⁸For more information on this event, see Girling (1981:115) and Marian Mallet's (1978) "Causes and Consequences of the October '76 Coup".

that they did, however, "respect religion," which is where Buddhist monks came into the picture. "Monks helped much in development," he said. "They had the duty to develop the people, pattana prachachon. Monks were leaders⁹ in development activities. People respect¹⁰ monks who teach the precepts of dhamma [sinlatham]."

Phra Phimonlatham was not Phaphat's idea of a pure monk. His government had tried to expose Phra Phimonlatham's (apparently virtuous) activities with a lamentable lack of success: "I'm sorry, eighty percent of the people don't believe this," he said, "but Phra Phimonlatham drove a nice car and had a sports boat. He had enemies in the Sangha."

Phaphat's idea of a pure monk was one who lacked personal property and who advanced capitalist ideologies. His idea of an impure monk was one who owned property and refused to advance capitalist ideologies.

Phaphat referred to economics as a type of witthi or method of social practice and noted that 'economic methods' had been highly successful in promoting development. He had heard of Somdet Phra Maha Wirawongse (Uan), the monk chosen by Phibun to head the Sangha Council in the 1940s, but claimed not to have known him personally. Phaphat immediately identified the story of Somdet Uan with 'the story of development,' however. Somdet Uan had had 'the personal bodily characteristics' that promoted personal development. In addition, he helped development by teaching 'development of the mind' [pattana thang citcai]. The main purpose of having monks help with development was to 'have the people know' ['to be introduced to' or 'led to']¹¹ energetic

⁹He used the word phu nam, the word for secular leaders used by Luang Phibun.

¹⁰Nap thu, literally, 'grasp onto.'

activities [kan khayān]' which is to say that the elite viewed monks like Somdet Uan as visual-moral models of productivity for rural peoples. A Western work ethic had begun to insinuate itself into traditional religious paradigms.

For Praphat, religion, development and Isan monks were all of a piece; he ascribed to the ancient cosmological model. "Hospitals and schools are built in the path of dhamma," he explained. "Development monks have people be good people. They have precepts upon which people can agree." The practical utility of Buddhism lay in its power to control knowledge; it was a way of encouraging men to hen duai or, literally, to 'see together'--to have uniform perceptions.

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn's business career resembled that of Praphat's, except that he sat on eight rather than eleven boards of major financial enterprises in the mid-1950s (Girling 1981:110-111; Riggs 1966:256-267). Thanom's wife reportedly had the business head in the family; she specialized in real estate.

In 1980, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, like Field Marshal Praphat, was comfortably ensconced in a heavily-guarded compound, except his had a swimming pool and cupid statue in the back. The former dictator was old and frail. He was closely monitored by his daughters until it became apparent that the subject of the interview was not only religion, but religious activities dating back twenty and thirty years.

Like Praphat, Thanom Kittikachorn immediately identified Isan Thammayut monks as nak pattana or proponents of development. "Nak pattana are people together in unity,"¹² he said. "They are invited

¹²Hai prachachon rucak kan kayan.

everywhere. They built schools and hospitals everywhere." He referred to the members of his personal agricultural development group [phuak pattana] as nak pattana. The monks who were nak pattana supported development by promoting unity (i.e., uniform perceptions) in the Northeast. He was an avid supporter of Somdet Uan and recommended that I read Luang Wicit's Law of Kamma.

These statements summarize the general views of Sarit's cabinet concerning the proper role of monks and religion in 'announcing' and supporting development. The following sections illustrate how these views were put into practice.

Stage II: Unity Kathin and the Development of 'Private' Enterprise

Once the government had announced its development plans to the rural populace, the newly formed business cliques headed by Thanom and Praphat began to sponsor personal kathin in the Northeast called 'kathin samakhi' or 'unity kathin.'

The king had established his circle of influence in Sakorn Nakorn, a province north of Khon Kaen, and Sarit had designated Khon Kaen as his private circle of influence. As Sunthorn indicated, the king was out of the country when Sarit performed his semi-royal kathin in Khon Kaen. Similarly, Thanom and Praphat appear to have waited until after Sarit's death before they began to offer kathin on an aggressive scale around the country, lest they seem to be challenging his authority. Each carved out separate spheres of influence, in different areas of the country, avoiding Khon Kaen and Nakorn Sakorn provinces. Furthermore, since they were very nearly equal in power and were equally interested in business, they avoided each other on these ritual forays. They did

¹²Mi khon ruam samakhi.

not offer personal kathin together; one would take his personal entourage to the North and the other would go to the Northeast, for example. Both men implicitly referred to their merit-making activities in terms of Buddhist ideas of perfection; they were 'completing' or 'making perfect' [tham hai sombun] whole villages or rural areas. They became personal patrons of village temples and village agricultural activities simultaneously--very much in the manner of the lords of old.

In contrast, the bankers Pote Sarasin and Sunthorn Hongladarom did not lead personal kathin samakhi into the Northeast in the 1960s nor did they perform them around the country on a grand scale--perhaps because they were already involved in economic activities on a full-time basis, perhaps because they were of Chinese origins. Pote said the workers at Thai Thanu Bank had a yearly kathin, but that this was not bank policy.¹³ Sunthorn spoke of organizing large kathin ceremonies to celebrate the high points of his career, at the temple where he had ordained as a monk. Furthermore, these kathin were not performed with his business associates but with close family and friends in the traditional manner. He was the host [cao phap] or 'owner' [cao khong] of these kathin, he was not their prathan or 'chairman.' In late 1979 when I spoke with him he was not interested in sponsoring large kathin ceremonies. "I want to do things a little more quietly," he said, implicitly acknowledging the widespread use of the kathin for publicity purposes.

¹³The word for "policy," nayobai, is highly charged in this context because it connotes planning, calculation, and, according to one informant, trickery. Pote's statement was at odds with government records (Kromkan Sasana 1980) which showed that Thai Thanu Bank offered at least one kathin phrarachathan in the Northeast in the 1970s. A Thai anthropologist said that "in the old days" nayobai was never used in relation to merit-making activities.

Thanom and Praphat were a different matter altogether. Each had built up powerful, semi-official agricultural enterprises while in office. Both led large kathin samakhi consisting of members of their agricultural development groups into the Northeast. They referred to these kathin as their 'method' [withi] of promoting agricultural and moral development.

Praphat's thumbnail description of kathin was unusual for its emphasis. "Thot kathin is Thai tradition," he said. "There is one kathin per temple People go to make merit, to have the benefits of money after the rainy season." This was one of the few times that an informant's primary identification with merit-making concerned cash.

His next statement negated the ideologies of worldly merit promoted by the Grand Palace, development monks, and even his own government. Praphat instinctively denied that building hospitals or schools was an important objective of the rural kathin samakhi of the 1960s. "Thai people make merit for chat na, for the next life," he said. "Thot kathin has benefits for people who have already died.¹⁴ People make merit for dead soldiers. Merit is not concerned with the present."

Praphat and Thanom were both distant and suspicious at the beginning of their interviews. Neither showed particular enthusiasm about attending the king at kathin luang, although both perked up considerably when they mentioned then phra ong or 'representing the king' (i.e., 'the sacred being') at famous royal temples in Bangkok in the kathin phrarachathan. This was clearly an honour. When they spoke of the kathin ceremonies of their personal development groups, however, they lit up with enthusiasm. These were genuinely religious experiences.

¹⁴Sat nai lok, 'animals' or sentient beings 'in the world.' Wang prayot sat lok thi tai lao.

Praphat's group was called The Agricultural Development Group for Isan. "This group was my own idea," he said proudly. "I was the chairman. The group performed kathin samakhi together."

He called the monks and laity participating in his kathin samakhi nak pattana. "Nak pattana were people who were willing¹⁵ to go from district to district making merit because it shows helping society,"¹⁶ he said. Like wandering meditation monks, the ritual sponsors drifted from district to district making merit. Praphat thought that although "people benefit a little" if kathin monies were used to build hospitals and schools, the main purpose of kathin samakhi was to promote moral unity.

Praphat referred to his group as both a phuak du lae or 'inspection group'--a group to inspect agriculture--and as an a group of educators. He formed it because "Isan people had little knowledge about economics. The government supported development to introduce the people to new methods." The kathin samakhi was "part of developing the countryside," part of pattana thang chonabot" or (U.S. sponsored) rural development. In his opinion, the "reason" for rural development was that "Isan was near Indochina and the Thai were afraid of other countries. Economics was a successful way of developing natural resources in the area."

As noted in chapter 8, Praphat contrasted his government's successful 'economic methods' with Phibun's unsuccessful and old-fashioned methods of teaching the Thai people. "Phibun's method was not as successful as economics," Praphat explained, much enthused over Western methods of creating order. 'Economics' was clearly a mode of social action that was appropriate to the cosmic conditions of the 1960s. By 1968, he was

¹⁵Namcai or had 'willing hearts.'

¹⁶Sadeng kan mi chuai lua sangkhom kan lae kan.

a millionaire many times over.

When asked about the kathin ceremonies he attended in the 1960s, Thanom spoke proudly of founding the Department of Agriculture and of making merit with members of this group. Like Praphat, he also had a private development group on the side, one which was similarly 'his own idea.' He was chairman of this group and of their kathin ceremonies.

Thanom described the members of his personal development group as people who "had the responsibility to be proper and to help each other. This type of unity is Thai custom," he explained. "We make merit together because we respect each other." Beginning in 1962, his group offered kathin samakhi every year in provinces in the North, Northeast, South and Central Plains 'to help poor temples, to help farmers and agriculture'--circumambulating the kingdom in the manner of the king of the four quarters. He hastened to add that they were "invited" by villagers. "They asked for help in restoring [burana] their temples," he explained.

Moral and infrastructural development were one and the same thing to Thanom. He used the word pattana to refer to rural development, to infrastructural development, and to development of the mind.

We were concerned with roads, water, wells and schools. It was our duty to train people. We developed dhamma and promoted mental development.¹⁷ This promoted unity and helped people in rural areas to care for religion [raksa sasana].

Thanom, Praphat and the other members of their government made active use of the naming prerogatives of royalty to create a pro-development ideology. The king endorsed these new linguistic usages by using them in the keynote themes of the royal addresses. Both Thanom and Praphat referred to monks on the Council of Elders as religious 'consultants' to

¹⁷Mi kan pathibat thamma, pattana citcai.

the government. They called themselves the 'chairmen' rather than the hosts or owners of their kathin ceremonies, thereby absolving themselves of identification with the Isan rulers of the past, at least linguistically. They referred to acts of mental purification, tham citcai hai borisut, (literally, 'making the mind-heart pure'), as 'mental development,' pattana thang citcai. In most cases, they used the verb pattana instead of the traditional burana to refer to the restoration of Buddhist temples. Burana refers to temple building as a material act of worship, of 'remembering' the Buddha.

Stage III: Kathin Phrarachathan and the Consolidation of Power

In the mid-1960s the government began to consolidate control of provincial capitals through the kathin phrarachathan program, and to systematically reorganize the Sangha, bringing the activities of both teaching monks and meditation monks under its control. This was done through the agency of the Department of Religious Affairs.

Sunthorn confirmed that the new kathin phrarachathan program was designed to complement the government's Five Year Development Plan and said that the Sarit government had a "deliberate plan" for kathin phrarachathan. "Since there are so many royal temples, the royal family can't go to all of them, and the rest of the royal temples were delegated to ministers, high officials, and even to private persons," he explained. "Now you can ask for it. So each year the king goes and offers kathin luang and his relatives and wealthy persons offer for him at other royal temples." The inclusion of "wealthy persons" on this list (persons selected by the government and not by the king) was a break from tradition. Sunthorn also said that the kathin phrarachathan plan was the precursor to the highly publicized (and controversial)

Thammathut and Thammacarik programs. "Kathin phrarachathan was part of economic planning, part of developing the countryside," he said.

Sunthorn did not define participation in rural kathin phrarachathan as official duty, however. "Kathin is part of propriety"; it was part of his code of conduct as a social leader.

Thanom had a similar view of the kathin phrarachathan. "Kathin phrachathan should be a model [tua yang] of going to the wat," he explained. For him, the performance of the kathin phrarachathan was not directly connected with the business of government. Rather, it was a way in which high-ranking government officials showed rural peoples how to 'enter the temple'--a metaphor of propriety. By performing this type of kathin, officials were fulfilling their own dhamma and leading others to do the same (cf. Inden 1976).

The four informants all said that it was their 'duty' to lead kathin phrarachathan in their capacities as the heads of major ministries (i.e., interior, finance, etc., the traditional branches of government). In contrast, they considered their performance of kathin phrarachathan in rural areas as the heads of newly-created government departments (like the Department of Agriculture) or with their "semi-official" development groups more along the lines of 'propriety.'¹⁸ In addition, Pote Sarasin, who saw the kathin primarily as a cultural event, said he had his "own idea" about kathin phrarachathan. He had thought of an additional ritual "plan"--to invite foreign ambassadors to kathin luang. "It didn't work because kathin was too long for them."

¹⁸Thuk tong, baep phaen.

Kathin Phrarachathan: 1965-1968

The records of the Department of Religious Affairs (1980) show that the 1965 sponsors of kathin phrarachathan in Northeastern capitals were predominantly Isan: "the people of Nakorn Rachasima" or "the Isan Mqlam [Folk Opera] Society," for example. There were two exceptions, however. The Department of Religious Affairs offered the kathin a Wat Phranamaram, at royal temple of the Mahanikai order in Korat, "the gateway to the Northeast."¹⁹ (The process of wooing Phra Phimonlatham's associates away from their preceptor had begun.) The Department of Industry offered in Roi-et.

In 1967 the Department of Teachers Training²⁰ offered the kathin at Wat Suthacinda in Korat. The Society for ARD (Accelerated Rural Development) offered the kathin in Roi-et in 1967, and the Department of Industry offered at that same temple in 1968. These kathin were the wave of the future.

Stage IV: New Frontiers

The Kathin Cangwat

The last and still continuing stage of expansion consists of a final push into remote provincial areas where rich agricultural farmland is located. In the 1960s the government concentrated its efforts on improving the roads leading from Bangkok to provincial capitals. In the 1970s it concentrated its efforts on extending the roads from provincial capitals to provincial market towns and beyond. By the late 1970s the

¹⁹The other royal temple in Korat, Wat Suthacinda, was Thammayut and already pro-government. It was the headquarters of Somdet Uan when he was reforming education in the 1940s.

²⁰Newly established by Sukit Nimanhem, the minister of education, and Colonel Pin Mutukan, the director general of the Department of Religious Affairs.

kathin cangwat was coming into its own as a way for the government to extend its influence over remote provincial areas, to 'civilize' their inhabitants.

This move to the forests coincided with another religious movement, the discovery and later phenomenal popularity of Isan Thammayut monks rumoured to be saints. The king patronized the leading monks in this movement, sometimes by offering kathin ton at their temples.

Thanom indicated that his government had deliberately standardized provincial kathin ceremonies to promote development. He called these kathin led by provincial governors 'kathin samakhi.' They were of two types, kathin phrarachathan, performed at royal temples in provincial capitals, and kathin cangwat, performed at commoner temples in rural villages. Thanom referred to them as 'unity kathin' because they exemplified Sarit's revolutionary principles. He insisted that the governors who led kathin cangwat were not the 'hosts' [cao phap] or the 'owners' [caokhong pithi] of these ceremonies but instead were their prathan or 'chairmen'--absolved of the negative connotations of lordship, as it were. "The workers do it together like unity. Together they represent the king," he said. "This helps promote unity in the province. All people are united in sacrificing on behalf of the king."

Kathin cangwat were portrayed as models of democratic for government officials and rural farmers alike: democratic ideals made manifest (visible) in the ritual context. Local officials 'absorbed' democratic principles from the example set by their superiors from Bangkok, and then passed these principles on to the rural populace through their own kathin samakhi. The kathin cangwat and kathin samakhi articulate with the spreading fame and rapid proliferation of Isan meditation monks in the line of Acaan Man.

The Meditation Monks and their Amulets

By the late 1970s, Isan Thammayut meditation monks had gained fame throughout the country and meditation had become popular among bureaucrats and members of the new managerial classes. The Thammayut meditation movement had begun to overshadow that begun by Phra Phimonlatham after his trip to Burma. This had not always been the case, however.

Thanom, Praphat, Pote, Sunthorn and officials at the Grand Palace indicated that they have not heard of the now-famous monks of the Thammayut meditation line in 1960 or 1961. These monks were discovered after the new infrastructure was in place, after MDU and similar units had done their work, and after ambitious entrepreneurs had entered the Northeast in search of new markets.

Although the line officially originated in Ubon, the headquarters of the movement was in Sakorn Nakorn, the site of the king's new palace, and the home of Acaan Man's most famous student, Acaan Fan. Sarit's men may have devoted their energy towards developing new agricultural techniques and towards increasing the production of string beans, jute and cucumbers in Khon Kaen, but the king had devoted his energy to the production (or discovery) of new monks. The king, some members of his privy council famous for their piety, and a few prominent religious devotees in Bangkok led in the discovery and veneration of these monks.

In a discussion in 1979 about which monks the kings "consulted," for example, one of the royal secretaries said that he was interested in the meditation techniques taught at Wat Bowoniwet. There were two 'lines' [sai] of Isan monks, teaching and meditation, and Acan Man of Ubol had founded the latter. "Some of the monks were believed to be sodaba n," he explained. "They had yan, special powers to know past and future."

He named Acaan Fan of Sakorn Nakorn and Acaan Khao of Udorn as prominent members of this line. ("Acaan Khao was a mind reader," he said.) In addition, a high-ranking Isan bureaucrat identified Acaan Sing of Ubol as another original member of this line.

The royal secretary pulled out an amulet he was wearing. It was imprinted with the image of Royal Grandfather Phang, a famous meditation monk from Manchakiri District in Khon Kaen. He had received this amulet from Major-General Pow Sarasin, the head of the Narcotics Board, who had sponsored a kathin ceremony at Luang Pu Phang's meditation retreat. An interview with Pow Sarasin revealed that one of his assistants, a native of Sakorn Nakorn, had first brought him news of Luang Pu's miraculous exploits. The secretary explained that Grandfather Phang was also of the line of Acaan Fan "from Sakorn Nakorn," and that he (Fan?) was "the youngest disciple of Acaan Man."²¹ He also explained that Acaan Man "was not heard of until after he was cremated" and his relics turned out to have magical powers. "He did not become famous until ten years ago, through his teachings."

Because the majority of my informants were either Isan or members of the ruling class in Bangkok, I assumed that everyone wore these amulets until long after fieldwork was completed. A Thai anthropologist who had done fieldwork in the North said that the custom of wearing amulets with the images of monks was a new one, restricted mostly to people in Bangkok. (Traditionally, amulets took other forms: cloth, stone, tiger fangs.) Military leaders, bureaucrats and technocrats alike coveted these amulets, regardless of whether they claimed Chinese ancestry or saw themselves as modern economists.

²¹This corresponds to the position of Ananda, the Buddha's youngest and favorite discipline, in the Buddha's entourage.

For example, Pote Sarasin was not particularly interested in other forms of Buddhist worship (in fact, he was famous for having converted to Christianity) but he was interested in amulets. "We wear phra khruang because each day we attempt to do and see many things which are wrong but we don't realize it," he said. "We wear them to remind us of what to do, as a 'teaching-warning' [son tuan]."

Praphat Charusathien thought amulets were important, but because they protected soldiers in battle. "Soldiers have a popular custom of having amulets to boost morale. Amulets protect them ('strengthen the heart')" he said. "Soldiers respect different monks and amulets because they are good luck and auspicious."

In the following section, I will describe the kathin cangwat and kathin samakhi of the new business and bureaucratic elite of Khon Kaen in 1979. These ethnographic data demonstrate how the new ritual forms relate to the discovery of the new Isan saints.

Khon Kaen 1979: Sarit's Legacy

The Governor

The governor's relationship to his workers and to the people of Khon Kaen was reminiscent of Sarit's attitude of "benevolent despotism" towards the Thai people. Workers close to the governor referred to him as khun pha, or 'father.' An air of secretiveness²² always seemed to surround his activities.

²²A request for a map of the province was treated like a major event: "It might fall into the wrong hands." When asked if there was any printed material available on his official activities, the governor said "No. It might be misinterpreted."

The governor was known for his authoritarian character and for his corruption, one social scientist even going so far as to characterize him as "notorious" (Turton 1978) with regard to his activities in his previous post in Nongkhai. The charges did not appear to be entirely unsubstantiated, as rumours about official corruption were constantly circulating in Khon Kaen (especially among opposition politicians)²³ in 1979 and 1980. The governor enforced the law and dealt with matters of public morality and his wife reportedly collected 'white envelopes' at home (a militarily secure residence on a lake near provincial headquarters, built by Sarit).

The correct procedure for studying provincial ceremonies is to retrieve the contents of the governor's waste basket in the weeks preceding the end of the Lenten season. The governor of Khon Kaen's waste basket was full of discarded kathin invitations. It was his secretary's job to sort the invitations and schedule the governor's ritual appearances.

When the minister of the interior performed kathin in Isan, the governor went to attend him. When the governor sponsored his own "private" merit-making ceremonies, he was accompanied by his close subordinates from provincial headquarters and by members of Khon Kaen's new commercial elite. His closest friends--the people with whom he voluntarily made merit--were mostly Sino-Thai merchants. His wife's were her jewel dealer and a wealthy Sino-Thai shop and real estate owner. Together they comprised the new elite of Khon Kaen.

²³The U.S. embassy, in a departure from protocol, reportedly requested that he be transferred out of Nongkhai Province, his previous position, because the take of supplies for the refugee camps had finally grown exorbitant (cf. Turton 1978).

The Forest Cloth Ceremony: Acaan Cuan's Cosmic Mountain

The governor celebrated the beginning of the kathin season by sponsoring a pha pa at the cosmic mountain retreat of Luang Pu Cuan, Nongkhai's most famous meditation monk (cf. Tambiah 1984:274ff.), a member of Acaan Man's Thammayut meditation line.

The festivities began at Sarit's old house, with the governor chatting with his close friends and distributing amulets. A bus was chartered for the occasion, and the group was feasted in Nongkhai, the governor's former seat. Heavily-armed members of the Thai Border Patrol escorted the group from Nongkhai to Acaan Cuan's isolated mountain retreat, 183 kilometers from Nongkhai.

The group climbed to the top of the mountain to a cave where Acaan Cuan awaited them. Steps were built into the mountainside and each level was marked by a sign indentifying it as a level of the Buddhist cosmos and a stage of the meditation process. The governor led the merit-making ceremony in the cave; large amounts of cash were displayed (i.e., \$25 bills decorated the group's 'wishing tree').

After the ceremony, the governor handed a tray of amulets to Luang Pu Cuan, who blessed them (by spitting on them, his lips and teeth stained red from chewing betel nut), making them saksit. Acaan Cuan's demeanor was not as reserved as that of other Thammayut monks I had observed elsewhere, meditation or teaching monks (cf. chapter 21). After the ceremony, the group crowded around him for pictures. Miles of sparse (stripped?) forest stretched to either side of the cosmic mountain. (One rumour had the governor's wife complaining to her jewel dealer about their reduced income in Khon Kaen; there was no teak industry.)

When the group descended, members of the Border Patrol lined up at the foot of the mountain. The governor distributed Acaan Cuan's amulets to the soldiers--to protect them in battles against 'communists.'

Kathin Cangwat in Khon Kaen

The official kathin cangwat took place in Khon Kaen a few weeks later. The ritual was self-consciously designed to instantiate ideals of democracy and religious purity, and each part of the planning process was named after a step of democratic or parliamentary practice.²⁴ Its organization was identical to the process by which men in the Department of Religious Affairs voted on a royal temple to receive their annual kathin gift (kathin phrarachathan), leading one to suspect that the Department prescribed the correct 'methods' for performing kathin cangwat throughout the country.

Division heads first attended a meeting [prachum] where each volunteered 'his own ideas' about where the kathin gift should be offered. This showed that the kathin was voluntary, not a forced activity, and that it was an egalitarian rather than a hierarchical event; subordinates could speak up in the presence of their superiors.

In volunteering his 'own ideas,' each official suggested a temple in an area that lacked [khat] basic educational and monastic requisites, a proceeding reminiscent of the perfection paradigm in the kathin origins myth where virtuous Buddhist laity know and 'exactly' fulfill the material requisites of worthy Buddhist monks (Wicit 1974).

²⁴In texts published by the Department of Religious Affairs (1978), these steps were likened to steps in the monks' side of the kathin ceremony (their voting on a worthy recipient for the kathin cloth).

After the proposals were discussed, the officials voted on where to offer the ceremony. In 1979 they decided to perform two kathin cangwat in villages at opposite ends of Khon Kaen Province. One was in a newly-created sub-district²⁵ near a railroad station in an area undergoing extensive development. This meant that the roads leading to nearby market towns were being improved, land was trading hands, and officials were identifying dissident villagers. The second village was chosen because it had a potential "insurgency problem."

The yearly provincial kathin ceremony was part of a more comprehensive plan for developing Khon Kaen. Provincial officials planned to offer kathin cangwat in a different district every year until the whole province was completely developed: i.e., they were encircling [munwian] the provincial with ritual action, in the rotating pattern of the royal beneficence.

Each division head was in charge of a different aspect of the ceremony (fund raising, gift selection, transportation, etc.)--a division of labour with sacred overtones which was also modeled on official versions of the first kathin ceremony (cf. Kromkan Sasana 1978b; Wicit 1974).²⁶ The governor was the formal chairman and leader of

²⁵There are seventy-two provinces in Thailand, each headed by a governor appointed by the ministry of interior, which is one reason why Praphat had so much power. Provinces are divided into districts and sub-districts.

The governor is the highest ranking official in the province except for military and police officers. The police form an almost autonomous branch of the ministry of interior. Army officers are appointed by the ministry of defense. The relations between the governor, the local police chief and the army commander were uneasy. They avoided attending the same kathin ceremonies. At one ceremony, the governor, who was one guest of honour, came and went. A few minutes after his entourage had pulled out of the village, that of the local chief of police arrived.

²⁶The democratic unity evinced in the organization of the kathin is consciously modeled on that displayed in the 'first kathin.' In Bangkok Bank's version of this event, the Buddha assigned separate duties to each of his disciples in the sewing of the kathin robe. Each monk

the event. The education officer coordinated it because it was seen both as an educational and a cultural event (the preservation of an ancient Buddhist ceremony). Educational materials were brought to villages as part of the kathin gift.

A former monk, a middle-ranking official born in Khon Kaen and known for his piety and knowledge of religion, played the role of go-between before and during the ceremony. He supplied personal information on the monks whose temples were being considered for receipt of the kathin gift:²⁷ on internal rivalries, attitudes towards the government, discipline, etc.

The event was organized to include as many people as possible and officials viewed it as an integrating mechanism of the type described by Thanom. The night before the kathin there was a somphot or pre-ritual celebration held at provincial headquarters and attended by the ranking monks of Khon Kaen.

On the weekend of the ceremonies, provincial officers, workers, and their families piled into two large buses. The governor went in a separate car, accompanied by his driver and a bodyguard. The merit-makers travelled over half-completed roads to reach the first destination. At one point the bus became mired in the soft dirt of a half-completed road. Fields of cucumbers and string beans stretched out to either side of the road, as far as the eye could see.

performed a different task, sewing the robe, holding the thread, etc. In Wachirayan's (1921:85) view, this complementary division of labour was the reason why the kathin was a ritual of unity--or at least as performed by the Thammayut order, whose members did and still do cut, dye and sew the robe in a single night and dedicate it before sunrise of the next day (see chapter 20).

²⁷This official had a picture of his ordination ceremony prominently displayed in his living room. Phra Phimonlatham was his preceptor.

The governor was treated like a lord on these excursions. His car stopped at towns along the way, where he was greeted by local officials, some of whom appeared to be close friends. A reception committee awaited him at the main road by the first village. The villagers lifted him high on a palanquin while he held an umbrella over his head--in the manner of royalty--and carried him into the village.²⁸

The local school teacher and the village headman were the most active local participants in the ceremony. Many of the young adults remained outside, however, and the atmosphere was generally tense.

After the kathin ceremony was completed, provincial officers distributed educational gifts to the villagers and received traditional gifts of hospitality: pillows woven in distinct regional patterns. The visitors were feasted and afterwards the governor gave his speech exhorting the villagers to obey the law [kotmai].

The governor warned the villagers that Buddhism was being destroyed by communists in Cambodia. He equated the breaking of Thai civil law (i.e., laws concerning land use and land ownership) with the breaking of the moral precepts of Buddhism. "People know when they are doing bad [tham bap]," he said somewhat ominously, "when they lie or steal"; they would suffer the kammic consequences of these acts.²⁹

A telling incident occurred on the way to the second village. The entourage stopped in a town for refreshments and the governor publicly berated two drivers for illegally parking their trucks (loaded with

²⁸The governor looked sheepish at having an American witness this event. He and I had both briefly attended the University of Southern California. He studied for a master's degree in public administration courtesy of USAID.

²⁹One received the distinct impression that if the laws of kamma did not punish these men, the local police would, or that the local police were the legitimate agents of kamma.

bales of jute) in the marketplace. He ordered his police escort to issue a harsh fine and his entourage swept away, leaving an almost palpable a wave of resentment in its wake.

The kathin at the second village seemed less tense, although the governor clearly commanded fear and respect. The village headman and his family were almost comically anxious to offer gifts of pillows and silk cloth to the outsiders.

The bus containing the provincial officers and their families returned to Khon Kaen after the ceremonies, but the governor's car criss-crossed the province from sunrise to sunset so he could attend as the kathin samakhi of friends and local merchants. After completing the second official kathin ceremony, for example, the governor rushed to the kathin at the mountaintop retreat of Luang Pu Phang, a monk rumoured to have magical powers. Luang Pu's meditation retreat was surrounded by miles of carefully tended fields.

In the weeks that followed, the governor attended all the major kathin ceremonies in Khon Kaen Province. He was the official guest of honour at the kathin phrarachathan at Khon Kaen's two royal temples. He was also the guest of honour at one of Khon Kaen's biggest social events, a kathin samakhi sponsored by a wealthy Chinese merchant and a retired Isan tax official. The merchant offered kathin every year in a village far from Khon Kaen, where she enjoyed a lord-like status among the cowed villagers. The money collected every year from the kathin was used to build a bot. (Her niece said that some people believed they would be reborn in heaven if they built a 'complete' bot.) The temple was in the ordination line of Khon Kaen's major Thammayut temple.³⁰

³⁰This raises questions about the religious beliefs of second and third generation Sino-Thai in provincial areas. Has the lure of new business opportunities inspired them to become regular practicing Thai

This ritual pattern was typical. Many powerful Sino-Thai merchants from Khon Kaen had staked out villages in newly-developing sub-districts as private spheres of influence, establishing themselves first as major temple patrons. Relations between villagers and ritual sponsors were not festive, but were often tense and unspontaneous.

The King in the Modern Era

I conclude the discussion of the four stages of development of Isan with the following comments of Sarit's cabinet ministers on the qualities of King Bhumibol. The king's behavior was of great interest to Sarit's men as it encapsulated the ideals of the modern and powerful Buddhist layman, ideals to which they could legitimately aspire in fulfillment of their personal dhamma. It was the king who determined which activities manifested the principles of social action 'appropriate to the present.'

The comments suggest that the government tried to develop a new type of lay Buddhist movement--a lay bureaucratic Buddhist movement--in the 1960s, based on the idea that pure bureaucratic action was a form of lay Buddhist activity. Virtuous civil servants were the potential equals of Buddhist monks as moral preceptors to the people: The king was a living example of this principle.

This movement represents the secularization of barami. A former justice of the Supreme Court, for example, said that "in the past" barami was linked to religious activity but in the present it just meant influence. (He cited as an example a Thai general's distributing money to subordinates to play cards as a sign of barami).

Buddhists?

Pote Sarasin: The King of Technology?

Pote Sarasin (a Chinese Christian) described the king as "the leader of the Buddhist faith and protector of all Buddhist faiths, one who protects Christianity also. This king is also interested in technology."

He associated the king with barami or influence, ithiphon, with non-coercive power. "You have a certain relation with someone and you're able to persuade them to do something," he explained. For Pote, barami denoted men's ability to command voluntary compliance from others, including strangers. This is a crucial point. The use of force cannot be sustained indefinitely in capitalist development. As evidenced in recent years, the men with barami become the most successful regional entrepreneurs.

Pote described amnat, the ability to use force, as almost the opposite of barami. "Amnat is power, authority," he said. "You have authority but no influence. This king has barami. He has been a good influence on the people."

For him, one of the primary attributes of the king (and, by extension, of other men of merit) was that "No one dares attack the king. Mai kla tamni," he stated emphatically.

Praphat Charusathien: The King as a Poor Man?

Praphat's attitude toward the king was lukewarm. He showed more interest in speaking of his private kathin ceremonies he sponsored at the temples of famous meditation monks (access to whom was clearly an important perquisite of high office for him) than he did in speaking of his attendance on the king at kathin luang. "That was duty," he said flatly. In commenting on his role in kathin luang, Praphat stated that

he donated money at each of these royal ceremonies, "In one year up to 10,000 baht (\$500)!" he exclaimed. "The king gives little money."

Thanom Kittikachorn: The King of Credibility?

Thanom identified the king as the 'head' [pramuk] of the nation. "When people have barami people respect them very much," he explained. "In this time the king has barami. He has credibility.³¹ People will obey him. The people see he is a good person," and, as an afterthought, "This shows one does not have to be a monk to have barami."

In Thanom's opinion, Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan had "some barami." The problem with not having barami was that

people don't believe you. People who don't have barami have people 'talk about them' [mi khon phut] in critical times and have little credibility [mi chua noi] This is because of the laws of kamma. Do good, receive good.

What is the significance of these notions of barami in the present?

After the social-structural changes of the 1960s and 1970s, the barami of government leaders is linked directly to shifts in the world market system. If Kriangsak, the prime minister of Thailand in 1979, was criticized for anything, it was the high price of oil and the disastrous effect it was having on the Thai economy (Girling 1981:224). This, rather than his incorrect observance of Buddhist rituals, had caused his barami to decline.

Thanom's statements left the distinct impression that merit-making generated natural rights that superceded civil law or the 'wishes' of politicians or of any other lesser beings who lacked either his seniority in government service or his long history of conspicuous merit-making. Thanom's ideas about the rights and benefits of merit were in fact similar if not identical to those of Buddaghosa: to travel

³¹Chu-fang, which means literally that he is 'heard-and-believed.'

freely freely,³² acquire fame, and be free from criticism or 'blame.' These are the perquisites of men of noble rank as the concept was formulated in the earliest Hindu (Inden 1976) and Buddhist (Gokhale 1966) traditions.

Kathin: the Invisible Strategy

Merit, that a man has thus heaped up with believing heart, careless of insupportable ills of the body, brings to pass hundreds of result which are a mine of happiness; therefore one must do works of merit with pure heart. (Mahavamsa XXVIII.44)

As these data show, provincial kathin ceremonies provided a means for ambitious entrepreneurs to forge alliances with rural peoples. In contrast to the Thammathut and Thammacarik, which generated sometimes bitter controversy over the proper role of monks in society, the new kathin programs went largely unnoticed, dissociated from the elite's development objectives. There was "nothing new" about kathin. They were not identified with state "policies" or formal development "plans."

Why was the ritual such an effective integrating device? First, it was an old rather than a new ritual, organized according to traditional cosmic and hierarchical paradigms. Second, the new long-distance ritual structures and merit-making ideologies amplified traditional themes of sacrality. The long distances over which laity traveled ("careless of insupportable ills of the body") to offer the kathin gift plus the resulting anonymity of ritual participants became indices of the barami

³²In Thanom's case, the right to travel into the kingdom after three years of exile. In 1976, he sneaked back into the kingdom and ordained as a monk at Wat Bowoniwet to 'make merit for his sick father.' This caused massive students protests ending with the slaughter of students at Thammasat University by the military and right-wing groups such as the Red Gaur and the Village Scouts from provinces surrounding Bangkok. This ended the brief 'democratic period' in Thailand and marked the reestablishment of military rule. Three years after the Thammasat incident Thanom still resented the idea that 'political' considerations could prevent him from making merit.

of monks and laity alike. The virtuous laity were implicitly likened to the virtuous monks in the government's (Wat Bowoniwet's) version of the kathin origins story; these monks traveled long distances and made great sacrifices to reach the Buddha's side (to become stream enterers) (Phrarachamongkhonmuni [Thet] 1978:1). Such 'diligence in search of dhamma' is the barami of tapa. The barami of the meditation monks was, in turn, so powerful as to attract men over long distances "like bees to honey." Distance, spontaneity or "rushing," and anonymity thus became emphasized as indices of sacrality.

In promoting a new kathin ideology, the government was only stressing the most fundamental themes of sacrality in the Theravada tradition: that monks must not 'hint' for gifts or have too-close ties to their lay supporters, that laity must not interfere in monastic affairs. The Buddhist kingdom traditionally preserved its status as a pure soteriological state by maintaining the pure separation of monks and laity, of the two wheels of the dhamma. The more the kathin exhibited these themes of selfless giving, of detachment between monks and laity, the more perfect it was for promoting capitalist development and the more easily men could misrecognize the calculation involved in the gift exchange.

The emphasis on anonymity suited men like Praphat just fine. He was primarily interested in attesting to the size of his kathin donations and, with the exception of a famous meditation monk in the North, evinced not the slightest interest in the identities of the monks who received his donations. It protected the Buddhist monks in Isan provincial capitals for criticism from too-close association with the central government; they did not personally know the men who sponsored kathin ceremonies at their temples.

In particular, the distance factor helped defuse the volatile political situation in Khon Kaen. Unlike the monks who participated in the Thammacarik and Thammathut programs, the monks who received the kathin gift from outsiders from Bangkok³³ did not know the donors and had never seen them before the ritual began. They could therefore not be accused of willfully consorting with the men who had jailed their preceptor, Phra Phimonlatham.³⁴

Since they were 'spontaneously' organized, the kathin samakhi and kathin phrarachathan of the 1960s alleviated the antinomy problems of the elite, who had self-consciously used the ritual to advance development or business objectives. There was no public outcry over the budget of these pro-development activities because there was no budget (or, the budget was never made public, thus invoking the concept of direct causality). There was no public speculation about whether the program had, in fact, met its (this-worldly) objectives.

Thus at precisely the historical juncture when the most calculation ever went into the planning of kathin ceremonies--calculation for the achievement of immediate, non-religious purposes--they appeared the most spontaneous.

³³From men like Police General Prasaert Ruchirawongse, for example, who offered kathin at Wat Klang in Khon Kaen in 1971 (Tambiah 1976:393)

³⁴Direct sight, the symbol of 'knowing for sure,' is of central importance to the Thai political system. Most political dramas eventually contain statements to the effect that leaders have not personally seen persons or situations (i.e., the working conditions at a factory with labour problems) and therefore cannot 'know for sure' if what they have heard about them is true. This lack of knowledge is legitimate from the indigenous standpoint as only monks and men with great barami can see beyond immediate circumstances and prescribe remedies. This is perhaps an unlooked-for advantage for the new crop of military prime ministers in the 1970s who are but servants to the king.

This combination of historical and ritual factors meant that kathin ceremonies had (and have) some peculiar and distorted features. To understand the nature of distortion in the contemporary ritual system, one must first examine the effects of development from the perspective Isan people.

The World Transformed

First, the infrastructure of the region was developed according to the specifications laid out by Sarit's development ministers and their American consultants.

There was a remarkable expansion in cultivation of crops other than rice, including newly introduced crops, along with large-scale introduction of new technology: expansion of irrigation, rapid spread of mechanization, use of fertilizers, pesticides, and improved seed, combined with better marketing facilities and more government extension services to farmers. (Girling 1981:66)

Second, as noted earlier, force was used to gain compliance with government projects in their early stages through the activities of MDU, ARD and other programs of their ilk. Isan's most prominent leaders were jailed. Five thousand American troops were stationed in Thailand, most of them in the Northeast so as to be near the Laotian border (Phuankasem 1973:36). There was corruption--and eventually charges of corruption--on the grand scale. Furthermore, there was widespread confusion over who owned land, what land ownership was, and what constituted proper use of land.

The surge of Bangkok-sponsored kathin ceremonies was accompanied by rapid urbanization, severe problems of unemployment and housing shortages, all of which, in Thak's view, combined to cause "a new mood of public disenchantment" (1979:343). Even the World Bank (1980) and American development agencies admitted in retrospect that their programs

had resulted in an increasing disparity between rich and poor (Anan 1984). About the time that men like Thanom and Praphat became enthused over kathin samakhi, Isan farmers began losing their land.

Transitions

The period from 1960 to 1968 can be characterized as one in which capitalist modes of production became dominant over non-capitalist modes of production (Taylor 1979:143ff.) in the Northeast. "Non-productive labour"--military leaders, bureaucrats and bankers--began to accumulate monetary capital in the Northeast. These men took direct control of land and agricultural production, of milling and money lending operations. Isan farmers, the "direct producers," were separated from their land, from their relatives (who were becoming transient wage labourers), and from their local (Chinese) moneylenders. Local moneylenders had traditionally accepted payment in kind rather than in cash and they rarely exploited the debt relationship to become landowners.

The process by which farmers became separated from their land can be roughly reconstructed from Thak (1979), Anan (1984) and from information in this chapter.

1. Non-indigenous entrepreneurs first 'inspected' prime agricultural land and the farming (and political) practices of Isan farmers, sometimes in their role as ritual sponsors.
2. The government built roads connecting these areas with provincial capitals where milling and transportation facilities were located.
3. The government raised the tax on land, and then
4. issued loans for its improvement.

5. The government also introduced the idea that land was private property and issued deeds.
6. The poorest of the farmers began to default on their loan payments when commercial banks refused to grant extensions on repayment, and
7. wealthy entrepreneurs bought it.

Local elite were displaced from the center to the periphery of ritual performances at the temples built by their ancestors as part of this process. Merit and veracity (moral authority) were transferred from an indigenous to an exogenous group, at which point ideological transformations and transformations in social practice began in earnest.

I suggest that these ritual factors must be taken into account in the analysis of capitalist development in Isan, as part of the "theoretical concepts" necessary for analyzing how Isan labourers became separated from their land. I suggest that, at the very least, ritual factors account for some non-coercive aspects of capitalist development. In addition, the ritual system appears to be a major mechanism through which credibility is transferred from one segment of the populace to another. Finally, men who control the most prestigious ritual networks, i.e., who build the most barami, control the interpretive process.

In sum, the situation thus arose that the Isan Sangha was thriving, receiving wonderful gifts from wealthy capitalists, at the same time Thai farmers were finding themselves increasingly landless and poverty-stricken.

A World Distorted

In the 1960s, government officials began to use the naming prerogatives of kings to rename the aspects of the kathin ceremony. The

royally-endorsed transfer of naming prerogatives from the king to the government occurred at precisely that point when Isan kathin began to shift from an intraregional to an interregional phenomenon.

I suggest that the new ritual system generated specific types of distortion as part of the net effect of this transfer. The kathin of the new elite constructed an image of reality that was the opposite of that experienced by Isan villagers. For example, traditionally, and somewhat ironically, when relations of production were at their most communal in Isan--when rice was planted and harvested by close neighbors and kinsmen--the kathin ceremony was at its most 'lordlike' or hierarchical. Kathin were generally led by male heads of households or village headmen who were called their 'hosts' [caophap, literally, 'lords of wealth'] or 'owners' [caokhong lit., the 'lords of kathin'], but the gift itself was a product of familial and communal labour. At precisely that historical juncture when relations of production began to change, kin relations began to break down, and Isan farmers were becoming part of a mobile labour force, Bangkok elite began to emphasize kinship terminology in conducting their ritual and official activities (cf. Montri 1968). Sarit called himself the 'father' of the Thai people in the manner of the kings of Sukhothai (who had, in fact, produced offspring with the daughters of lords of nearby ruling circles); the governor of Khon Kaen similarly portrayed himself as the father of the people in his province, with whom he shared no kinship ties.

At the point when new types of hierarchical (owner-worker) relations were becoming predominant, outsiders made a point of offering kathin samakhi or 'unity kathin' which emphasized the equality of ritual participants. At the point when new concepts of private property and

ownership were being introduced and enforced in Isan, the elite stressed the ownerless and communal nature of their kathin gifts. Everyone 'added' to the leader's gift in kathin samakhi, thereby dissociating the gift from the idea of private property and the owner with the idea of excessive wealth; after all, this was just like the kathin luang.

At just that historical point when the central government began to exercise the most systematic and extensive control ever over Isan religious and market activities, government officials changed the organization of official kathin ceremonies to emphasize their spontaneous, 'democratic,' and unifying qualities.

Similarly, when government leader-entrepreneurs used the most calculation ever in planning their own and the nation's kathin ceremonies, they deliberately changed their ritual performances to emphasize their spontaneous qualities. Even as business groups began competing fiercely for prime agricultural land and control of the Isan market, they stressed that they were 'drifting' from village to village offering the kathin, 'wandering' to make merit somewhat in the manner of thudong or forest monks. At that historical point when force was systematically used against the rural populace to effect change, a ritual terminology was employed that emphasized the 'willingness' [namcai] or 'willing heart') of men from different parts of the country to make merit together.

Kathin samakhi were 'leaderless' and 'lordless'--and seemingly accidental--when the new overlords of the emerging corporate world were making the most concerted effort ever to implement precepts of capitalism learned from their U.S. counterparts. The kathin gift became the most 'ownerless' at that historical juncture where the new corporate overlords became direct owners of the land, and when they began to exercise direct control over the Isan market.

Conclusion

The 1960s was characterized by the systematic transfer of naming prerogatives of royalty to the government and to government leaders, systematic because new linguistic usages were consistently endorsed by the king and used as keynote features of the royal addresses. The new military-business elite used these prerogatives to create new semantic foci or areas of semantic elaboration.

The nature of this semantic elaboration provides a basis for comparing modern capitalist development in Thailand with that in Western Europe, with the economic changes that followed in the wake of the French Revolution, for example.

In France the revolution came "bottom up," as a revolution of the common man; semantic elaboration occurred in the areas of work, work relations, and property (Sewell 1980). This is similar to the Burmese case. Burma witnessed a 'socialist' revolution; ideological elaboration occurred in areas concerning the ethical implications of the accumulation of capital and class relations (cf. Sarkisyanz 1967:120ff.). In Thailand the capitalist revolution came "top down," imposed by the elite on the rest of the populace. The new semantic foci deflected attention away from those very areas of work, work relations, or property that were stressed in France--and onto the ritual system.

One effect of this new semantic elaboration, taken in conjunction with the elite's ritual performances, was to transfer moral responsibility among the populace. The new ritual sponsors could take credit for the positive effects of development and the sudden wealth that appeared in Thai villages which received their personal patronage; their "precise performance of rituals" comprised the causal roots of the new order (of the shining new bot in the village). As for the negative

and more diffuse effects of development--poverty, landlessness, anomie--this could be laid at the feet of poor men who lost their land and ritual privileges simultaneously; they had failed to perform the necessary rituals of purification. The system thus legitimized the transfer of wealth from one class to another and consistently deflected attention away from the most serious and immediate consequences of social change.

Two questions about the "religious backgrounds" of capitalist development remain unanswered. Why was the kathin phrarachathan never connected to formal government development policy? Why was its role in development unchallenged? And how was it that these Isan meditation monks were suddenly 'discovered' by elite in Bangkok, in some cases, many years after their deaths? I will address these structural issues in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 15

INVISIBLE INTERMEDIARIES: THE STRUCTURE OF SACRED EVENTS

The heaviest administrative work of the sangha is not done by its monk-officials but by the civil servants of the Department of Religious Affairs, who transmit the decisions taken by the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council to the lower echelon, pay stipends, manage the collective sangha funds, and so on. (S. J. Tambiah, World Conqueror, World Renouncer)

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, two major religious developments occurred in Isan in the 1960s and 1970s, the proliferation of interregional kathin connecting Bangkok and the Northeast and the 'discovery' of Thammayut meditation monks believed to be saints, the nation's new crop of arahants. These movements had two features in common. They appeared to be spontaneous and the participants were generally unknown to each other.

From the village perspective, the kathin processions 'sprang up' or 'were born' [kaet khun] suddenly, out of nowhere, with little or no visible calculation occurring beforehand. From the Bangkok perspective, unknown monks with magical powers just 'appeared' [prakot] in the forests of Isan; the rush to venerate them was sparked by rumours of their magical powers.

These events were characterized by a structured lack of knowledge between monks and laity, between men in Bangkok and men in rural areas and they incorporated the previously-discussed four key indexical features of highly sacred events--distance, spontaneity, anonymity, and a last-minute or rushed quality--which is what made them effective in

promoting capitalist development. Because they seemed thamma-chat or 'born of dhamma,' born of none but the purest of religious motives, Bangkok elite were able to sidestep charges that they were using religion for personal gain.

The argument of this chapter is first that the apparent spontaneity of these religious movements was maintained in large part by the activities of nameless intermediaries, socially and linguistically invisible because of beliefs about the nature of hierarchy. Second, the "missing pieces"--breaks in the chain of communication--between monks and laity in Pali and Thai-Buddhist texts and Thai oral stories about the kathin imply the use of such intermediaries. The missing pieces of the story correspond to the role of the makkhanayok, the lay advisor to Buddhist temples whose job it is to act as a liason between the Buddhist clergy and the Buddhist laity. It also corresponds to the role of the sanghakiri (now the Department of Religious Affairs), the government department whose job it is to act as a liason between the Sangha and the government.

The interregional religious movements of the last two decades represent both the geographical and social extension of the roles of the Sanghakiri and the makkhanayok, and, in some cases, the Sanghakiri's assumption of the duties of the makkhanayok. They also represent a related extension of withi cong or the methods of reserving a wat for the kathin. The expansion of these roles and procedures is a feature of the modern radial polity. It also is part of an ongoing historical movement, the "routinization" (incorporation into formal bureaucratic practice) of formerly spontaneous religious activities.

The Go-Between

In Thailand, the intermediary role is generally played by middle to low-ranking individuals or government agencies, which is similar to ritual situations in Sri Lanka. Ritual officiants at the Temple of the Tooth of Kandy, for example, are selected from the lowest rank of the highest non-royal caste in Sinhalese society, from the goyigama or cultivator class (Seneviratne 1978:10, 27). These men of 'some purity' mediate between the nobility in the capital and the barbarians in the forest, between men of great purity and men who have no purity at all.

In the Grand Palace in Bangkok, the role of intermediary is performed by the palace ritual unit, which is staffed in large part by men lacking formal university educations or the offspring of concubines of past kings. This unit ranks low within the hierarchy of the Royal Household.

In informal clique situations, the intermediary role is often played by a former monk, the assistant to the leader of a group (but not the second in command). Most government agencies have a particular employee who plays this role in their merit-making ceremonies. He is usually a former monk of common birth who comes from a rural area.

The Department of Religious Affairs plays this role formally vis-à-vis the central government; its official task is to mediate between the government and the Sangha. The department itself is staffed mostly by former monks, pious men of humble backgrounds (Tambiah 1976:307-308), and the department is considered inferior to other departments in the Ministry of Education (Tambiah 1984:374).

As noted in chapter 14, the government-inspired religious movements of the 1950s corresponds to another imperative of capitalist development, that of urban capitalists to contract alliances with rural elite (and profess their same traditional beliefs) before taking control

of their markets and their political systems. In Thailand a related and culturally-specific imperative developed late in the 1960s. The government had to control the flow of ritual sponsors to the Northeast to prevent undesirables from capitalizing on the newfound fame of rural monks. This second imperative was also achieved through a flow of seemingly unconnected religious activities, arranged through key Isan intermediaries (monks and laity).

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part I will examine conventions of anonymity, i.e., the missing links, in texts and stories about the kathin and then their relation to Thai concepts of 'speaking in order' of rank. This explains the speech conventions that govern the activities of intermediaries--why they are socially invisible and their actions undiscussed.

In the second part I will discuss the life and works of one the most effective intermediaries to have ever come from the Isan area, Colonel Pin Muthukan, director general of the Department of Religious Affairs from 1963 to 1971 which demonstrates exactly how Isan Thammaut meditation monks "suddenly" came to the attention of the military leadership in the 1960s. In the third part of the chapter I will present excerpts of an interview with the official in charge of the ritual unit of the Department of Religious Affairs. His statements confirm the existence of a formal kathin phrarachathan 'policy' and demonstrate exactly how it is executed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of historical transformations and continuities that characterize the period from 1957 to 1968, picking up the historical narrative in 1968, the year the Thanom government began to encounter serious problems.

The Missing Links

Most stories about the kathin, be they popular oral accounts or those in contemporary or ancient religious texts, are based on the premise that the spontaneity with which a religious event occurs is an index of the sacrality (disinterest) of the participants. Spontaneity indicates the lack of previous calculation involved in the event and therefore that a proper and strict separation of monks and laity has been maintained. (This separation is what empowers the two wheels of the dhamma.) For example, in popular Thai accounts of the kathin, the robes are spoken of as if they appear magically--they fall from the sky. There is little or no explanation about exactly how the Buddhist laity discover virtuous 'monks in need,' or how laity decide where to offer their kathin gift.

For example, the preface to Mahamakut Buddhist University's semi-official (Mahamongkhonmuni [Thet] 1978:4) volume on the kathin states simply that "Male and female worshippers full of merit, for the welfare of monks, invite each other and take and respect each other in order or rank" to offer kathin to Buddhist monks. The origins story makes no mention of where the cloth came from, only that the Buddha declared the rules for its distribution and the freedoms that accrue to the monks who receive the merit of kathin. In Bangkok Bank's (Wicit 1974:4) version of the origins story, "the people" [prachachon] know the news" of the monks in need and go to serve them but there is a resounding silence on the topic of how they "know" this news.

One of the most obvious and perplexing features of the formal Pali text on the kathin, the Mahavagga (Davids and Oldenberg 1882:146ff.), and popular Thai religious tracts¹ on the ceremony is that they contain

¹Somdet Wachirayan 1921 [Wat Bowoniwet]; Phra Supaconmuni [Pin, Wat

little or no discussion of the interactions of monks and laity, either before or during the ceremony. Bechert (1968) writes there is no Buddhist text which contains a complete description of the ceremony, an observation which is borne out in Wells' (1960) discussion of Thai kathin ceremonies. With the exception of Maha Makut Academy's official manual on the kathin, which contains words of offering for kathin robes at Mahanikai and Thammayut temples, there is no single text that describes both the monk and lay 'sides' [fai] of the ceremony.

Lay informants said they 'knew nothing' about the kathin and that I should go ask a religious expert about it. Monks were silent on the topic of the laity's part of the ceremony.

The convention of 'not knowing' (or of silence) which characterizes both Buddhist texts and ordinary discourse confirms and maintains the separation of monk and lay interests.

The same themes of detachment, of "accidentalness" and monk-laity separation, are found in the pha pa or 'forest cloth' ceremony.² Informants say that giving pha pa is like leaving robes in the forest, where they are later 'found' (i.e., accidentally stumbled upon) by Buddhist monks.

Both the Pali and Thai versions of the Mahavagga describe only the monastic side of the ceremony, thereby emphasizing the autonomy of Buddhist monks from the Buddhist laity. The Buddhist laity offer the kathin gift to the entire monastic congregation and not to a particular monk. Monks decide who deserves the kathin gift, a point which has

Bowoniwet] 1943; Bangkok Bank 1967; Phra Rachamongkhonmuni [Thet], Wat Samphatawong-Mahamakut Buddhist Academy] 1978.

²The pha pa is an informal merit-making ceremony in which laity offer robes to (forest) monks. It is similar to the kathin except that it takes place year round and there is no limit on the number of pha pa that may be performed at a single temple.

important political ramifications.³ A high-ranking Thammayut monk, writing in 1943 (Phra Supaconmuni 1943: Preface), notes that the story of kathin has many 'problems' along these lines: "Who was the first person to offer kathin?" he asks, and then concludes that the identity of the lay sponsor is irrelevant.

A named/nameless distinction structures monastic and lay, oral and textual accounts of the ritual, alternating according to the point of view of the speaker. When monks describe the ceremony, or when the monks' side of the ceremony is discussed, monks are often named by name while the laity are generally anonymous. For example, the author of Bangkok Bank's (1967) booklet on the kathin recites a story in which monks are sewing the robes together 'in harmony,' supervised by the Buddha. The Buddha's famous followers are referred to by name, but the laity go in a 'group' to pay their respects.

Conversely, in ordinary conversations about the organization of kathin processions, lay donors are usually referred to by name but the monks are not (the exception being when the robes are offered at the temple of a famous meditation monk).⁴ These conventions confirm the absence of previous contact between ritual participants.

³The monk who is "most in need of new robes" (cf. Hardy 1860; Wachirayan 1921) or "has passed the most Lenten seasons in the Sangha" may receive the gift, or the monk who is "best" amongst the congregation, but this is a centuries-old source of controversy. Contemporary, government-sponsored accounts of the kathin (Wicit 1974; Phra Rachamongkhonmuni [Thet] Mahamakut Buddhist University 1978) emphasize that the monks select the "best" amongst themselves to receive the kathin robe, which is usually the abbot, and the abbot's appointment is controlled by the government.

⁴The kathin samakhi is an exception since it purposely obliterates the identities of the individual sponsors.

In the past, a major function of the anonymity convention was to indicate that the monks had not 'hinted' or 'given a sign' for the robes, which would have invalidated the ceremony (Buddhaghosa 1976:29), or that the laity were not offering splendid gifts to their monk-relatives, i.e., to build the prestige of the family name (cf. Wyatt 1982). In the present it indicates that the government has not exercised undue calculation in controlling the nation's kathin ceremonies, i.e., that there is no formal 'policy' with regard to the regulation of lay Buddhist rituals.

The missing parts of the story, which correspond to missing parts of the communication process, support the ideology that kathin robes loy fa or 'fall from the sky' in response to the great merit of the monks, that it is a cosmic, not a social event. From the perspective of the Thai Buddhist laity, the most thrilling kathin are those in which, on the last day of the Lenten season, they 'suddenly hear' of monks who have not yet received the kathin gift and they 'rush to their sides' to offer it, a theme which predominates in the story of the culakathin, a now defunct custom in which the laity sit up all night sewing the kathin robes, beginning with the spinning of thread into cloth (Wells 1960) and rushing to complete the robes before dawn. These features--rushing, anonymity, spontaneity--which structure kathin myths and which indicate the lack of previous calculation of a worldly nature become felicity factors in the ritual.

Most if not all of the above accounts of the kathin imply the existence of an intermediary, and in Thai social life the role of the invisible intermediary presupposes a tradition of sacred hierarchy. Communication within the hierarchy is based on ideas about the nature of interactions between 'cool'- (or 'peaceful') and 'hot'-hearted men.

Hot and Cool Beings: Hierarchical Communication Patterns

The Thai social order is based on a distinction of cool- to hot-hearted beings, cool-hearted beings inhabiting the top of the social order and hot-hearted beings at the bottom. The high/low cool/hot opposition corresponds to further distinctions: of men who 'have names' [mi chu] versus those who 'lack names' [mai mi chu] of men who 'have voices' [mi siang] versus those who 'lack voices' [mai mi siang] in decision-making processes.

It also corresponds to a distinction between men who 'have face' [mi na], or who have 'face and eyes' [mi na mi ta, sometimes used satirically) and those who do not, i.e., to men who have 'lost face' or whose faces have 'spoiled' [sia na]. Face is symbolic of the sum total of one's social identity: perceptual powers, honor, and/or rank.

Men with hot hearts 'have no name' in the sense that they lack fame and honour [kiat] and they receive their names (or titles) from others.⁵ In addition, hot-hearted men dare not 'say the name' [bok chu] of their superiors nor look into their faces. In contrast, cool-hearted beings not only 'have names' and 'give names' to subordinates, they address them by their personal names.

The ideology of communication between hot and cool-hearted beings, the custom of 'speaking in order' of rank [phut tam lamdap], is based on the opacity principle. As noted in earlier chapters, hot-hearted beings are presumed able to see only the visible (material) face of events. Their natures are such that they react or 'stick' to the stimuli in those events; they are in and part of events. The kamma that they commit with their mouths, bodies, and minds after being exposed to

⁵The king gives names to the children of favoured individuals as phrarachathan, as a royal gift. Men like Somdet Uan and Pote Sarasin give names to Isan people as reflections of new classificatory schemes.

strong stimuli (to the sight of a charismatic meditation monk, charlatan or not) is but a natural part of a kammic chain of events.

In contrast, cool-hearted beings stand more outside and above events. As men of greater mental purity, they are believed able to analyze the invisible interior of events--to see past their material faces into their hidden, underlying causes.

Raw information is passed from low to high beings in the social order, and laws or edicts from high to low. Low-ranking men report on the physical face of an event, passing their impressions upward to their superiors in the form of 'news' [khao] or 'rumours' [khao lu], but they are not responsible for (or deemed capable of) determining the veracity of what they observe, of assessing the hidden causal or temporal dimensions of the events.

These communication paradigms correspond to biological metaphors of the state. In the supreme example of this system, that concerning the king, information travels all the way up the king's councilors, his 'eyes and ears.' Their job is to collect information, analyze it, and pass their recommendations up to the king, the 'heart and mind' of the nation, who dictates the appropriate response.

Once hot-hearted men have passed information up the chain of command, it disappears 'into the sky,' so to speak, out of sight and beyond their analytic range: they have nothing more to do with the decision-making process. When the information returns, it does so in a totally different form, as a royal command, an expression of the royal temperament, or as a royal gift.

This is the pattern by which business of all sorts is transacted in the modern Thai kingdom. It is the pattern by which distant meditation monks are 'discovered' by elite in Bangkok and by which long-distance

merit-making ceremonies are organized. In the following sections I will give three examples of how the custom of 'speaking in order' (the missing link) is incorporated into the organization of kathin rituals and the discovery of meditation monks.

Example 1: Reserving the Temple

The formal rules and informal customs for reserving a wat [withi cong] to receive the kathin gift preserve the traditional separation of knowledge and interest between monks and laity, superiors and subordinates. There are only two formal rules governing the reservation of the wat: monks must accept kathin donors on a first-come, first-served basis, and a temple can receive only one kathin gift a year. The monks are said to 'have no voice' [may mi siang] in determining who will offer their kathin gift. The laity are said to 'have no voice' in the monks' decision to dedicate the kathin robe.

In practice, the temple is often reserved by a representative of the lay donor. He or the donor contacts the abbot about the details of the ceremony (in theory, only those details concerning the 'time and place' of the ceremony). Neither the abbot's followers nor those of the kathin sponsor come into contact with each other until the day of the ceremony. This is the same pattern--of monks and laity 'not seeing' and 'not knowing' each other--that structures the seating arrangements and actual performance of the kathin (chapter 21).

Example 2: The Royal Kathin

This lack of knowledge between monks and laity is maintained in the kathin luang through the use of low-ranking intermediaries who work in the palace ritual section. As noted earlier, the head of the unit first 'goes to see' [pai du] the temples under consideration, to examine their

visible, physical attributes: whether they are clean and well-maintained, whether their monks are well-disciplined. He arrives without advance notice, then reports back to the palace, passing the information up to his superior, the lord chamberlain (a man of more pure blood, i.e., greater perceptual acuity).

The lord chamberlain and his personal assistant discuss the hidden, political facets of the temple, the composition and kin ties of the temple committee members. The lord chamberlain then passes his recommendations on up to the king, who makes the final decision about where to offer the kathin.

The temple receives only seven days' notice before the kathin luang takes place; the decision to offer the kathin robes there 'falls out of the blue' and a last-minute quality is thus incorporated in the formal, pre-ritual preparations.

The members of the ritual section play the same intermediary role in the actual ritual performance. They arrange physical objects and hand them up to the king (from their knees); they are not ritual participants. When the king communicates an order, he sends information down, first to the lord chamberlain (who is prostrate at his feet), who then conveys it to the appropriate persons (the 'arms and legs' of the royal entourage), who execute it.

The Department of Religious Affairs plays a similar role in the royal kathin. During the ceremony, the director general stands before the king and reports the physical facts concerning the temple, i.e., the number of monks and novices. He and his officers act as go-betweens between the king and the Sangha and the king and the temple supporters, before and during the ritual. They are not ritual participants but 'servers.' Like ritual objects, they have specific communication

functions (to 'greet' guests, 'announce' information or 'serve' the monarch).

Example 3: The Discovery of Isan Saints

Similar communication patterns govern the discovery of meditation monks in the forests of Isan. Low-ranking, hot-hearted men from the forests and nearby villages report the news of the miracles performed by the monk to district officers or to other low-ranking government officials. These men then pass the news or 'stories' upwards in a chain of command until it reaches their superiors in Bangkok (i.e., Major-General Pow Sarasin). These 'big men' or their agents may 'go to see for themselves' if the rumours are true, and, if they believe them, arrange kathin ceremonies leading to the temple of the monk in question.

In fact, the low-ranking official who 'tells the news' [bok khao] to the kathin leader often comes from the same province as the monk. Such men may arrange the details of the ceremony; their families may feast the ritual sponsor, and they are often the most likely candidates to play the role of go-between in the actual ceremony, i.e., handing objects and information back and forth to ritual participants.

These men are not the 'hosts' or 'owners' of the ritual, however. It is not their 'own idea' nor it is performed 'in their [own] name,' and they are therefore not perceived as being morally responsible for its outcome.

Pin Muthukan: The Go-Between

. . . and he is regarded as the sincereist recluse who resides in the wilderness (Spence Hardy, Eastern Monachism)

As the following excerpts from his cremation volume indicate, Colonel Pin Muthukan, the arch-enemy of Phra Phimonlatham, was probably the

individual most responsible for bringing word of Accan Man's exploits to the ears of the military command in Bangkok. A look at his career (1972:2-3) as a temple boy and novice in the Isan Sangha in the 1920s reveals the kinship ties that linked him with the Isan meditation monks who gained fame in the 1970s. The accounts of his life and works in his cremation volume indicate the extent to which the 'bloodlines' [sai lohit] of middle-ranking Isan bureaucrats are intertwined with the 'ordination lines' [paramapara] of Isan meditation monks (cf. Tambiah 1976:307-308;1984).

Into the Forest

In 1924, at the age of eight, Pin entered the government school in his village, Ban Kham Phra, located in Ubon Province near the Cambodian border. After he had completed his education there, his father

left [fak] him⁶ as a temple boy with Acaan Yoei who was abbot of Kham Phra village temple. Later on, his father offered him as a ta pakhao (a child who wears the white cloth and observes the eight precepts before becoming a novice) to Acaan Un, who was a thudong monk in that time.

As a young boy, Pin wandered to the major capitals and meditation temples of the Northeast with his teacher, Acaan Un. As the cremation volume explains,

There were forest temples which were thudong sides of the Sangha at that time, and Acaan Un resided in Kham Phra village which was in his orbit⁷ [khocan]. Acaan Un was a student of Acaan Man Burithat Thera who was the greatest teacher of the vipassana-kammathan (meditation) side of the Sangha.

A monk named Acaan Sing and his brother, Acaan Pin, were two of Acaan Man's original disciples (Maha Boowa 1976a:36), Acaan Sing's miracles being among those later recounted by officials in Bangkok in the late

⁶Fak means literally to 'deposit' (cf. chapter 20).

⁷The wanderings of meditation monks are likened to the orbits of planets.

1970s. As Pin's cremation volume reveals, Acaan Sing and Pin Muthukan were blood relatives, which probably meant that White-robed Pin wandered the forests of Isan with his paternal uncles. As the story is told in his cremation volume:

In that year his excellency Chao Khun Phrayanawiti (Acaan Sing) who was a teacher on the meditation side came to wander [thudong] to Kham Phra village to rest at that wat. Acaan Un offered White-robed Pin as a student of His Excellency because Acaan Sing was a relative [yat] of Pin's on his father's side. White-cloth Pin was a nephew of His Excellency by bloodline [sai lohit]. That year, Acaan Sing and other monks who were his students together with white-robed Pin went to observe the Lenten season at Kham Phra Forest Temple. When the rainy season was over His Excellency took them to wander to various villages in districts of Ubolrachathani Province. From this province he took them to Khon Kaen Province to announce dhamma religion on the meditation side [fai vipassana-kammathan].

Pin thus came to know the highest ranking monks in Isan and eventually attracted the attention of the abbot of Wat Srican in Khon Kaen.

Acaan Sing and white-robed Pin performed religious activities in various districts and sub-districts in Khon Kaen Province for about two years. When they were in Khon Kaen, monk-teacher Phisalaranakhet, the abbot of Wat Srican, the head of the monks' government in Khon Kaen province and associated with a relative of Acaan Sing and white-robed Pin, saw the deportment of white-robed Pin, that he was a 'person of spark,'⁸ that he was a clever person. Acaan Phisalaranakhet invited Pin to ordain as a novice, to study with him and allow him to relate nak tham and Pali, the principle suttas for study in the path of religion at that time.

Pin did not stay at Wat Srichan, however, but returned to Ubol to study with the famous monk Phanthumaloo (Rat), whose title was previously held by Phanthumalo (Di), who Mongkut reordained on the raft outside Wat Samorai in the dahlikamma ceremony (chapter 4).

⁸This idiom raises interesting points of comparison between Thai beliefs about power and merit and those in Cambodia, with Wolters (1975) "man of prowess" theory of leadership in early Cambodian kingdoms.

Pin ordained as a novice⁹ at Wat Suthatanaram in Ubol when he was fifteen years old. After that, Acaan Sing took him to walk thudong to Udonthani and Sakorn Nakorn. His excellency established a vipassana-kammathan group in that province at Kutreukham village in Waniwat district. From there they returned on foot to Ubol province and rested at Wat Suthatanaram in the city of Ubol.

In the Buddha-year 2474 (1931), a year before the revolution,

Acaan Sing took white-robed Pin to become a novice at Wat Suthatanaram. His excellency Phra Maha Rat (Phanthumalo), the former assistant of the head of the monks' organization of Ubol Circle, abbot of Wat Suthathanaram, was his preceptor. Pin stayed there to study Buddhist scriptures in the temple school. (1972:2-3)

Rolling the Wheel of the Law: Pin's Career as a Bureaucrat

Pin's biography, examined from a cultural perspective, reveals much of his inner world and hints at the paradoxes and contradictions that plagued his religious programs, which were explicitly designed to complement Sarit's national development programs. Pin's programs were created by a man whose roots lay incontrovertibly in the past, in ancient religious traditions.

The cremation volume, entitled Inside and Outside Structures: Strategies to Decrease Suffering, is full of religious and cosmological allusions. The title refers to the methods [withi] Phin devised to cut the 'impurities'--wrong ideas and activities--of Isan people. "Inside structures" refers to ideas and "outside structures" to their material manifestations, i.e., to social practice.

Pin's birthplace is "The Royal Capital of Ubol," his birthdate 1916, "the Buddhist year 2459, the eleventh day of the waxing moon entering into the eleventh month (of October) the Year of the Snake." His natal village, located in the Swamp District¹⁰ of Ubon, is Ban Kham Phra, 'The

⁹Bamphacha means literally to 'enter the state of becoming a Buddhist monk' or to 'leave the world and take up the life of the ascetic.'

Words of the Monk.'

In 1934, after he had passed his preliminary Nak Tham and Pali exams, Pin was taken to Wat Samphutawong in Thonburi, outside Bangkok and 'offered' to Chao Khun Phra Thepanyamuni--then known as Phra Maha Choei ('Indifferent Monk'). Phra Maha Choei taught in an educational training program of the type first promoted by the princes Damrong and Wachirayan.

Pin eventually ordained as a monk at Wat Samphutawong. Somdet Wachirayan of Wat Bowoniwet¹¹ was his sponsor. He attained Level Seven in the Pali exams and became a monk-teacher. Pin became known for his ambition and for his almost excessive enthusiasm for promoting pro-government educational programs. He came to the (somewhat critical) attention of Somdet Uan, who commented on these very same traits: "You are like a jewel on a ring," said Somdet Uan. "You take it anywhere and fear that it will be stolen" (1972:5).

Pin's first published work was entitled, "To Repay an Obligation." As his biographer notes somewhat cryptically, some of his programs were successful but others failed to receive cooperation and they 'declined' [lom loek pai] (1972:5) shortly after their inception. (Some of them were probably downright unpopular, seeing as they placed Isan monks or former monks at the disposal of the central Thai military command.¹²

Pin's two titles, "Maha," a title of respect used to address former monks, and "Colonel," indicate his primary loyalties, to the army and to the (Isan) Sangha. In 1944 he disrobed to train as an army chaplain and

¹⁰For a discussion of Isan mythology concerning swamps, see Tambiah (1970).

¹¹Supreme patriarch from 1944-1958.

¹²In later years, Pin had former monks return to Isan as army chaplains to preach against communism.

soon came to the attention of the top military leadership. (Thanom Kittikachorn said in a 1980 interview that he first heard of Pin in connection with the 'revolution' [military coup] of 1947.)

Pin became an army spokesman on national television and the Armed Forces Radio in the 1950s and eventually gained fame as a lay expert on religion, a successor to Luang Wicit. He became famous for sermons and seminars on Buddhism and nationalism, and eventually for his dislike of Phra Phimonlatham. In 1955 he attained the rank of colonel.

Pin's rise in the bureaucratic hierarchy translates as a rise in the celestial hierarchy. He received numerous awards for outstanding service to the nation, all of which came from 'the hands of the king.' He received his first award, the 'Five Supports of the Thai Crown,' in 1951. His last, awarded in 1971 before his death, is called 'The Wheel of the Law Rolling Everywhere Without Obstruction' [cakkaphadimala]. Pin achieved the distinction of allowing the government's 'wheel of the law to roll everywhere' in the Northeast. His department worked relentlessly to eliminate 'obstructions' to development, the wrong views of independent monks and their lay followers in Isan. In 1957 Sarit appointed him deputy director general of the Department of Religious Affairs: That same year, Pin noted that religion was in decline and made a vow to revive it. His career as a bureaucrat was in the nature of a religious experience.

One of Thanom's first acts as prime minister was to appoint Pin director general [athibodi or 'fully enlightened'] of the Department of Religious Affairs, a position he held until 1971 (Surachai 1967). Under Pin's active leadership, and with strong backing from the military, the department came to dominate the affairs of the Sangha to a degree previously unknown in the history of the polity. Pin also received

strong support from the king. In 1964, the king sent him and M.L. Pin Malakun¹³ on a religious mission to Sri Lanka to deliver a Buddha relic.

As director general of the department, Pin dedicated himself to two goals, to the "Isanization" of the Thai national religious tradition (the adoption of Isan Thammayut religious practices as national orthodoxy), and to the elimination of "regional" (i.e., Mahanikai) variants of Buddhism in the Northeast. On one hand, he secured military support for Isan Thammayut monks and on the other he worked constantly to subordinate the Thai Sangha to the state bureaucracy. He developed a steady stream of programs designed to manifest Sarit's revolutionary principles of moral unity and development and he was a virulent anti-communist.

Pin's career as a bureaucrat exhibits two major themes. The first is the sacralization of the Thai bureaucracy, i.e., the attempt to represent pure bureaucratic action as pure religious action--to create a bureaucratic civil religion. A second, related theme is that of bureaucratic religious individualism: Pin advanced the idea that pious Buddhist bureaucrats, like pious Buddhist monks, could promote the salvation of the nation's citizens. He was famous for the (1972:9) slogan "To lead a single person out of darkness is to make much merit," darkness being a metaphor for wrong views (i.e., belief in communism) and the cosmic hells. This aphorism was created to inspire his workers.

Pin's meritorious wanderings as a youth led him from the forests and royal temples of Isan to the highest-ranking Buddhist temples in Bangkok but the religious programs he designed in the 1960s brought him and the

¹³Another Phra Phimonlatham detractor, dating from the days when one of his forebears and a former ruler of the Northeast, M.L. Pin, was forced to 'stand and wait' for Phimonlatham at the Rangoon airport (Khru Acaan Nisit 1975).

elite of Bangkok back to those same forests, to make merit in the "reverse radial pattern" described by Tambiah.

Pin's programs were designed as analogues of pure ritual action. Like ritual, they had a formal purpose or 'objective' [cut prasong]. They had a proper first cause or pure intention--a mental 'inside structure' (i.e., the desire to promote the welfare of Buddhist monks, old people, education, etc.). They had proper 'techniques' or methods of performance--the material form or 'outside' structure. Finally, they had a projected set of kammic fruits or benefits [phon].

The assumption was that if Pin's modernization programs were carried out with correct methods, materials, and procedures and, above all, with pure intentions (i.e., with a true desire to develop the nation), and if their guiding principles were appropriate to the conditions of the moment, they would generate positive kammic results and advance the nation's citizens on the path of purification. Perhaps for Pin more than for others in the Sarit administration, development was but another name for religious purification.

As director general of the department, Pin began to assume the interpretive prerogatives of royalty. In 1973 he published his own dictionary of religious terms.¹⁴ After likening bureaucratic to ritual practice, Pin often renamed aspects of bureaucratic practice after Western political practices, to mediate fundamentally opposed concepts of dhamma (order) and democracy. These and other of his attempts to modernize the polity resulted in systematic incongruities, one being the idea of 'budgeting for morality' when true morality is believed to exist only as a function of voluntary religious practice, another being that

¹⁴Colonel Pin (1973:527) translates rachakhana as "high dignitary monk" and explains that racha does not mean royal in this case but refers to leadership in the Sangha. (Translated in O'Connor 1978:132).

of Thai-style democracy (or dhammocracy), modeled after the custom of Buddhist monks 'speaking in order' of rank or 'voting' on a monk to receive the kathin gift (Kromkan Sasana 1978b). His most intense intellectual efforts were geared towards sacralizing budgetary procedure [ngop praman], especially that concerned with religious programs.

Pin created a whole series of programs to develop the nation but the kathin phrarachathan program, which was formalized under his administration, is not listed among them. As the military built up momentum in the Northeast, Pin developed a standardized curricula for pariyatham schools and promoted them in the Northeast where the majority of the ranking monks were students of Phra Phimonlatham. He and Sukit Nimanhemin, the minister of education, developed the Thammathuut program and supported the Thammacarik (Tambiah 1976; Somboon 1981). His biographer notes that many of these programs, like those he organized as a monk, also 'declined' (1972:27). By the late 1960s Pin was personally designing educational programs for Buddhist laity in rural villages, advising them on how to proceed on the path of purification.

The booklets commemorating the Department of Religious Affairs' kathin phrarachathan in the 1960s indicate that Pin was quick to recognize the potential of the new style of royal kathin ceremony to 'announce' his programs in rural areas. He was blatant in his use of royal authority to legitimate those programs and to sacralize the activities of the bureaucracy. Under his leadership, the department even began to interpret cosmic process to villagers, as the following excerpts from the department's 1968 commemorative booklet indicate.

Pin's 1968 Kathin Phrarachathan

The booklet commemorating the 1968 kathin is hardbound--and expensive--indicating the extent of Pin's influence and the size of his department's budget. (Those printed in 1978 were xeroxed and some were even hand-stapled.)

The department had taken on the "activity signatures" of the Dhammaraja; it was complete and perfect [sombun] in its ritual observances. The introduction states that the department offers kathin phrarachathan every year, "rotating to every area of the country" and that every year it "prints books by virtue of the royal merit, arranging new plans to advantage in governing the Sangha and in developing temples" (Preface). The state is referred to as the rajanca or 'king's domain,' rather than as the 'nation' prathet or chat.

The 1968 booklet promotes a voluntarily-funded program to enhance the welfare of village youth. One receives the distinct impression that the programs were the king's idea, not Pin's: The preface states that the department is acting on behalf of "His Majesty's Government" and that the new program is part of "His Majesty's policy to make Buddhism the permanent religion of the nation" (1968:5).

The volume contains a Buddha-song plus a complete description of the government's new program for youth (which was probably never implemented). Villagers' contributions to this program are identified as boricak, material 'sacrifice' on behalf of their youth, the implication being that if villagers chose not to make the prescribed sacrifice, they and not the government would bear the moral responsibility for neglecting the welfare of their youth.

By far the most fascinating item in this booklet is a map of the cosmos drawn to "explain" the cosmological dynamics of the program. The

map "shows" [sadaeng, i.e., teaches in a visual manner, 'through the senses'] the connections between planetary forces and the government's new welfare programs. The nine stars of astrology [nophakro] are drawn at the center of the map, next to the village temple. The village is placed at the outer edges. Rays of light radiate from the center to the periphery of the page, each ray labeled with a word for a different kind of luck, welfare, or auspiciousness.

The map is an exercise in interpretation, in glossing. For example, "luck" is defined as "different ways of villagers helping each other", i.e. as different modes of (government-prescribed) pure practice. A notation at the bottom of the map states that readers "desiring" the key to the map (i.e., those 'inclined towards dhamma' and seeking to understand the forces of auspiciousness), should practice the "four kinds of activities" prescribed in the pages following (activities prescribed by the government and supervised by the abbot).

Trouble in Paradise

Several of Sarit's development ministers were ambivalent about Pin and his role in development. They admired him for his piety but privately thought that he was too "superstitious." They also feared that his religious zeal and unquestioning devotion to 'development' would take him to excessive lengths and embarrass the government, which it eventually did. (They, and especially their offspring, expressed cynicism about men who confused morality and development.) Despite such reservations, however, they had to support him because he was their link to the Isan Sangha.

Two stories illustrate Pin's somewhat paradoxical role in modernization and the confusion that arose from his attempts to mediate

Buddhist and Western values. These stories also indicate the extent to which so-called "economic" issues are articulated as religious dramas in Thailand.

The first story concerns Pin's nemesis, Phra Phimonlatham. After Sarit died, Phra Phimonlatham's followers began agitating for his release from prison. In 1966, after Phimonlatham was cleared of the charges that he was a communist, Pin stated publicly that Phimonlatham could go free anytime he wished. The statement was highly charged because it was made during the Lenten season; for Phimonlatham to change residences meant that he had not properly 'completed' the Buddhist Lent, that he was ineligible to receive kathin robes, and thus lost his seniority in the Sangha (which is measured by the completion of successive Lenten seasons). This was precisely the government's purpose in jailing him in the first place. Phimonlatham refused to leave jail until he had completed the Lenten retreat, thereby serving notice that he refused to acknowledge the government's right to disrobe him, to 'interfere' in affairs of the Sangha (Bangkok Post, 6 September 1966).

Phimonlatham's refusal to leave jail before the end of the Lenten season everafter complicated the kathin at Wat Mahathat. He may have lost seniority in the eyes of the government and the Council of Senior Monks, but not in the eyes of his monk-supporters at Wat Mahathat. In 1978 Phra Phimonlatham was comfortably ensconced in the number one kuti (even though he was not abbot). In 1979, if the king wished to offer the kathin robes at Wat Mahathat in person (which he did not), he would have had to deliver them straight into the hands of Phra Phimonlatham, who was the 'announcer' of the robes. Pin's career was dedicated to reforming the Sangha to promote development and Phimonlatham's to constantly focusing national attention on the extent to which the government had wrongfully interfered in Sangha affairs.

The second story concerns an Isan monk who was reportedly performing miracles in the Northeast. Each morning when the monk arose he found food in his begging bowl, supposedly left there by the angels (a sign that he was an arahant, which meant the situation was rapidly getting out of hand from the perspective of the central government.) Word of these miracles eventually reached Pin, who then traveled to the Northeast to 'see for himself' (and for the government) whether they were true.

Pin reportedly returned to Bangkok convinced of the monk's magical powers and organized lay support for him in the capital. It later turned out the rumours were false, however, the result of a 'trick', the monk's followers had placed the food in the bowl.

Pin and the government lost face over the incident, but this, too, was an antinomy issue. Did Pin lose face for traditional reasons--because he lacked sufficient virtue to judge true from false monks--or because he believed in angels in the first place? By indigenous standards, the incident seemed to indicate that, despite his apparent piety, Pin lacked the true inner purity (and mental acuity) that would have guaranteed a positive kammic outcome to his programs. The jailing of Phimonlatham and the Thammathuut and Thammacarik programs were resoundingly unpopular. They created schism in the Sangha, especially among the abbots of the major temples in Khon Kaen.

Pin died a painful death of cancer in 1972. According to his daughter, he used the meditation techniques he learned as a youth to combat his suffering while he lay dying. The unhappy circumstances of Pin's death combined with those of Sarit (who died suddenly of a stroke in 1963), and the monk Cuan, the government-backed candidate for supreme patriarch (who died in a fiery car crash in the early 1970s), only

increased Isan people's doubts about the purity of intention of government officials. If Sarit, Pin, and Cuan had been truly virtuous, they would have enjoyed the four benefits of merit--health, long life, happiness, and strength. Meanwhile, Phra Phimonlatham continued to lead an active (and controversial) life as a monk well into the 1970s, clearly enjoying those benefits. (During the hot season of 1980, the abbots of the major Mahanikai temples in Khon Kaen were unavailable for interviews because they were in Chiang Mai, 'meditating with Phra Phimonlatham.')

Pin's greatest distinction was received after his death when the king personally sponsored his cremation ceremony at Wat Thepsarin (The Abode of the Angels) where members of the Thai royal family are cremated. The monarch personally laid the white funeral cloth on Pin's bier and lit the torch that sent him from one life to the next, to the Buddhist heavens.

Kathin Phrarachthan: The Invisible Policy

The kathin phrarachathan stands as Pin's unacknowledged legacy to the modern Thai state. The procedures for administering the program were developed while he was director-general of the Department of Religious Affairs, but the program was never made public, and neither Pin nor any of the top-ranking men in Sarit's or Thanom's governments were ever publicly identified with it. It fell from the sky, as royal alms.

The beauty of the kathin phrarachthan policy was that its planning and execution were invisible to the general public. The existence of a formal 'policy' could only be inferred until a member of the Sarit cabinet and the following informant confirmed it. The program was categorized as 'inside knowledge' [khvam ru phai nai] and it operates on

traditional principles of hierarchy, thus preserving the traditional separation of interests of monks and laity, ordinary mortals and the king. The program concerns the king's wishes and the king's temples--which automatically make it not the business of ordinary mortals. This is as true today as it was when the program was first created.

The kathin phrarachathan was a masterpiece from the perspective of capitalist expansion. It provided a structure for elite to penetrate Northeastern capitals as world renouncers, and from there to push into remote rural areas. It was invisible because it was a natural extension of ancient religious paradigms and roles. The Department of Religious Affairs assumes the role of temple liason [makkhanayok]. Traditional methods of reserving the wat are writ large--as state policy. Finally, as the following data indicate, the program incorporates four indexical features of highly sacred events in its organizational structure.

In 1968, when Pin was director-general of the department, the potential of the kathin phrarachathan was largely unrealized. I would argue that it did not assume its present importance to the business community until the early 1970s, when the new infrastructure was in place and the use of force had to be balanced by the distribution of honour if one wanted to triumph over business competitors.

The following are excerpts of an interview with the official in charge of administering the kathin phrarachathan program.

The informant's concerns about modern kathin ceremonies presage a new wave of antinomy problems that these were bound to surface after twenty years in which the royal temple system had been used to promote the interests of men whose primary concern was to dominate the markets of the Northeast. His concerns about abuses of the ritual were concerns

about men 'clinging to the efficacy of rites and rituals' [silabbataparamasa], one of the 'five lower spiritual fetters' [sanvojana] (Maha Boowa 1976a:31). This concern had a new twist, however. As most bureaucrats were aware at some level, the new program was formally identified with a state policy whose explicit aim was to advance the economic interests of the nation and to control the people. No amount of linguistic manipulation could dispel the unease of pious men over the systematic abuse of ancient rituals of purification--although who was doing the abusing was, like all things, a matter of interpretation.

The Policy to Promote the Program of the Royal Merit

The kindly, middle-aged bureaucrat in charge of the ritual division of the Department of Religious Affairs was from central Thailand. He had ordained briefly as a Buddhist monk but was a career bureaucrat. He prefaced his discussion of the kathin phrarachathan by reasserting the ideals of merit-making. "Merit is up to your mind," he said. "Ritual sponsors make merit in kathin only if they have pure hearts [mi cai borisut] and good intentions [cetana di] in performing the ceremony."

In his opinion, people wanted to sponsor the kathin phrarachathan because it was the ceremony that gave rise to the most merit [kuson], or it was a way of getting into the presence of the king. "I think it's this way," he explained.

Thai people no longer ordain as monks. To give alms is to care for the precepts and people want to be in the line of merit [sai bun]. Some pious people want to be in the presence of the king. They have great honor [mi kiat]. They have meritorious hearts [cai bun]. They will also receive fame.

The duty of good Buddhist monks was to "teach people to hen dii (literally, to 'see well' or to have right views). They must teach

people to do good, tham thuk, to act properly," he said. He then launched into a discussion of the government's kathin phrarachathan policy [nayobai]. "We have the policy to promote the program [krong kan] of the royal merit [phrarachakuson]," he began. "This means that we praise¹⁵ the institution of the monarchy. We must have a budget [ngop praman] to carry out this plan according to the king's wishes [tam phra rachaprasong]."

Kathin phrarachathan means¹⁶

that the workers of the Department of Religious Affairs are the people who receive responsibility for arranging the kathin phrarachathan. This is because ordinary people cannot reserve [cong] kathin at royal temples on their own. They must come and ask¹⁷ royal permission from the king. Then they can go and reserve the kathin.

He inadvertently revealed another invisible state policy regarding the king's business. "The ministers in the government come ask us which temples have been reserved," he said. "These temples are throughout the country but still not in every province." The government was in the process of establishing royal temples in every province in the nation. The ritual unit acts as the go-between in organizing these long distance kathin it links sponsors in Bangkok with temples in rural areas.

Of the cong kathin and other pre-ritual preparations, he said, "Monks have no voice in deciding who offers kathin. The department suggests [choen-chuan] at which temple lay sponsors may wish to offer the kathin gift." After that, the leader of the group or his representative contacts the temple "to arrange time and place," but that

¹⁵Yok-yong, lit, 'lift-to-praise.'

¹⁶Mai khwam wa. The "meaning of things" is defined in the glossing process as proper actions.

¹⁷Kho, a word used to indicate inferiors asking or begging for something from a superior.

was ideally the extent of the pre-ritual interaction. "This is called withi cong," he said. "It is as if the robes fall from the sky [loy fa]." The state began to insert itself into the merit-making process by selecting temples for men who wished to make merit in rural areas, by handling details in such a way as to insure the anonymity of the participants.

In theory the king determines the ritual content, but in practice the Department of Religious Affairs does. The department controls the symbolic content of the ritual--the gifts and the ritual procedures. "It is our duty to to prepare all types of kathin implements," the informant said. "We tell people what materials to use and the correct methods for performing the ritual. The gifts are the property of the monarch, given in his name."

In theory, the ritual gifts are owned by the king, but in practice they are purchased from the department's budget. The department buys the ciwon ('three robes') and the khruing borikhan ('monks' implements') from its budget and distributes them to the men they select to perform the ritual.

After the department screens ritual sponsors and assigns them to particular temples, it issues a formal announcement to the newspapers listing their names. The list is published fifteen days before the kathin season begins--so people really do not know who is offering kathin phrarachathan at royal temples until the last minute. First-class royal temples are given only seven days' notice before the king performs kathin luang ("so they will know to clean the wat and put flowers up").

The kathin phrarachathan is one way the department keeps tabs on the goings-on at rural royal temples. The king performs the kathin luang,

"then the kathin phrarachathan can take place," and after that, ritual sponsors must "come make a list . . . called 'the list of the meritorious royal work' [banchi raygnan phrarachakuson]" which tells how many monks, novices, and Buddhist laymen participated in the ceremony and how much money went to build schools, restore temple buildings, etc.

The informant was not concerned about how much money was given at the kathin or how much of the kathin monies went towards "civic" projects. 'Have the school borrow the barami of the wat,' he said. We were discussing religion, not worldly matters. He was uncomfortable with any statement that implied that there was an intentional link between the king's ritual performances and the attainment of material objectives--of any sort, benevolent or not.

When pressed for an estimate of the actual dollar amounts involved in these types of kathin, he finally insisted that it was wrong to connect money and merit. "Money has nothing to do with it," he said. "We don't force people to make merit. This is the story of faith!"

Linguistic usages pertaining to merit-making ceremonies support the ideals of the disinterested exchange. One can say that people 'have faith twenty baht' in a particular monk or temple¹⁸ but one cannot ask how much money a monk or temple "received" or "earned" from a ritual.

The official consulted his list of sponsors for 1979 and noted that the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT) "had great faith 300,000 baht" in the temple where they offered kathin phrarachathan. They donated \$15,000 to build a school. Why did they choose that particular temple? "The abbot had credibility," he explained. "This [whole incident] means people are attached to tradition."

¹⁸Mi satha 20 baht nai wat nan.

The Transgressors

The interview took place in 1979, almost twenty years after Sarit's planning ministers first came up with the initial plan for kathin phrarachathan. The head of the ritual unit was deeply concerned about 'bad people' wanting to perform the kathin at royal temples, and even more worried about them wanting to perform the more informal kathin samakhi in rural areas. That was why the department had to screen prospective sponsors. "Some people try to use the name of the king to get 'face and eyes'¹⁹ or fame," he explained. It was his job to choose good sponsors, men who performed the kathin out of a genuine desire to help the temple and who were sensitive to the specific needs of that temple.

What were the characteristics of bad sponsors? "Bad sponsors have no faith. They want to have fame. They go try to find votes [ha siang]. They want to make merit to have face [ao na] and get a little merit, too," he added. (One received the distinct impression he was speaking of opposition politicians and Chinese merchants.)

The department screened kathin sponsors and it also screened Buddhist monks before they were allowed to chant in royal ceremonies. Was it an honour [kiat] for a monk to chant before the king? "Of course!" he exclaimed. How were the monks screened? They had to meet specific criteria.

First, they have to preach in a manner that is easy to understand.²⁰ Second, they must have good manners, kiriyamalayat, and they must know how to samruam.²¹ They must

¹⁹Mi na mi ta.

²⁰Lit., 'Preach in a way that enters the heart easily' [thet khawcai ngai].

²¹How to hold their bodies perfectly still in the attitude of total indifference to worldly things.

have good knowledge and they must have high ecclesiastical rank. Monks below the rank of cao khun cannot sit ritual at royal ceremonies.

One of the department's responsibilities was to locate 'good monks' for the king, but the king, not the department, makes the decision to grant them high ecclesiastical rank. "When monks have good knowledge, the king will raise them to be royal monks." Monks who failed to receive this honor were automatically excluded from the most auspicious ceremonies in the kingdom, royal ceremonies.

Could meditation monks become royal monks? "Sometimes," he replied, and gave as an example Acan Chaa of Ubol. How did the department know which monks were good monks? "We know already," he laughed. They kept extensive files on Buddhist monks, but no one else was allowed to see them. They were the intermediaries between rural monks, the Sangha Council and the Grand Palace.

The kathin phrarachathan program operates on the opacity principle, as evidenced in the following exchange. Did villagers have the ability to judge the intentions of wealthy kathin sponsors from Bangkok? "Some people can know, but it is not their business to know if people are really serious or have some other motives in offering the kathin," he stated flatly; that was the department's duty. He was clearly concerned about the proliferation of suspect kathin samakhi. "When it's kathin samakhi," he said, "some people try to bring kathin to speak of the donation or the size of the donation."²² With kathin everywhere, some people try to grab the opportunity to have face. We try to see first if these are good sponsors."

²²Ao ma phut.

Speaking of Royal Things: The King's Finances

The same principle of hierarchy that governs the relationship between the Department of Religious Affairs and the Grand Palace governs the relationship between villagers and the Department of Religious Affairs. For example, in speaking of the king's kathin gifts, the official explained the following about the royal finances:

The institution of the monarchy has its own property, but it belongs to the royal household. This is royal property [sombat khong luang]. Royal property belongs to whomever is king. This money is used for kathin at the sixteen first-class temples.

From there he entered dangerous territory, a discussion of the business activities of the king, a 'supposed angel.' He listed the exact sources of the royal income: rent from the Bangkok Sports Club, the race track, and other royal properties. "The king also has his own income," he explained. "This is rai dai or private money, ngoen suan." The money allocated by the government for the kathin phrarachathan was "money to preserve the monarchy." In addition (?), "The king gives 3,000 baht (\$150) to each temple at kathin luang." This restructuring of the royal income has been a matter of public record since the 1930s.

As if he suddenly found himself on shaky ground, he began to disavow any knowledge of the king's income and especially to deny that there could be any intentional connection between the king's merit-making activities and civic projects (which contradicted palace officials' statements about the purpose of the kathin ton.) Using the traditional vocabulary of merit-making, he said:

Royal merit doesn't have anything to do with money, especially for schools. The money is called ngoen bamrung wat (money to preserve or restore temples). It is sacrifice money [ngoen boricak], money to offer to monks [ngoen thawai phra].

He began to retract his statements about the financing of the royal ceremonies, not because he lacked knowledge on the subject, but because he was 'speaking of royal things,' which implied that he thought he could 'know for sure' about royal matters. 'People might criticize me [at ca titian],_' he said. 'I am guessing [sanithan]. I am not sure [mai nae]._' He finally said:

This is 'inside knowledge' [khwam ru phaynai]. We are chatting ordinarily This should not be spread about because at ca mai ru cing ('I might not know truly.') It might not be right.

A few minutes later he repeated the statement. "Rao ru mai cring lae? We don't know for sure, yes?. I fear that I am guessing. These are my own thoughts." Did he want to keep the tape of the interview? No, he just wanted me to know that he knew that he could not 'know for sure' about royal matters.

He concluded the interview with a statement about his own ideas about why the kathin was so popular in the present. "This is my own opinion,"²³ he said. "They go to pai thiao (to go around for fun) and make merit together."

As a devout Buddhist, he was disturbed over the implied uses to which kathin ceremonies were being put. "To offer truly, one must practice oneself, alone [pathibat tua eng]," he said emphatically, and then quoted a traditional aphorism: "It is better to observe the five precepts in one day than perform kathin five times." Perhaps sensing that this might be construed as a criticism of the state's ritual policy, he drew back, saying "This is my idea."

²³Khwa hen or 'sight.'

At the end of the interview, he seemed to deny the amount of calculation that went into the state's organization of the kathin phrarachathan. "We really don't have much to do with it," he said. 'To do ceremonial we are choei-choei (indifferent).'

Conclusion to Part III: The End of an Era

By 1968, the Department of Religious Affairs, successor to the ancient sanghakiri, was playing a major role in the distribution of royal privileges. Department officials decided who received the king's ritual favours, who offered his kathin robes, and who had use of his name--major expressions of the royal wishes.

Having taken on the task of directing ritual traffic nationwide, the department had taken a major role in restructuring the Thai socio-celestial hierarchy: the nation's sai bun or 'line of merit.' Department officials, who answered directly to the prime minister's office, determined which men and monks were praised or 'lifted high' [yok yong] in the celestial hierarchy and which were not. They began controlling access to the king's person, the king's monks, and the king's rituals.

A curious phenomenon occurred. Men used the interpretive prerogatives derived from ritual prestige to introduce the idea that religious, economic, and political activities were distinct and cosmically dissociated realms of activity. In other contexts they used the same prestige to disguise the fact that their business and political activities were not separate at all.

The data in the previous section underscore a fundamental point in the study of religion and economy in Thailand. The significance of the gift given in Buddhist merit ceremonies cannot be analyzed from a

Western, utilitarian perspective without obscuring its most important, and elusive, function in Thai society. Taylor (1979), for example, arguing from the perspective of historical materialism, sees the sacrality of the Buddhist temple as a function of its role in the storage and distribution of surplus. Even Tambiah (1976) stresses the practical value of the kathin, how it functions as a redistributive mechanism in a literal sense. The cultural significance of the kathin goes beyond even Bourdieu's concept that such rituals are a means of creating "symbolic capital"--a store of favours and social obligations that are unspoken of and which are returned at an unspecified point in the future.

Although the above statements are not necessarily false insofar as they apply to the kathin, I would argue that there are even more significant dimensions to the kathin insofar as the ceremony touches on questions of capitalist expansion. As the above official kept insisting, the kathin has nothing to do with money or even with the promotion of projects that directly enhance the well-being of the citizenry. (If it does, it is automatically delegitimated.) The kathin is 'about merit' and merit translates into generalized prestige, in particular, into specific types of linguistic and interpretive privileges. The ritual system is the means through which this prestige and these privileges are distributed and redistributed among the populace.

As the interviews with Sarit's planning ministers indicated, barami translates into freedoms in all areas of men's lives, similar to those enjoyed by Buddhist monks who receive the 'benefits of kathin.' Furthermore, as Praphat noted, men who lack barami have others 'talk' about them in critical times. They have little credibility. In the

words of Phote Sarasin, "People don't believe you." Lacking this form of ritual prestige, leaders cannot command silence from the populace or control the flow of information.

In sum, it can be seen that the men who control the distribution of merit also control the distribution of surplus, regardless of whether surplus is channeled directly through the temple. The importance of Buddhist temples has not declined as the Thai economy has become commercialized.

Transformations: The Emergence of the New Order

As Hocart (1927) notes, Siamese kings, like other divine kings, have priestly functions that are appropriate to their membership in the warrior or khattiya caste. Historically, this meant that Siamese warrior-kings found themselves racing for virtue against Buddhist monks, struggling to control the revelatory functions of men of ritual purity.

By 1968, the king, the military, and the state bureaucracy had brought the revelatory functions of Buddhist monks under tight government control. The less pure teaching or 'town monks' [gramavasi] (less pure because they were more involved with the Buddhist laity) were limited to revealing the dhamma as it was interpreted in government-sponsored religious texts and taught at formal Pariyatham schools.

The rising popularity of meditation monks in the 1970s and the decline of the prestige of teaching monks (Swearer 1981) had important political ramifications. As Praphat said of meditation monks, "These monks like to be alone." The revelatory functions of the more pure forest monks, the arrannavasi, were limited by the timing of their

discovery²⁴ and by control the government was beginning to exert over temple patronage. Many of these monks did not become famous until they were old or until after their death. Like Acaan Man, some were known only 'by their teachings,' which were handed down by their (pro-government) followers.

In addition, control of their relics is an important form of social control. Only men of equivalent purity are believed able to determine whether monks are true saints, which means the populace must wait until after their deaths and watch their relics for special signs. If the monks are truly saints, their relics will turn into sand and then into crystal and they will have magical protective properties for those who wear them. Men who control the relics thus control the prestige of their followers; they control stories of the relics and, posthumously, their and their followes' claims to sanctity.

Acaan Fan's cremation in particular led to a "tug-of-war" of merit. The king sponsored the ceremony (appropriating the most auspicious relics), leaving provincial officials, local followers, and worshippers from Bangkok to struggle over the rest.

The events of the 1960s thus left the king, the military, and the "economists" to divide major revelatory and interpretive functions among themselves--especially those pertaining to the morality of lay affairs.

In 1968 the interpretive situation in the kingdom was still fluid, however. Like Field Marshal Praphat, the majority of the populace probably felt that 'economics,' like 'democracy,' was a largely untested method of purifying the polity: it could quickly become inappropriate as social and cosmic conditions shifted. The king's role as the

²⁴Although major military figures claimed to have known Pin since the late 1940s, they did not hear of Acaan Man and other Thammayut meditation monks until the 1970s.

interpretor of the law was as yet undefined.

The End of an Era: 1968

The year 1968 marked the end of an era. The new ritual structure, like the new infrastructure, was tentatively in place; the elite had only to capitalize on it to enhance their quest for merit--and new markets--in Isan. The first period of intensive, U.S.-backed development projects ended with a rash of corruption charges, and Thanom and Praphat suddenly found themselves on the defensive.

In 1968, to "divert the attention of the public from social and political problems" (Thak 1979:344), the Thanom government announced that the Constitutional Assembly had produced a satisfactory constitution "after deliberating for ten years." It was signed by the king with great pomp and ceremony. That same year the government pulled the royal barges out of storage and bankrolled a splendid river kathin ceremony, trying once again to latch on to the royal virtue.

As the procession moved down the river to Wat Arun, The Temple of the Dawn, the king's barge was flanked by those holding members of the Thai police, military, and powerful ministries. None of his relatives played a major role. The prows of the boats were carved in the shape of characters from the Ramayana, the mythical beasts who followed King Rama into battle. The Tourist Organization promoted the event and American service and diplomatic personnel were encouraged to attend.

After the elections, the government party obtained a majority of seats in the lower house. Thanom was once again appointed prime minister. His party devoted its energy to creating slogans about 'democracy,' Thai-style. A totalitarian government's emphasis on democracy only increased the perception that there was a great gap

between the names of things and the way they actually were. Dosa, illusion, was proliferating throughout the land.

By 1969 corruption charges against the Thanom government had reached epic proportions. Several powerful business cliques had profited from the "free enterprise" system of the 1960s and they fully intended to continue doing so into the 1970s. Inflation had set in by the end of the decade, however, and the most aggressive of these cliques began competing openly against each other, accusing their rivals of corruption. The king himself reportedly became uneasy over the level of corruption in the government (Girling 1981:141).

The revival of the river kathin was not enough to solve the legitimacy problems of Thanom and Praphat. Eventually the king's unease over the activities of his loyal servants and the end of the economic boom ushered in a new interpretive era: The influence of powerful military leaders began to decline in favor of that of a strong and suddenly wealthy monarch. The king, too, had benefited from the commercial expansion of the 1960s, but secretly, because the secrecy of his business transactions was protected by the military.

Like the story of the kathin robes, the story of the king's wealth had some missing parts. Like the kathin robes, it just appeared out of the blue. In 1955 the king could not leave the capital without government funds and without obtaining Luang Phibun's permission. By 1968 he was a multi-millionaire, but no one dared discuss the source of his newfound wealth, including major business publiciations. This would have been impropriety, 'speaking of royal things.'

One result of the Sarit style of government--and Sarit's division of interpretive labour--was that government leaders and their economists became responsible for the ordering of the Thai 'economy.' It was their

duty, not the king's, to introduce specific methods of ordering commercial affairs, to prescribe a limited 'economic' code of conduct. Their barami rather than the king's became linked to the fluctuations of the world market--with disastrous results. The king, 'above politics,' was but a disinterested observer of the effects of the inflation and recession that occurred from 1968 to 1975.

After sixty years in which the Thai monarchy was in decline, subject to constant threat from the nation's generals, King Rama IX regained control of the most important of the royal prerogatives, the interpretive prerogatives. In the next section of the dissertation I will discuss exactly what he did with those prerogatives.

PART V

THE DESTINY OF THE KING

The great king . . . marched around the town, his right side
turned towards it, thus making it known that the realm of
Lanka bereft of its king had again a king. (Culavamsa II:256)

CHAPTER 16

CAPITALISM AND THE ROYAL VIRTUE: 1968-1976

The mental and material
Are twins and each supports the other
When one breaks up they both break up
Through interconditionality.

Formations are all impermanent:
When he see thus with understanding
And turns away from what is ill,
That is the path to purity.
(Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification)

Introduction

In 1968 King Bhumibol began to claim his kingdom. After twenty years of near obscurity or domination by powerful military figures, he began to address his subjects on a regular basis and to assume the revelatory functions of the Dhammaraja. He scrutinized the effects of capitalist development and, as Buddhaghosa recommended, "turned away from what was ill," advising his subjects to do likewise. At the same time he began to take a dominant role in introducing and shaping capitalist practices.

The king's interpretation of the effects of capitalist development as signs of cosmic decline set the stage for Thanom and Praphat's fall from power. Even while rejecting the immorality of capitalist practices, however, and the most fundamental precepts of free market capitalism, he shaped the future course of capitalist expansion: through his official and 'special' royal work and by the way he prescribed the dharma, the na thi or 'duty' of his subjects. The king began to equate 'work' [ngan] with religiosity and one almost received the impression that hard work would generate the same happy states that men experienced when they gazed upon the sacred traces of the Buddha or performed rituals of purification.

Girling (1981) writes that the king became uncomfortable with the level of corruption in the Thanom government in the early 1970s. I argue that the king, through his exercise of royal interpretive prerogatives, actively contributed to their downfall, but one must appreciate the religious and cosmological allusions in the royal addresses to realize how this occurred.

In the first half of the chapter I outline fundamental factors in the rise of the monarchy and highlight cosmological themes that are relevant to an understanding of the royal addresses. I then present excerpts from the addresses from 1969 to 1971 in support of the above argument. In the second half of the chapter I will demonstrate how the king took on a unique and dominant role in promoting capitalist development by reshaping the royal activities, thereby absorbing new industrial and agricultural practices into the ritual cycle and the mythic past.

Factors in the Rise of the Monarchy

Several factors contributed to the king's rise to prominence in the early 1970s.

1. Inflation disturbed the national economy, creating hardship for Thai farmers and loosening Thanom and Praphat's moral hold on the populace;
2. After ten years of faultless public conduct, the king had achieved a state of ritual purity;
3. He had a stable financial base; and
4. He had begun to cultivate a large peasant constituency. Those 'hot-hearted' beings could, and eventually did, rise up in his defense, remaining eternally vigilant lest liberal academicians or even powerful military leaders should show insufficient respect for the crown.

5. There was growing public sentiment against military coups; no single military leader could stay in power long enough to challenge the king's assumption of ancient royal prerogatives;.
6. The Thai nobility was powerless;
7. After ten years of Sangha reform, no single monk was powerful enough to challenge the king's interpretive exercises.

Since religious purity and the ability to interpret the cosmos were not egalitarian phenomena, the king was left as the most pure layperson in the kingdom. He best of all men was qualified to examine the kammic structure of events and to prescribe new principles of order. After ten years of remaining 'above politics,' ten years in which the military protected the secrecy of his business investments, the king was full of merit and dissociated from the most controversial of the government's government development projects. He had perfected the practice of sila or morality to the point where he was detached from social process, and could observe it in a penetrating and disinterested manner (cf. Weber 1967).

The Structure of the Royal Addresses

. . . the essence of the law was the king himself. The law was a justification of kingship, and the king was the interpreter and creator of law, limited only by the moral constraints enumerated in the thammasat and by the belief that the rules of thamma would eventually work their retribution upon unjust acts. (David Engel, Law in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn)

The rhetorical style of the royal addresses was traditional: It was based on kammic models of causality, on the popular maxim 'Do good, receive good.' The subject matter was non-traditional, however: economics. The king portrayed pure capitalist practices (like pure Buddhist rituals) as consisting of right principles, right methods, right materials and, above all, of right intentions or ideas.

One of the meanings of dhamma is practice, and 'meaning,' morality and practice are synonymous in the Thai cultural tradition. A new vocabulary crept into the royal addresses, words like "capitalists," "infrastructure," "exploitation," and even "feudalism." The king either assigned new names to old practices (e.g. "feudalism"), or new 'meanings' (i.e., codes of conduct) to terms borrowed from the West (e.g., "infrastructural development").

One sign of cosmic decline is that the 'true' meaning of things, the nature of one's duty or dhamma, the mode of behavior that is appropriate to one's station (Inden 1976), 'fades' [sia], becoming lost or unclear. The king's initial challenge to his ministers thus took the form of a glossing attack: He began searching for the 'true meaning' of development. The glossing war played on antinomy issues; when the military was in power, the true meaning of things oftentimes concerned 'democratic' practice, but when a democratic government was in power, it oftentimes related to the restoration of order.

One of the most important transformations in royal traditions in this period occurred in the tradition of law-making. In the nineteenth century the king was responsible for making civil law; he was morally responsible for its outcome. A body of king-made laws called the rachasat complemented a body of permanent law called the thammasat, a Buddhist version of the Hindu Code of Manu (Engel 1975:4-6). Royal edicts were formally incorporated into the thammasat if and only if they withstood the test of time, (i.e., if they had permanent, beneficial effects on the populace).

Thanom and Praphat practiced the "Sarit style" of leadership insofar as it concerned the division of interpretive labour between themselves and the king. They (or the parliament) formulated specific political

principles in the form of the civil law, kotmai, while the king articulated the transcendent moral principles, lak tham or 'pillars of dhamma,' that should guide the kingdom.

Given the instability of Thai governments, however, I suggest that, in the 1960s and 1970s, civil law took on a status similar to that of the rachasat of the nineteenth century, ie., that of temporary edicts. In 1969, King Bhumibol, assuming the role of the Dhammaraja, the interpreter of the law, in serious, began to scrutinize civil law to determine if it genuinely conformed to the dhamma and enhanced the well-being of his subjects. Since many of these laws concerned land ownership and new types of labour relations, and since, after scrutinizing these laws and determining their effects on the populace, the king often turned away from 'what was ill,' the royal observations stood as an implicit condemnation of the morality of capitalist practices. By 1968, the Sarit strategy had backfired. The military, not the monarchy, was morally responsible for the effects of the laws governing behavior in worldly domains.

Capitalism and Cosmology: The Semiotic Inversion

There are several ironies attached to the king's rise to power in the 1970s stemming from negative affinities between Buddhist cosmology, the history of capitalist development in Thailand, and the Theravada Buddhist semiotic tradition as it evolved in Thailand in the last twenty years.

When the cosmos declines, the difference between appearance and reality increases. The connection between events and their causes becomes progressively more obscure and the material face of events has to be carefully analyzed before events can be understood in their

entirety. In very bad times a semiotic inversion occurs; the material shape of events not only differs from underlying realities, it masks an opposite reality. The apparently virtuous activities of men disguise evil hearts.

This state of moral decline is signified by ritual contamination, widespread abuse of religious practice, and the decline of the civil law. In times of great trouble, only a great world renouncer can restore order by analyzing the causal sources of suffering and prescribing appropriate, and radical, social remedies. The inflationary period of the late 1960s, characterized as it was by the clandestine business activities of government officials, played straight into this paradigm as did the actualities of the (secret) American military presence in mainland Southeast Asia.

The inversion of the semiotic order calls for an inversion of the social order; subordinates must question their superiors and followers must become leaders. Only drastic changes will halt the downward spiral of social practice, which is precisely what the king recommended in his addresses of 1969 and 1970.

Capitalism and Cosmic Decline: The Royal Addresses of 1969

The years from 1969 to 1971 were a 'democratic' period; the nation was ruled by a military-dominated parliament. The United States began to question its commitment to the Vietnam War and possibly to the security of Thailand, all the while remaining directly involved in "development projects with security aspects"¹ on Thailand's north and northeastern borders. Sarit's generals began to quarrel over the fruits of development and the business boom of the 1960s began to draw to a

¹AID's budgetary category for military-related expenditures.

close. This was when the king first began to notice signs of cosmic decline.

When the king spoke to students at Chulalongkorn University on Law Day in March 1969,² he began a fullscale renunciation of the capitalist practices and ideologies adopted so enthusiastically from Americans a decade earlier. This and subsequent addresses were full of subtle allusions to decline: knowledge that was improper or incomplete, tasks not fully comprehended or completed, a government that could not correctly formulate and communicate law to its people. The king spoke of ruse and deceit, dirt, disorder, and moral blindness.

He began his speech by advising students that "Law and reality [khwan pen yu, 'what really exists'] may differ, and there are no small number of loopholes [chong wai]³ in the law." The problem was that "we have reformed our administrative systems on the basis of principles of foreign countries, without any regard for the way of life of the people"

To illustrate his point, he spoke of an incident in Prachuap Khiri Kahn. Violence broke out when villagers migrated to a forest that had been reserved by the "government"--apparently without anyone knowing about it. As the king related the incident,

. . . the authorities came upon a village whose inhabitants had originally moved over from Nakhon Si Thammarat and settled near the perimeter of or, in fact, intruded into the reserved forest.

These people lived and earned their living in peace, having their own self-rule without any record of crimes. They would have been considered democratic but for the lack of a district officers and officials, and, in fact, they were more

²The following addresses are from Royal Addresses and Speeches, printed by Prime Minister Kukrit Pramote's office in 1975. The volume contains only four speeches from 1960 to 1967. The bulk of the addresses are from 1969 onward.

³E.g., it is 'imperfect' or 'incomplete.'

democratic without than with a district officer. Anyhow, without these, they were not considered democratic but apparently taken as offenders verging on communist terrorists.

We have no wish whatsoever to have communist terrorists in Thailand, but we ourselves have created them by accusing villagers who were governing themselves well in an orderly and democratic fashion of being trespassers of the reserved forest and by driving them out. (1975:13)

After two decades in which the size of the Thai military budget varied directly in relation to the number of "communists" Thai military leaders discovered in the forests, not even a Righteous Ruler could tell true from false communists.

If the laws passed by the Thanom government were false and confusing, how could the people be expected to obey them?

These people from Nakhon Si Thammarat had worked hard and well for so many years and never destroyed any forest, but as the law happens to ordain that nobody can trespass on reserved forests, they found themselves in trouble. Reserved forests are drawn up on maps, regardless of whether they are accessible to officials who, in most cases, never get there. So how can the people know that they are living in reserved forests? Then treating them as simple villagers, we oppressively demand that they must know the law. But such a law, like a line drawn up at will, is no true law. It is law because the Reserved Forest Act is a law, but which cannot possibly be known to them since the administrative authorities never apprised them of it. (1975:13)

Perhaps a great king was needed?

In ancient times, [the king's men] beat drums to call people together in order to make announcements, and the same is true even now in some parts of the country as is told in the famous folk song about Phuyai (Headman) Lee.⁴ But in this case there was no Phuyai Lee to beat the drum. The law was simply proclaimed routinely for a very short time and could hardly be considered as having taken full effect. (1975:14)

Who was to blame for this problem (what was its causal root)?

. . . it is not a matter of blaming the people for not knowing the law. People ought to know the law, but the administration is so ineffective that they really do not. That is why there have been clashes between people and legal authorities (1975:14).

⁴This may refer to King Lithai, the generic name given to the kings of the Sukhothai kingdom.

The king expounded on the 'essence of democracy' to students in the same way he expounded on the essence of dhamma [nama] to members of the Buddhist Association of Thailand. He counseled students to be guided by the principle of "reasonableness" [pho somkhuan, literally, acting 'just enough to be proper']). "In the legal and administrative fields, 'reasonable' assumes importance" he said.

If we are to govern and help achieve law and order in this country, we cannot afford to observe the law to the letters Think in terms of your own personal responsibilities and not your official ones which are coloured by bureaucratic strait-jackets of chain of command, superiors, subordinates and the rest. (1975:14-15)

Students should rely on their own judgement (instead of the government's) in deciding how to educate hill tribesmen. "You should speak to them as adult Thai's so that our country may attain true democracy according to the dictates of the minds and hearts of the people, and not of the letters of any text" (1975:15).

The Dhammaraja Comes of Age: April 1969

In April the king asked "Youths from Twenty Provinces" to consider the true meaning of the loyalty oath to the nation: the pledge "to do your utmost to develop the nation" (1975:16). He began to assert his position as interpreter of the law by making a distinction between the 'apparent' versus the 'true' moral order.

He advised students to stop and think before doing their (apparent) duty to the nation.

There are many ways and means to promote national progress and security when there is a task to attend to, please pause to consider first. To consider means to find out what the task involves and what you are told to do, and then use your own thought or reasoning. There must be a reason for everything, and what you are told to do must be backed by reason. (1975:15)

Like a meditation master leading his students along the path of purification, the king told his subjects exactly how to think, or "reason" as the English translation goes.

Consideration here means thinking or reasoning, if you like. For instance, when we learn or hear that the country will advance if we help to develop it, we then have to consider what all this means. We must ponder the meaning of the terms used. What, for example, is advancement? (1975:16)

He asked the students what they learned from seeing the capital, then gave the following account of the organization of the modern Thai state.

" . . . everyone has seen that the State has to take on multifarious undertakings," he explained.

On the one part, there is industrial development--the manufacture of goods for us to consume and to sell for money with which to finance national progress. You have also seen the various types of armaments . . . war-ships and installations of the Armed Forces

Dangerous ideas (wrong views), not weapons, were the most serious threat to the nation's security. Armaments are necessary because "there are enemies from outside who are not Thai and bent on committing aggression against us." The means of aggression were many, but deceptive ideas--"propaganda under the banner of independence, freedom and liberaton of the country"--were the worst. Propaganda was a point that deserved special attention, "for we may otherwise be duped by such propaganda and hence fall into the hands of others by sheer emasculation due to internecine fighting" (1975:17).

Hard 'work' [ngan] was the major theme of this and other benedictions in the royal addresses.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the officials for their hard work in helping to bring up the youths to be good citizens of the country and therefore to ensure the security, progress and invincibility of our nation. May every official and youth here assembled be blessed with progress, fine mind and diligence for the sake of solidarity and a bright future of our nation May . . . all join in working for our national progress and prosperity. (1975:17-18)

The Forest Transformed

In June the king addressed a team of doctors in mobile medical units working under the supervision of the Accelerated Rural Development Program. After nine years of development, the symbolic values of the forest had changed.

In Buddhist mythic traditions, the forest is the place where virtuous monks go to endure hardship and to demonstrate their religious purity. The forest is full of danger, which traditionally takes the form of wild animals and fierce demons (Phra Maha Boowa 1976a-b).

In 1969 the forests of the north and northeast had become battlegrounds for government forces and communist insurgents--or perhaps angry villagers driven off their land. These areas contained valuable timberland as well as rebels or squatters, and thus were primary targets of both development and security programs.

In 1969, King Bhumibol began to refer the forest as the place where renunciatory civil servants should go to practice austerities, to perform personal sacrifice on behalf of the nation. These new symbolic values deflected attention away from that most vexatious of antinomy issues: If the nation's tax base had expanded along with the economy, why was there no money to pay the salaries of these volunteers?

The king noted that

. . . for doctors to go on field trips in the cause of charity, community development and co-operation with the defenders of the country is a most progressive activity. It is often said that Thailand is backward and that doctors working in the rural areas have to make a lot of sacrifice Instead of working as hospital doctors after graduation as was customary in the past they now have to go farther afield and may experience more physical exhaustion or confront various obstacles in their path. Besides, to go upcountry involves some risk which may cause them physical harm. The subjection to physical exhaustion, the running of risks and the encountering of obstacles and difficulties in the way of living all make up a round of activities benefitting good doctors, good men and good patriots.

Unlike traditional formulations in which the purpose of 'sacrifice' [boricak] was the attainment of a better rebirth situation in the next life, the king said the purpose of this type of sacrifice was to 'devise a modern way of working' so

there will be hope for progress and for warding off the danger from infiltration I should like you to research and study the best way to work. The future progress of the nation depends on firm action which must be pursued with determination, honesty and impartiality, even though it may deviate from the known approach or text-books or certain bureaucratic procedures. I wish everyone good health in the mind and body. May you all be blessed with strength and safety. (1975:22)

In a somewhat bizarre manner, "hard work" had assumed the properties of amulets and merit ceremonies; it would ward off evil. If performed with correct methods and pure intentions, it would protect men against danger and generate the four benefits of merit.

This ideological twist led to a new round of antinomy problems. It was one thing to represent civic duty as a voluntary act of merit on behalf of the nation when the nation's leaders were themselves exemplars of this principle, it was another to endure hardship without recompensation because Thai officials were draining state funds to finance their private business ventures. Or was this their right as the new lords of the land?

From Whence Cometh Chaos at the Borders?: June 1969

In a June speech to the "businessmen of Chonburi" (notorious for the rapacity of their business practices), the king analyzed the root causes of the insurgency problem--after first thanking his audience for their contributions to the royal charities.

The insurgency problem has originated from several fundamental causes. Firstly, foreign elements cross the border into Thailand with a view to subjugating our fertile and hospitable land. Secondly, they incite the people into thinking that they must fight for freedom and economic liberty. This,

however, may be partly true since many in Thailand are poor; thus the propaganda is widely believed, leading to disturbances and agitation. Thirdly, if justice is not dispensed throughout the land, disorder will prevail. Many are driven into becoming insurgents by force of circumstances Your donation testifies as to your understanding of the insurgency problem . . . Troops we can fight, for we are a nation of warriors; but insurgency which is of our own making is much more difficult to defeat. (1975:23).

For the king to suggest that the businessmen of Chon Buri were responsible for their own insurgency problem would have been to imply that he was attracting donations from men of evil character. Nevertheless, the situation was becoming so serious that he issued a warning to these businessmen (and to their silent business partners, Thai bureaucrats).

It is up to officials in rural areas to perform their duty with caution, justice, conscientiousness and greater sacrifice. Otherwise we shall have to concede victory to the insurgents I ask you to spread the message among colleagues and subordinates that we must act now or it will be too late. (1975:24)

The Ill Effects of Infrastructural Development: June 1969

A week later, the king addressed a group of ARD officers. In this speech, one of the longest of the royal addresses, he examined the kammic consequences of road building into the Northeast.

A foreigner familiar with conditions in the rural North-east had once remarked to Me that it would have been better not to build the roads, for instead of engendering progress these roads have served as the conduits to suck the people out, resulting in the prevalence of terrorism. These remarks may seem incredible, because it is hard to believe that benefits cannot be derived from the construction of roads which should enable us to get to the villagers to help them get their products to the market at more favorable price. This may well be true, but there is one important point which, if we fail to attend to forthwith, may really spell disaster.

The royal eyes did not observe the flowering of virtue, they observed the proliferation of suffering.

I have seen with my own eyes in Prachuap Khiri Khan and Phetchaburi where, true enough the roads built enabled the

villagers in the vicinity to dispose of their products more profitably, but at the same time an element of trouble also crept in. This took the form of influential, wealthy people who may be on the side of the terrorists, who stepped in to buy up the adjoining lands at prices satisfactory to the villagers. It then turned out that villagers were finally presented with two alternatives, either to hire themselves out as daily labour to the capitalists--a backward move, or to wander off with the money gained from the sale of lands and recede further into the jungle for new land to cultivate with little or no real prospect of making good while the money dwindled and life became more distressing

Speaking of a visit he made to Karen tribesmen in the North, the king deduced the causal chain that led to "terrorist attacks" in the region. The government had driven farmers off the land because they feared they would become "tools of the terrorists." The farmers settled in a village built by Police Paratroopers and the Highways Department, where they became wage labourers. Then the trouble began. While not precisely condemning the government's practice of driving farmers off their land, the king pointed out its evil consequences. "Let it be known, the remuneration was not monetary payment but in kind, in the form of moonshine (illicit) liquors and every material encouragement to gambling and other vices," he said. As a result, "the reserved forest at the headwater of the Pran river may be turned into a battle-field which may have to be razed by sweeping bombings against terrorists as advocated by some Such then are the disturbing and far-reaching consequences" of the actions of the police (1975:27).

Perhaps the use of wrong implements (Western technology) was the cause of the problem?

Let me turn to the proposition that the provision of infra-structure like road-building or irrigation may have adverse effects. Now, speaking about the Karens brings to mind the objection I raised against such infra-structure [a plan to build a road into the hill area so tractors could be used to clear the land] . . . If the road was not built, then the U.S. military should be asked to use helicopters to lift and transport them there to clear the terrain, but again I posed an objection out of the knowledge that the Karens are

not familiar with tractors which, if brought in and while doing some good work, may make them marvel at the efficacy so much that they will not do any work with their own hands.

Getting the Karens to Work

The king had no objection to his lesser subjects performing difficult physical labour. In his role as father to the people, he even suggested how they should work and what tools they should use. He also suggested that their poverty was a function of their unwillingness to work hard, a Protestant as opposed to a Buddhist explanation of suffering (that they had performed evil deeds in the past).

On my trips to the La-oo forest, I took along and gave spades and pick-axes to the Karens to acquaint them first with the use of their hands and such implements. Of course, under the accelerated development programme, there are projects which call for the use of modern labour-saving devices, but don't think that spades and pick-axes are obsolete, because not everyone can have tractors, except capitalists who have no regard for common villagers anyhow These villagers--also Karens--have such a view of progress and development: if the officials want them to develop and catch up with modernization, then tractors must be given them.

Was laziness an act of demerit, on par with the breaking of the five precepts of Buddhism?

I went to see their farmlands, and told them I had some doubt and reservations and wondered whether they could not become a little less poor if they have the mind to weed out the grass. I got it across to them that they could not do away with the grass not because they were poor but because they were too lazy to go out on to the plots and root out the grass.

The Laws of Capitalism Versus the Laws of Morality

The king questioned the morality of land ownership--or perhaps the methods used to obtain land. New methods of obtaining land did not violate civil law, but they violated fundamental moral laws. "The capitalists are armed with legally valid documents which have been issued by the authorities without any humanitarian consideration for the

fact that the lands had been occupied for at least a few generations," he said in a discussion of reserved forests. These forests

were originally forests with trees and animals and there are certain rules under the law regulating their exploitation. But the law is silent on human beings who are in the forest. It does not say how or what to do with people who have inhabited the forests without any knowledge of the protection law Once a reserved forest is opened up, the newcomers come in driving off the previous occupants, sometimes rather brutally, giving rise possibly to terrorism (1975:28)

The king was not pleased with his government or with the attitudes of its workers.

I have suggested to the provincial authorities from the governor down to district officer and the police that the weight of real humanitarian consideration together with the precepts of human kindness and of acting really for the common good should be brought to bear and to resist the application of the law in support of oppressors of the people. (1975:28)

Wrong attitudes may have been one cause of disorder, but the use of wrong implements was clearly another.

The most important question concerning rural development, however, is to do with tools. It is all right if these tools--and there is a vast quantity of them . . .--are applied correctly according to the rules and properly in accordance with humanitarian principles. But sometimes, because accelerated development is still an innovation and a "trail-blazer", the rules are not so clear and there may be errors in their application.

Almost every aspect of rural development was wrong. It was like a totally impure ritual, characterized by wrong principles, wrong methods, wrong implements and even evil intentions.

Errors or breaches of rules and regulations, if motivated by good intentions, are fair enough, but they become more serious if, as sometimes alleged they are committed through ignorance, for executors of projects under the accelerated development programme are supposed to be proficient and expert and cannot be that ignorant

The king then administered the interpretive coup de grace.

Another important requirement [for rural development] is honest intention Mistakes or errors, if committed with honest intentions, can be passed over, but if they are

not, may mean treason He who causes its failure must be a traitor. This may sound too harsh and too strong, but it is within reason, because . . . any chance opening provided for terrorists or infiltrators to make headway is an offence committed against the nation. And, more important still, if we can erect a fence to ward off these vicious encroachments by means of the development of human and material resources so that peace and contentment shall prevail, we shall never see our country slip to its downfall.

Rural development required the same moral qualities as progress on the path of purification.

Rural development is thus an important and difficult task, requiring for its fulfillment a high degree of ability, wisdom and intelligence coupled with honesty without any thought for financial gains. Anyone who wants to make money had better resign and go into business.

The speech ends with a truly interesting benediction:

May all of you be blessed with physical and moral courage and strong enough for sacrifices and against all forms and manners of subversion which insinuates itself not through the barrel of a gun or the door of a death camp but in the mind of each.

As for the people who asked why they did not gain anything after such hard work (i.e., if work really was a Buddhist virtue, why had it not produced the appropriate kammic benefits?):

You certainly will gain something, and that is security of the nation I wish you all the strength in the mind and body so as to be able to discharge your important task in harmony with great wisdom. (1975:29)

The True Meaning of Development: October 1969

In October 1969 the king took interpretive aim at military-dominated political parties. He asked a delegation of youths and government officials to consider the true meaning of development.

Naturally, everyone wants to develop, and it is precisely because of this that adverse effects may be caused, for there are some who do not aim at real progress or those on the other side may resort to the use of the term "development" as well. Only clever and discerning people will be able to distinguish between those who really want to bring about development and those who want to do it for the devious benefits of their own party

He encouraged his subjects to speak up against the government, at the same time somewhat hastily retracting his previous criticisms of the nation's top development agencies. At the beginning of the speech he notes that

. . . the Accelerated Rural Development Office, the Community Development Department, the National Security Command, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Police, which are engaged in development work, all are imbued with the good intention to further our national security and thus tried to reach the people with a view to promoting peace. (1975:34)

This emendation aside, he then recommended that men disregard the authority of the existing hierarchical order.

It is the duty of people to help and to know who is really for development and who is going to dupe them The government agencies, no doubt, have no wish for a conflict among themselves or to subvert us It is no use to keep mum on what may have erroneously been learnt. When in doubt, ask questions so as to perfect one's knowledge. Silence in such a case may, on the other hand, make one feel doubtful and uneasy and result in some act detrimental to oneself, to the community and to the nation. To exchange views will help to dispel doubt. Should it turn out that the cause of our doubt is a point on which we have been misinformed, the government officials will have to admit it and the authorities will have to resolve it. (1975:35)

This was the last speech of 1969 and the wheel of the law had come full circle. In 1932, Phya Phahon's coup group pointed to (i.e., 'observed') the signs of cosmic decline, the effects of the world depression; these signs signified the decline of the royal virtue. King Prajathipok had promised to help his people and he had failed to keep that promise. In 1969 King Bhumibol played the same role vis-à-vis Thanom and Praphat. They had promised that development (and the American presence) would bring prosperity and harmony to the people and they had failed to keep that promise.

In 1970 the king signalled his rise in the celestial hierarchy in yet another way by discussing the essence [nama] of religion, its most

fundamental and invisible aspects, with the Buddhist Association of Thailand.

The Essence of Religion: November 1970

The king's November speech to the Buddhist Association opened with a subtle bit of hierarchical interplay since he was in the presence of the elders [theras] of the Sangha. "I will have to pass by the request of your President to give instructions to those who are acknowledged to be learned and in the presence of Maha Theras," he said, "because I feel that the teaching of Buddhism is intended to benefit the people as a whole." He transcended the original topic, the propagation of the dhamma among youth, in favour of a more encompassing one, the 'whole meaning' of religion.

The king defined the 'true meaning' of religion in his speech, and in so doing, reinforced the traditional linkage between religious purity and knowledge of the truth, the key to the Thai elite's control of language and of the interpretive process. He equated Buddhism with truth, "not divinity," because Buddhism

does not come within the term of Religion [as defined in Western societies, "divine teachings handed down from above"], because the substance, the essence and the principle of Buddhism were born out of the quest for the truth of life through the human intellect. If the question is asked: what, then, is the Buddhist Religion? It must be answered that in its essence Buddhism deals with the truth of life.

Buddhism, rationality, and science were synonymous: "Buddhism is a philosophy because of its method of teaching that is based upon the principle of rationality," he explained. "Buddhism is knowledge or, to be more precise, it is scientific knowledge."

The king discussed the proper way to teach Buddhism--the duty of Buddhist monks--and in so doing reaffirmed the fundamental principles of

hierarchy: each person has a different capacity for understanding the truth.

Your duty in spreading the Dhamma depends upon your choice of the subject matter and your decision upon the correct method of teaching. The use of the right words and the explanation of the right principles in comparison with things as they really are, until they are clearly seen according to the mental condition of the modern man, will help each person to discover and to understand the righteous way so that he can follow it according to his own station in life. (1975:47)

Capitalism and Cosmology: Hidden Realities

The hidden realities of the 1960s reinforced the king's observations of cosmic decline. Many American military and intelligence operations in Southeast Asia were clandestine. The American presence gave rise to improbable rumours: of secret airbases in Thailand,⁵ of secret bombings in Cambodia (Shawcross), of CIA involvement in the heroin trade in Vietnam (McCoy 1972), of clandestine American support of pro-American Thai generals, and of American involvement in coups and coup attempts in Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia--all vehemently denied by the U.S. government. The CIA gained mythic status as the invisible 'third hand' in Thai politics and as the hidden dynamic of the violent events of the decade: coups and assassinations. The war brought great suffering to many Thai soldiers, who became strong supporters of the meditation monks of the Northeast.

Thai generals and politicians formed secret business alliances with American corporations during the 1960s. Although American military and business interests played an important role in shaping Thai foreign and economic policy, this, too, was categorically denied by the leaders of both governments.

⁵At least six were in eastern Thailand and there was another major network in the Northeast (Kahin and Lewis 1967:193-194,317-318).

Like the secret financial transactions of Sarit, the secret business deals of the Thanom's and Praphat's (personal) cliques were eventually exposed by their rivals, beginning in the 'democratic' period in 1969. The revelation of their secret financial dealings plus the fluctuations of the international market--the beginning of an inflationary phase--merely confirmed the accuracy of the king's observations of decline.

The cyclical timing of corruption charges, the patterns of concealment and sudden exposure that regulate the life of the Thai business community, also confirmed mythic paradigms, an indigenous-Buddhist theory of events. According to the law of kamma, events will gradually turn themselves "inside out"; their original causes, the hidden intentions of their perpetrators, will eventually be exposed through a series of material consequences. Like the Hindu King Yayati, apparently virtuous Thai leaders with hidden, fatal flaws could find themselves plunged from the highest to the lowest levels of the celestial realms, or, worse yet, to the earth or even to exile in America.

Thanom Restores Order: November 1971

Thanom had his own means of creating order. The army seized power and dissolved the parliament in November 1971. Thanom's explanation of the coup was that the current world situation and the increasing threat to the nation's security required prompt action, which was "not possible through due process of law under the present constitution" (Girling 1981:115). Cosmic conditions were changing rapidly, which meant that civil laws had to change just as rapidly.

The next two years saw a groundswell of protest against the new Thanom regime. Meanwhile the king continued to pursue his special royal work in ways that emphasized the traditional connection between the virtue of a great Buddhist king and fertility, resplendence in the cosmic order.

The Lord of the Land: 1972-1973

. . . prime importance has always been given by Their Majesties to the visits which They have regularly paid to people in all parts of the country. These visits are intended to allow Their Majesties to become acquainted at first hand with the conditions and problems of the people in all corners of the Realm and there is thus absolutely no limit as to their coverage The gist of each visit . . . is always the close questioning by Their Majesties of all the local people in attendance concerning their welfare and particular problems with a view to find the best ways to improve their standard of living. (Introduction, The Royal Addresses)

A second major transformation in royal traditions occurred from 1969 to 1975 and beyond: The king consolidated his position as the initiator [khon riroem] and perfecter of development by altering the tradition of royal intrakingdom pilgrimages. He began inspecting new agricultural and industrial projects as part of his annual 'circle' of ritual activities. By the mid-1970s, the major purpose of the king's rotations around the kingdom was no longer to venerate worthy monks and sacred objects, it was to inspect the nation's burgeoning industrial and agricultural projects.

By constantly observing the activities of the rajanacak, the realm of this-worldly affairs, the king gained unquestionable experience [prasopakan] and knowledge of the nation's economic situation. This knowledge kept him at the forefront of economic change and confirmed his powers of omniscience. The dominant message of the royal pilgrimages was the same as that presented in the royal rituals: physical labour on behalf of the nation is meritorious activity.

The Creation of the New Order: Capitalism as Realized Morality

The organization of time and the group in accordance with mythical structures leads collective practices to appear as "realized myth," in the sense in which for Hegel tradition is "realized morality" (Pierre Bourdieu, A Theory of Practice)

In 1973 the Grand Palace published a large volume detailing the royal activities for 1972-1973.⁶ This volume contains pictures of the king overseeing the casting of a Buddha statue, offering alms to monks, and performing the annual kathin ceremony. He accepts a generator for a canned food factory from the German-Thai Association. As the seasons changed, he also inspected tractors, power plants, and new types of industrial equipment, and accompanied his family to inspect a sausage factory.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, the king's ritual activities have the aura of "realized myth," and they also have the aura of "realized morality." His ritual circumambulation of his kingdom assigned what Bourdieu calls "a tempo and a duration within the ritual calendar" to new and alien types of social practice. As Bourdieu also notes, one reason why society so rigorously demands submissions to the collective rhythms is that "the temporal forms or the spatial structures structure not only the group's representation of the world but the group itself, which orders itself in accordance with this representation" (1977:163).

Beginning in the late 1960s, the activities of the king and members of the royal family drew U.S.- and World Bank-sponsored development projects into the ancient ritual cycle. Once these projects were identified with the barami of a Righteous Ruler, they became 'natural' events, thammachat, phenomena arising from dhamma.' New practices thus

⁶Phrarachakaranyakit (1973).

became linked to the doxic or taken-for-granted aspects of Thai social life, and endowed with the sense of limits or the "sense of reality" that applies to ritual activities (1977:163-164).

Absorbed into the ritual cycle, they were absorbed into the indigenous kammic framework, into a moral and interpretive structure. They became part of the (ritual) system for assigning praise and blame--which was, by then, tightly controlled by the central government.

Ritual on the Eve of Revolution: 1972-1973

Those in search of help I would fain support by letting like a cloud overspreading the four quarters of the earth, a rich rain of gifts pour continually down upon them. (The Ruler Parakkama on the rebuilding of Pulatthinagara, Culavamsa II.8)

The following abbreviated account of the curious admixture of ritual and capitalist-oriented royal activities of 1972 and 1973 demonstrates exactly how the king sacralizes to new modes of production, and how he sacralizes the transition to new modes of production.

At the end of the Lenten season, in October 1972, for example, the king sprinkled holy water over members of the cast and crew of the historical drama, "The Great King Naresuan," and attended the bathing rites for the late Princess Haemavaddee at Wat Benchamabopit. He also sprinkled holy water on the feet of a Buddha image before it was sent to a temple in the Republic of Singapore. That same day the queen was presented with produce grown on the farms of members of an experimental community project under royal patronage.

On the 21st of the month, the king and queen presided over the ceremony of Gold-Pouring to Cast a Buddha's Image sculptured by the Princess Mother at Wat Benchamabopit. On the 27th the king presented kathin robes at Wat Pathumvanaram and on the 29th he anointed the Thai

version of the Buddhist scriptures at Chitlada Villa. On the 6th of November he attended the opening ceremonies for a power station in Bangkok South and on the 13th he and the queen attended the kathin of their children at Wat Theprasit in Nakorn Phanom Province (in the Northeast). On the king 17th he attended a panel discussion on Thai Socialism at Thammasat University.

The royal activities emphasized traditional connections between fertility and kingship, between ritual and prosperity. In 1973, for example, the king personally awarded certificates of achievement to farmers who had produced the best harvests of the year. There was a twist to this ancient cosmological association, however, as royally-inspired fertility was also identified with the use of modern technology (and fertilizer). In October 1972 the king attended a demonstration of the making of artificial rain. In November of that same year he received a contribution from Chantaburi Province for the purchase of an airplane to be used in a royally-sponsored artificial rain-making project. In June of the following year he granted an audience to representatives of the Orchard Owners' Group of Chanthaburi Province: as the caption beneath the picture of this event notes, the growers presented "choice fruits from their orchards in gratitude for the artificial rain given to them" by the king.

The monarch also began promoting handicraft production as an expression of the 'cultural' and regional identities of his subjects--and then traveled around the countryside inspecting (i.e., sacralizing) these projects. The royal activities thus marked "the great classifications of Thai social life" in ways harmonious with the master plan for national development.

The Return of the Prince

In December 1972 the king presented a mid-day meal to the Supreme Patriarch on the occasion of the Royal Birthday Anniversary. That same month, a new round of succession dramas began. In December 1972 the king and queen welcomed their son home from his military studies in Australia, but there was a problem. The prince could not become a warrior without rousing the ire of the military and he certainly could not become a businessman. What was he to do?

Soon after his return, the crown prince and the king visited Khon Kaen Province. Both wore military uniforms, announcing the intended order of succession. On some expeditions the crown prince carried a gun, something the king never did. According to one rumour, the king objected to the practice because it exacerbated tensions with the military. According to another, it demonstrated the prince's lack of barami: If a prince is truly virtuous his subjects do not try to kill him.

On 28 December the Crown Prince participated in the ancient Brahmanic investiture ceremony. He took the Oath of Allegiance to his father and drank the Waters of Allegiance, attended by a man in the uniform of the court Brahman.

The King On the Eve of Democracy: 1972-1973

By 1972 the autocratic Thanom government was under attack from almost every group in the urban populace--students, shopkeepers, officials and teachers (Girling 1981:187ff.). Students began openly demonstrating against the U.S. military presence and corruption in the government.

Reynolds (1978:138, 141) and Girling (1981:188-189) have noted the king's apparent support of the students in the events preceding the

revolution of October 1973. I argue that his more significant support of students occurred several years earlier, in 1969. As the following excerpts from the royal addresses indicate, by 1972 and 1973 the king was already beginning to qualify that support by redefining the dhamma of his now vocal subjects.

The royal addresses of 1972 and 1973 sought to limit the use of language by students and the press--as part of the process by which the king assigned an appropriate dhamma to his subjects and as part of the royal interpretive-glossing activities. After three years of encouraging students to "bring the undiscussed into discussion" (to speak of the illicit business activities and abuses of high-ranking government officials), three years of broadening his definition of their 'duties' towards the nation, the king began reversing this process--perhaps lest they mistakenly receive the impression that 'democracy' endowed them with the rights to scrutinize the royal activities, and, in particular, the royal business activities. He began to "relimit the universe of possible discourse" (Bourdieu 1977:168-169) by assigning students and the press a limited dhamma. Having long since broken the military's stranglehold on the royal activities, the king no longer had to exhort students to disregard the "bureaucratic strait-jackets of chain of command, superiors, subordinates and the rest."

The Press Association of Thailand: July 1972

A free press is an inherently distasteful institution for a Dhammaraja, especially who seeks to maintain traditional principles of order. Primary amongst these is the principle that the great world renouncer, free of moral blemish, is exempt from public criticism.

In his address to the Committee of the Press Association of Thailand, the king was clearly uneasy at the prospect of his subjects looking too far beyond the appearance of things to their underlying realities. His response: Intention rather than principle is the major determinant of a positive kammic outcome to press activities. Furthermore and in accordance with traditional paradigms of purification, freedom of the press is not necessarily a principle of action that is appropriate to every cosmic era.

"They [western nations?] say that the Press is a force in the nation," he began. "If it is a force employed in the right direction, it will benefit the country, but if not in the right direction, it will adversely affect the country (1975:58)." He was not exactly sure how a free press might adversely affect the country.

It is rather difficult to specify what these evil ways are. However, on the whole, we can see that any act done with a constructive purpose is good, but that if it is constructive only for the benefit of certain individuals or some section of the nation without regard to possible damage to others, then it can be called a wrongful act. So with such force or power, the Press must exercise care and judgement and must have what is called sacrifices for the common good. (1975:59)

American customs should be adopted on a selective basis.

I have stressed the ideals of Press [sic], because I have seen cases of misguided and blind following examples set abroad. There they say that the Press must have power and can even seize power, and so we would say and try to do likewise. Such an idea is not quite correct. But if power is used in the right way and even though not in accordance with the foreign dictates, you should go ahead with it. Please think carefully and use reason. (1975:59)

Thammasat University: 1972

In 1972 the National Student Center of Thailand was at its most active. The Center was coordinating protests against the government and sending students to the countryside to educate Thai farmers about the

law. This meant that the government's more violent tactics for controlling rural markets were threatened with public exposure. And perhaps Thai farmers might even become disaffected with the Righteous Ruler, especially if the connections between the king's business and that of hated government officials were exposed.

In a 1972 speech at Thammasat University the king implied that students had wrongfully accepted "foreign theories" that an old order must be destroyed before a new one (based on ideals of free speech?) can take its place.

At present there seems to be a new theory that all things that have been formerly established must be abolished and destroyed by violent means so that something new may be initiated. It is an expression of intellect and creativeness on the part of the highly educated. This new theory originated abroad and has gained considerable influence . . . You should make special research into this theory, to find out whether the destruction of old established things for the sake of bringing about the new would lead to entirely good results Moreover, there seems to be no guarantee that the new things thus brought about will be good for certain.

Students should question the opinions of their teachers (the highly educated)? This was, after all, only a manifestation of democratic practice: "After due consideration, it is My view that real creativeness may be expressed only by peaceful means . . . allowing all sectors and all men to participate in the correction of things" (1975:60).

The Young Buddhist Association: October 1972

In October 1972 the king addressed the Young Buddhist Association of Thailand, commenting that "The decline of many religions can be attributed to its over-emphasis on ritual and miracles" (1975:64). His warning about the dangers of overemphasis on ritual was linked to themes that juxtaposed Buddhist and Western concepts of instrumentality.

The king stated that if Buddhism was to be "instrumental in solving the adolescence problem" and the nation's crime problem and if the nation's citizens wished to "avoid chaos in the future," its youth must "concentrate on the teaching of Dhamma or Doctrine, the guiding principles as set forth by Buddha, then we can apply those principles to the political, administration and economic problems of our country" (1975:64).

A Discourse on Law: June 1973

As the revolution drew near, the king again addressed the law faculty of a major university on the question of land reform. This time he attributed social conflict and bad land tenure laws to the borrowing of "wrong principles from abroad" rather than to the wrong methods or intentions of government leaders in promoting development.

Since legal science is a wide discipline, there are bound to be certain principles. Sometimes we even borrow these principles from abroad in making our laws when, actually, they may not be in accord with our own situation or locality. I have already taken as an example a law relating to land tenure and the livelihood of people in remote areas to whom we cannot apply the law because, through our fault due to the inability of the authorities to reach them, the people have no means of knowing the law Ways must therefore be found to implement the law according to the dictates of nature. (1975:72)

The most fundamental tenets of laissez faire capitalism, those which caution buyers to "beware" and laud cleverness in the marketplace as a sign of religious virtue, appeared to conflict with the laws of common decency.

In the 1970s, communist radio broadcasts (from the 'forests') had begun castigating the king as a "great landlord" and a "great feudalist" (Turton 1978). These broadcasts were dangerous not only because they introduced a new vocabulary for analyzing the Thai social order, but

because they introduced the idea that common men, not just kings and monks, had the right and the ability to analyze the morality of current social practices. Despite clear evidence to the contrary (that the king owned a factory with questionable labour practices, for example), however, many of the king's rural subjects flatly refused to believe that he could be linked in any way to big business, and especially to unscrupulous big business.

In his speech of 1973 the king countered leftist criticisms of the monarchy with an attack on "capitalists." This attack appropriated Marxist terminology and identified landlessness among peasants as the singlemost crucial issue of the times--as the singlemost significant sign of the decline of the moral order. In speaking of conflicts in rural areas, the king said:

I have related all these problems to you, because I have come across them myself and am deeply concerned and distressed lest people in Thailand should be landless. Without land, they would be enslaved . . . at present, changes are taking place and rather ominously; people are becoming slaves on the land under the oppressive yolk (sic) of capitalists Thailand has been reviled in some quarters as having a feudalist-imperialist system when, in fact, our truly Thai system may be "feudalist" but certainly not in the sense they mean, that is, oppression. (1975:74)

His analysis of the stages of Thailand's economic growth was confusing, to say the least.

Ours is a system in which each has his own land and shelter, but all that is now being turned into the reviled system of feudalism of medieval Europe with a hierarchy of oppressive rule down to the lowest stratum of men entrapped to the soil, known as the "worms of the earth". I have seen people working on lands which are apparently their own turn into "worms of the earth" due to hardships and sufferings. These people used to work on their land or land which could be theirs but for the capitalists' offer to buy up which was accepted out of the illusion that the money thus received could bring them happiness. But, in reality, with the money gone, they had to hire themselves out and cheaply too, and finally became the capitalists' slaves. (1975:72)

The king suggested that the laws of resettlement be changed so that "our nation will be able to preserve its virtues, unity and identity without having to fall slave to the ideas which may seem progressive" (1975:74). Life under communist or socialist government might seem to be attractive an alternative alternative to life under the Thanom regime, but it really was not.

In Support of Village Scouts: July 1973

The royal activities of the early 1970s, before the student revolution of 1973, were already sowing the seeds of a new cycle of purification. In 1971 the new Village Scout Movement was organized under royal patronage to promote national unity. Unlike earlier scout movements such as those organized by Rama VI, the impetus (and funding) for this movement came from the Thai Border Patrol Police, which was supported by the CIA and later by the U.S. AID program of technical assistance to Thailand (Muecke 1980:408). The movement began in the northeastern Province of Loey, on the Thai-Laotian border, from there spread to other provinces in the north and northeast, and, at the command of Thanom and the king, from there to the rest of the country.

The movement immediately drew criticism for having a status akin to that of a private baramilitary unit. In July 1973 the king addressed a group of Village Scout leaders at Citlada Palace. He thanked the scouts for their "invaluable assistance" to the community and rebutted claims that they had taken on the status of a private army. "Another proof of our success lies in the fact that those who do not wish to see our country enjoying progress or stability have attacked or distorted Scouts' activities," he said. "We do not want Scouts to be the private army of anyone" (1975:75).

Continuity Amidst Chaos: The Royal Activities of 1973

The world recession began in 1973. Powerful generals from the old Sarit faction began to fight bitterly among themselves while the king continued to build his barami and perform the duties of the modernizing Righteous Ruler. The king offered only tentative support to ranking military leaders but offered strong support to the rank and file. He and members of the royal family sponsored Red Cross functions and established charities to support the activities of the Border Police. They continued to accept contributions to the anti-communist royal charity established in 1966.

The book of royal activities of 1973 contain pictures of the king visiting dams and power stations. In one picture, a white garland of the type used in Buddhist rituals rests on top of a turbine that was inspected by the monarch. The king addressed the Sangha, according to the caption of one picture telling monks that "Sects [nikai] are not important" (i.e., downplaying monastic schism). The next page shows him inspecting handicrafts made by hill tribesmen.

As the economy worsened and fighting among the generals increased, the king began to retake his kingdom. He consecrated the central posts of provincial government headquarters and distributed Buddha statues to all seventy-two provinces. These statues contained hairs from his head, paint from his sailboat, ashes from in the private royal temple, incense burned in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and cuttings from the bodhi tree.⁷ He instructed provincial governors to perform important Buddhist ceremonies in front of these statues, "unless the province had another Buddha statue that the people already venerated" (cf. Tambiah 1984).

⁷This information was provided by two Thai students studying for advanced degrees in the United States.

and Tiplia Fish Shall Be Established Throughout the Kingdom

The king's support of new industrial and agricultural projects was based on the conceptual model of 'the flowering of the lotus of the law.' This concept of dhamma-inspired development works on the "multiplier principle" of religious virtuosity; the king's actions are so powerful that its effects radiate throughout the kingdom, in a circular pattern. King Bhumibol distributes the fruits of his experimental projects to his subjects in the same way he distributes cuttings from the Bo tree or Buddha statues to Buddhist temples.

In 1979, for example, Prime Minister Kriangsak's government (with the help of Bangkok Bank's Publicity Department) published a book called Thailand into the 80's stressing the king's role as the "innovator" of agricultural development (called to the "new meaning" of kingship.) It describes the king's experimental dairy farm at Citlada Palace "that scientifically breeds dairy cattle for local use." The farm "also explores milk preservation methods such as the manufacture of powdered milk and shows farmers how to better their living standards by producing highest-quality dairy products" (1979:119).

In its discussion on the "modern kingship," the book also notes that the king started a fish farming project at Citlada Palace. He received "fast-breeding tilapia fingerlings" from Japan, raised them on his fish farm, and presented adult tilapia to villages throughout the kingdom: ". . . before long tilapia were firmly established everywhere in Thailand" (1979:120).

The Kingship at its Apogee: The Democratic Period

In October 1973 the king's power reached its apogee. The Thanom group did not have a chance of survival. As Girling (1981:115) writes,

"The authority of the regime was gravely compromised by leadership feuds and recurrent scandals, by its bungling of rice supplies for the cities, and by the onset of the world recession accompanied by steeply rising prices." The supporters of Phra Phimonlatham added to the general confusion as they were among the protestors, fighting to get Phra Phimonlatham's rank restored (Somboon 1976).

In October 1973 Thanom and Praphat fired on unarmed student demonstrators. The king withdrew his support and the army command under General Krit Sivara refused to obey further orders from Praphat. The king 'suggested' that Thanom and Praphat resign and go into exile; they went to America. For the first time since the revolution of 1932, a Buddhist king appointed his own government.

1973-1976: Thailand's Experiment in Democracy

The period from 1973 to 1976 is referred to by political scientists as Thailand's brief 'experiment in democracy.' The era began with the king's appointment of Dr. Sanya Dhammasakti as acting prime minister. Dr. Sanya was the head of the Privy Council, a devout Buddhist, a highly respected teacher of law, and the former rector of Thammasat University. He was instructed by the king to bring about democracy (elections) within ninety days.

The caretaker government proposed immediate labor and land reform legislation. Advised by an ambitious group of technocrats, it also unwittingly ushered in a new phase of capitalist development: the expansion of the commercial banking system and the transformation of the system of indebtedness to Thai farmers.

The Era of the Farmer

The new elections of January 1975 were won by the Social Action Party, headed by M.R. Kukrit Pramote. Kukrit headed a coalition of political parties from the military-oriented extreme right to the business-professional center (Girling 1981:16). His government continued to follow the policies laid out by the Sanya government.

Kukrit announced that the Era of the Farmer had begun and the king supported this assertion by making speeches about the honourable nature of agricultural labour and by sponsoring even more experimental agricultural projects. As an idealistic bureaucrat stated proudly, "This king has the hands of a farmer," but the royal hands did not perform manual labour, they handed awards to those who did.

The Kukrit government promoted new lending policies for commercial banks. Banks were encouraged to reinvest a given percentage of their profits from rural areas back into those areas in the form of loans to merchants and farmers. This was done partially to counteract criticism that banks were draining the resources from poor areas of the country and using them to promote industry elsewhere. The new loan system was represented as a form of metta and karuna, Buddhist lovingkindness towards farmers and as enlightened social policy. The king publicly rewarded these banks with royal titles and ritual privileges, identifying himself as the initiator of the new and more humane economic order.

Although the banks portrayed their lending policies as sacrifice on behalf of Thai farmers, Anan (1984) has argued that they actually imposed no great hardship as there was a ready supply of money at this time and the government guaranteed the loans. Furthermore, these policies enabled commercial banks to extend their influence into the

countryside with little or no financial risk. Since Bangkok Bank was closely associated with the Social Action Party, it received a major share of the new loan business and benefited most from the new policies.

As Anan also notes, in the North the loans were made to already wealthy Thai farmers as they could offer collateral or sold to Chinese middle-men who offered them to Thai farmers at a higher rate of interest. The Northeast received the lowest percentage of loans of any region in the country.

Government control of rural areas loosened slightly during the democratic period. Students continued to advise peasants of their legal rights and farmers' organizations were begun. Students also advised labour unions and staged urban demonstrations. The most important, and least discussed, historical development of the era, however, was that the budget for the royal household once again came under the scrutiny of men of humble origins, members of parliament; many of them were shocked to learn the costs of maintaining the royal virtue.⁸

The King in the Democratic Period: October 1973

In 1969, playing on the antinomy issues of the day, the king was a champion of democracy. In 1973 the wheel had come full circle and he became the champion of order. He apparently decided that the 'pillars' of the Thai nation, liberty and equality, the values he had so confidently supported in his speech to the U.S. Congress more than a

⁸Although allocations to the monarchy are part of the budget process, no mention of debates over the size of the allocation to the royal family appears in newspapers, although the allocation appears in government documents. The Budget Committee for the Parliament votes on both the amount to be allocated to the royal family and for support of the royal properties. Less powerful members of parliament are excluded from the committee deliberations, although they were a common topic of conversation among upcountry politicians (as well as among the elite politicians who sat on the Committee).

decade before, were no longer appropriate to Thai conditions and to the present cosmic era. By 1973 these principles were beginning to seem 'unreasonable' and 'improper.'

Immediately after the revolution, the king told his hot-hearted subjects--a gathering of student representatives, teachers, and college lecturers--that they had just "gone through a period of great impressions" and should, on reflection, view these events "as a lesson and probably a basis for the future [which should] . . . be looked into very carefully." He cautioned students to exercise mental control.

For instance, when we are angry, we generate much energy which may however be dispersed and not used to the full for failure of control by the intellect or moral fibre. Anger thus saps your full physical power, because, in anger, our mind is not clear but befogged (1975:82)

Chulalongkorn University: 1974

A year later, while conferring degrees at Chulalongkorn University, the king emphasized the same theme.

Nowadays, free thinking is understood by some . . . to mean to think differently from others. Such understanding is not quite right. Thinking must primarily aim at thinking things out so as to have a clear idea as to what they are To pursue a way of thinking only for the sake of being different from others can also be done, but it is doubtful whether any benefit will result other than the difference which has solely been the aim from the start. (1975:89)

With Thanom and Praphat out of power, the king had once again to overcome the contradictions inherent in his support of democratic principles else he could not protect the secrecy of his business investments.

Renunciatory Civil Servants: November 1975

The book of royal addresses concludes with a speech in which the king continues to develop the idea of a a Thai civic religion: civil

servants and teachers should labour voluntarily (or with little pay) for the good of the nation and for their own salvation. He issued badges of honour to teachers and praised them for being renunciatory beings who strive for even more precious kinds of benefits than "money, honours, power and wealth." He promised that they would receive "benefits of a spiritual rather than a material nature" in return for their labour (1975:112).

. . . Fluctuations in the World Market System

In an address of 1975 the king consoled members of the U.N.-sponsored Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific over the failure of their development projects. Even their work was subject to a higher cosmic law.

The king did not renounce the principles of free market capitalism but instead suggested that fluctuations in the world market system corresponded to a higher set of universal laws. "The operations of the United Nations . . . must like all other operations be normally subject to periods of prosperity and deterioration following one another in cycles according to the changing times and circumstance of the universe" (1975:111), he commented, and encouraged the commission to continue with its business.

The Dark Side of Democracy

The democratic period was marked by a new kind of violence. Labour leaders, leaders of farmers groups and liberal academicians were threatened or assassinated by right-wing groups. The king, enacting the paradigms of the Righteous Ruler, patronized all worthy subjects, which his meant he cultivated business, student, military and right-wing constituencies alike. In effect, he played them off against each other

by defining their respective dhammas in antagonistic ways. In 1969 he encouraged students to disregard authority and use their own judgement in educating hill tribesmen, but in other contexts he had urged civil servants and villagers to beware of new and dangerous ideas.

Right-wing paramilitary movements called the Nawaphon and the Red Guards were formed during the 'democratic' period. Like the Village Scouts, these movements rallied around the patriotic theme of "Nation, Religion, and King." In the mid-1970s the royally-sponsored Village Scouts began to polarize against the "left" (or democratic) elements of society: political parties, liberal academics, critical journalists, socialists, intellectuals, labor unions and student groups (Girling 1981:116).

The economy continued to deteriorate in 1975 and 1976. Oil prices quadrupled and a domestic recession began, This affecting textiles, construction and investment. There was severe labor unrest and continuing student activism. The more democratic ideals were implemented, the easier it was for the king and right-wing groups to point to signs of cosmic decline.

There was another dark side of the democratic period. The benevolent loans offered by the government to Thai farmers came due. Many farmers lost their land when the banks called in their loans or refused to grant repayment extensions. Those farmers who did not lose their land found themselves indebted to commercial banks rather than to their local Chinese moneylenders (Kroekkiat 1978).

There were new elections in 1976 but the democratic period was already drawing to a close. Led by M.R. Seni Pramote, Kukrit's brother, the Democrats took power. Seni led a coalition similar to that of Kukrit but the Seni government was powerless and could not prevent the violence that followed.

The Revolution of 1976

The democratic period ended in bloodshed in October 1976 when Thanom and Prapat sneaked back into the country, Prapat to ordain as a monk at Wat Bowoniwet. (The king and queen visited him there.) Their return and Thanom's ordination triggered massive student protests at Thammasat University. The Armed Forces radio announced that students had hung the crown prince in effigy, an act of lèse majesté or insult to the monarchy, punishable by death, and village Scouts and other (anonymous) members of right-wing paramilitary units 'flocked' into Bangkok to defend the monarchy. (Being anonymous, they were never held accountable for their actions.) In the bloodiest incident in Thailand's modern history, they and members of the military attacked unarmed students. Many students were killed, many jailed, some fled to the jungles 'to become communists,' and the Seni government fell.

For the second time since 1932 a Buddhist king appointed his own government, but this time King Bhumibol appointed the right-wing and rabidly anti-communist Dr. Thanin Krawichien to the position of prime minister. Dr. Thanin was predictably unpopular with the student population. In 1976 General Kriangsak Chomanan led a coup to 'restore order' and to preempt any such future demonstrations.

Kriangsak held the position of prime minister until April 1980, when he was forced to resign. He was succeeded by the royalist General Prem Tinsulanon, who has remained in power into the 1980s.

The king's observations of cosmic decline helped fell a military government in 1973 and it did the same to a democratic government in 1976. Three years later, in 1979, before the accused students could come to trial (and the events of 1976 exposed to public scrutiny), the king issued a blanket pardon to those involved in the events of 1976,

ostensibly to the jailed students, but in actuality insuring that their attackers would never stand trial.

Capitalism and the Decline of the Monarchy

The monarchy began its decline even as it reached its apotheosis, however. The initial stages of penetration of the Northeast were over. The 'royal' ritual structure was in place and the king had sacralized new patterns of state and corporate support of religion. The government and the large corporate enterprises that had initially relied on the use of the royal virtue for legitimacy in their upcountry ventures were becoming independent of the monarch--to the point that they themselves were exercising royal interpretive prerogatives.

Like the king, Thai businesses and corporations had gained power and independence from the military when the economy expanded in the 1960s. Corporations and banks became wealthier than single individuals, including the monarch. Operating on traditional purification paradigms that specified that pure ritual action transforms substance ('name' or identity), big businesses were beginning to move away from the centuries-old identification with "Chineseness."

"Sinocization" had attended "Buddhacization" (cf. Kirsch 1977). Sino-Thai businessmen officers participated in Theravada Buddhist rituals, made conspicuous contributions to the royal charities, and created joint-venture companies with Japanese, Americans or Thai bureaucrats or military leaders. Members of the younger generation adopted a third, soteriologically neutral identity, that of "technocrats" or economic experts. Contrary to the view of the nation depicted in royal kathin ceremonies, one in which ranking bureaucrats, generals and technocrats were subordinated to the king in order of

official rank, these men held relatively equal positions with the king's advisors on the boards of directors on major corporations.

In contrast, the king was constrained by antinomy problems--which did not constrain corporations. Ideologies of free enterprise stipulated that the economy and the kingship had to remain separate if the polity were to remain pure (and the market to function unfettered). For traditional and practical reasons, the king could not become a great capitalist. Success in the marketplace was a sign of virtue of ordinary businessmen as long as they made generous contributions to the Sangha but not necessarily so for a Dhammaraja. Furthermore, the late 1960s was not an ideal time for the monarch to identify himself with corporate capitalism (with the business activities of the nation's most prominent officials).

New questions arose. If great banks, like great kings, made constant, splendid contributions to the Sangha, did they really need a king to legitimate their activities? If the king was truly a great world renouncer, why was he giving hammers and screw drivers instead of huge cash gifts to the Sangha? If "free" market capitalism would generate order (as U.S. economic advisors, United Nations organizations, the king and the nation's leading economic advisors had long suggested), how could the king's secret financial transactions (i.e., "manipulation of the market") be justified?

The monarchy faced yet additional problems not shared by corporate capitalists, the traditional ones of the death and succession, and the succession dynamic had two new twists. (1) The king had no harem, and (2) the effects of twenty years of the monarch's trading ritual for economic prerogatives began to manifest themselves. The government and big business had come into their own as world renouncers and patrons of

religion, threatening the monarch's newly-regained dominance of soteriological process.

The business-government partnership was such that the increasingly generous acts of merit of bureaucrats and corporations was imbuing them with natural rights to interpret social change. If they chose, they could even assign new 'meanings' to membership in the 'bloodline of warriors,' replacing the concept of membership in the 'royal lineage' [phraboromrachanuwongse], based on the sharing of royal blood, with that of membership in a more generalized 'line of merit at the head of the nation' as a dominant ideology of power.

In the following chapter I will discuss the ideology of kingship presented by the Grand Palace and the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet in 1977--when the king's power was still at its peak--and introduce evidence to support the thesis that the kingship had reached its apogee and begun its decline in the mid-1970s.

CHAPTER 17

THE KINGSHIP AT ITS APOGEE: THE SOTERIOLOGY OF THE SEVENTIES

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the kingship at its apogee and the structural features that argue for its decline.

The Kingship in 1977: A Retrospective

In 1977 King Bhumibol Adulyadej completed 10,000 days on the throne. Mahamakut Foundation (under royal patronage) and the Foundation for the Promotion of Buddhist Meditation in Thailand issued a volume of the same title commemorating the event. The volume contains two essays, the first on the king's life and works (probably written by the Grand Palace) and the second on the king's virtue by the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet. Together they summarize the current elite's ideology of modern kingship, their idea of the perfect Dhammaraja under the conditions of the present.

The essays confirm what was implicit in the king's behavior in the 1960s:

1. that he initially restored the royal fortunes through his exercise of hereditary ritual prerogatives;
2. that at some point his seeing and being seen by as many of his (pro-government) subjects as possible had become an official government policy;

3. that this policy was grounded in the belief that the king has special powers of attraction that are a function of his religious purity; and
4. that King Bhumibol's perfection of the ten kingly virtues occurred primarily in the context of ritual circumambulations of the kingdom. What was an exception in the beginning of the Ninth Reign--that the king left his capital--had become the rule at its apotheosis.

The King of Practical Reason

The essay on the king's life and works speaks of the king's practical nature as if it were a divine attribute. It attempts to reconcile Western and Thai-Buddhist notions of causality and practicality, vacillating between a Western ideology of direct causality and a Buddhist ideology of indirect causality. The monarch's gifts of verbal wisdom to his subjects instill them with right views about agricultural and industrial practice. These views enable them at once to become more perfect beings and commodity producers in the world market.

King Bhumibol set out at the beginning of his reign to analyze the 'true' conditions of his kingdom and then to devise the most appropriate ways of lessening the suffering of his subjects. Like a perfect being, he brings all royal tasks, large and small, 'to completion,' his ceremonial tasks being among the most important of them. In fact, the king is so concerned with his ceremonial tasks that he

makes formal State Functions into personal affairs, even adjusting the details of some ceremonies to make them more authentic and meaningful, and above all, He always takes such opportunities to meet and talk with the people from all walks of life who attend these ceremonies in order to learn the true circumstances of their professions and thereby the true conditions of the country. (1977:45)

The king conducts foreign policy by charming the representatives of foreign nations by "the norm" (i.e., the dhamma): He and the queen are "always exerting Their charms and developing understanding between Thailand and the rest of the world" (1977:5).

His most pressing concern is the welfare of his poor rural subjects, however, to whom he extends gifts of practical wisdom.

Their Majesties have been to every one of the 72 provinces which go to compose Thailand and visit the more remote areas very often. His activities in this direction are centered on getting to know the local conditions and problems from the people themselves and, after consulting with the officials concerned, to devise the best ways to improve the conditions or solve the problems. At the same time, He would emphasize to the local population the necessity of self-improvement and the importance of the basic factors of life such as education and health so that at least the level of their general welfare could be improved.

His Majesty, however, never limits Himself to academic studies of the country's conditions and problems but always tries in all practical ways to complement the Government's works in all appropriate fields of action.¹ (1977:7)

Three royal charities are cited as expressions of the king's "practical" concern for his subjects: his animal breeding project, his agricultural project developing "new seeds for propagation," and his hill tribes program. The hill tribes program

now embraces introductory stages of activities ranging from animal husbandry, wet and dry cultivation of rice and other crops such as coffee, tobacco, soybeans and corn, to production of preserved fruits and vegetables that in stages will alleviate the hardship and suffering of this poorer sector of the rural population whose standard of living is close to the margin of subsistence. (1977:8-9)

The funding for these programs: "His Personal Funds supplemented by voluntary contributions" (1977:8).

At some point in the 1970s the king became the patron of the modern economy. His endorsement of new cash cropping programs accelerates the transition from a barter to a money-based economy in the North and

¹The king 'perfects' or completes the actions of government.

Northeast. With the king thus 'initiating' and 'completing' the tasks of the government, a money-based economy will soon 'spread' from the capital to the furthestmost regions of the kingdom--like the preaching of monks and like light from the altar.

These development projects are but manifestations of the dhamma: "His Majesty also never ceases to extol the virtues of the country's other pillar of existence, that is the Buddhist Religion . . . His Addresses and advice often quote the Buddhist Scripture and Principles as the bases of all His thoughts and action" (1977:17).

The King as a King of Truth

It is by truth that heaven and earth are mine, that fire burns among men. Never have I spoken a word that was vain, for the good give homage to the truth. (King Yayati, The Mahabharata)

The essay on the royal accomplishments makes constant allusions to the king's veracity and it ends with the following statement about trust. Because of his unceasing sacrifices [boricak] on behalf of his subjects,

the relationship between king and people is . . . firmly built upon the bases of mutual trust, interest and affection. The words in the Constitution that the King is the Repository of the Sacred Trust of the Thai People and the Supreme Symbols of the Nation's Unity are thus given their true and substantial meaning. (1977:18)

The sovereignty of the modern King Bhumibol, no less than that of the mythical King Yayati, rests on "protection of the order founded on truth" (Dumézil 1971:111). This is the most fundamental principle of Buddhist kingship; the dhamma is synonymous with truth.

This means that for King Bhumibol, like the celestial King Yayati, the "suprafunctional" and irreparable sin is that of lying. In the 1970s, accusations of falsehood did not arise over the king's failure to

single-handedly correct the ills of the national economy 'as he promised'--the sin that caused the seventh King Prajadipok's fall from the heavens. Those charges were reserved for a succession of prime ministers, economists, and high-ranking bureaucrats who were constantly accused by their rivals of engaging in questionable business practices--or of incompetence in economic affairs. If any such issue is to arise in the present, it will concern the ninth king's failure to tell the truth about his private business activities, the existence of which, in the past, did not represent a transgression of the royal ideal.

The Sermon on the Royal Perfections

The second essay, the "Sermon on the Royal Perfections," was written by the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet and is likewise dedicated to confirming the veracity of the king. The abbot, a renowned textual scholar, compares the king's deportment (i.e., the visible dimension of his activities) with the attributes of the perfect Buddhist king described "by the Buddha," concluding that the king is, indeed, a true and perfect Dhammaraja.

In this text and context, the abbot functions as a perceptual link between the people and the king. His superior interpretive powers derive from his knowledge of religious texts and from his degree of personal purity: the sermon was preceded by a period of meditation.² Like the king--and unlike the majority of his subjects--the abbot can distinguish 'true' from 'apparently true' phenomena. The essay is also an exercise in moral accountability.

²The full title of the essay is "Transcription of a Sermon Given by Somdet Phra Nanasamvara at the Conclusion of the Meditation Period Dedicated to His Majesty the King on the Occasion of the Completion of 10,000 Days of His Majesty's Reign."

"The king has ruled the kingdom with much successful results that can be seen so clearly and felt so deeply both by the clergy and the laity," the abbot begins (1977:21). (His merit is responsible for the positive effects of capitalist development and none of the negative.) His Majesty has ruled the kingdom by "drawing on the merit which has accrued to Him from the past as well as from His present constant actions and has patiently transferred them through various activities into benefits of increasing happiness and prosperity of the people" (1977:21-22).

The king is not responsible for any of the violent events of the 1970s or for the violent side-effects of development; on the contrary, the kingdom was healed by the strength of his merit.

Although it cannot be denied that together with certain periods of glory our country has also had to pass through many periods of trials and troubles . . . we have always managed to overcome all threatening dangers owing to the constant over-riding virtue of His Majesty The virtuous state which His Majesty has reached through accumulated merits is so massive that it stands out so clearly for everyone to see. (1977:22)

The abbot then describes the king's perfections of each of the ten virtues (most of which, de facto, occurred in the context of his development activities). His almsgiving [dana] is "so complete, so pure and directed so exclusively to the Country and the people." His perfection of sila is similarly so complete that

The personality as displayed by His Majesty towards His people both in His actions and words is always and everywhere courteous and refined. Never and anywhere will one see from Him a crude action or hear an angry word. His outward personality reflects an inner spirit of loving kindness and compassion. (1977:23-24)

There is no question of the king's pursuing or even having "private interests" because of his unceasing perfection of the third virtue of self-sacrifice, of boricak. The king is "selflessly sacrificing private interests for the sake of the greater public interest," the abbot states

outright. "These sacrifices of His are so clearly apparent for all who care to follow His numerous activities" (1977:24).

As for his perfection of maddava, modesty or gentleness,

When you watch His Majesty circulate among the ordinary people who always come to greet Him in great numbers wherever he goes, you will see Him moving and closely conversing with them without the slightest sign of harsh or callous action. He talks with them instead in such a modest and polite manner that makes one wonder how a person so high-ranking as He can so naturally assume an ordinary air. (1977:25-26)

It was unthinkable that the king had any connection with violence, with the razing bombings of the North, for example.

The abbot concludes that

his Majesty thus merits to be classified as the Best among Kings according to the criteria which our Lord Buddha indicated in His days that the Best among Kings must be he who reigned with absolute righteousness. (1977:30)

The Lord Buddha "furthermore mentioned that an anointed King who ruled over any people would be invincible if possessed of five righteous attributes." These attributes are: (1) a perfect lineage; (2) a full treasury; (3) the support of a full complement of armed men; and (4) the support of able Ministers. If the king possessed these four attributes "to the full," they would

invariably lead to the fifth which is the King's Glory This means that the King's Power would be firmly established and acknowledged all around, striking fear in the heart of all enemies and creating security for his country and his people. (1977:32-33)

When all was said and done, however, for the abbot at least, the king's pure blood was what distinguished him from ordinary men, enabling him to "avoid all evil or wrong actions or words." The abbot exhorts ordinary men to emulate the king's practice of sila (abstention from lying, stealing, killing, sexual misconduct and the drinking of alcohol), but at the same time implies they have little chance of doing so.

A person who has managed to maintain these abstentions is like having his blood cleansed of evil and thus compared well with a King who possesses a good lineage. A King of good lineage is likely to behave in an exemplary manner for the blood of his good ancestors are in him, and so an ordinary person who has constantly avoided wrong actions is bound to turn out to be an equally exemplary person. (1977:35)

Since ordinary men are constantly faced with hardship, they have little chance of constantly avoiding wrong or, given the way that Thai laws are made, of even knowing what it is.

The Monarchy at Its Peak

By 1973 the king had begun to reach the apogee of his reign (Girling 1981:193). He had gained substantial control of what Dumèzil refers to as the "three functions" of the divine king--symbolized as control of the plow (commerce), the ax (the armed forces), and the libation cup (religion). Bhumibol had totally reversed the position he found himself in 1950 (and in which the monarchy had found itself in since the 1920s). In the following sections I will examine how he exercises the three functions of the divine king.

The Plow

The royal coffers, empty in 1950, were full by 1973. By exchanging ritual for economic prerogatives, the king had amassed a large private fortune which grew during the economic boom of the 1960s. The royal properties had been turned into thriving business concerns and they were administered by the king's men, not by men appointed by a military prime minister. By 1982 the royal charities numbered into the millions of dollars (Thak 1984), yet another way of the king's accumulating and directing the flow of capital. These charities are not royal property (the personal property of the king), however; they are the property of the 'nation' and thus are not identified as part of the king's personal fortune.

The royal charities perform two functions with regard to the king and the development of capitalism. First, they depict a "celestial" or archaic economy which stands as testament to the king's royal barami. This celestial economy helps disguise the mechanisms through which a modern capitalist economy is being developed and it helps deflect attention away from the king's personal business pursuits as well, making it almost literally unthinkable to the majority of the populace that he even has "personal interests." As the abbot said, "everyone can see" the extent to which the king has sacrificed personal for public interests--because no one can see the mechanisms through which those interests are pursued.

However, it is the king's constant distribution of ranks, titles and ritual privileges to members of the business community that grants him a major role in shaping the modern economy. In some respects this is the continuation of ancient traditions. In the past, Thai kings had unquestioned rights to ally themselves with powerful merchants and to receive a share of their profits. Kings issued trade rights, titles, and ritual privileges in a single package to anyone they desired, powerful Chinese merchants included. In the present, however, only part of this relationship is visible to the public--that in which the king awards titles and sacred objects, in return for contributions to the royal charities. Other dimensions of the transaction, in which economic privileges are bestowed on the monarch (or his business representatives) in order to receive these royal gifts, are a well-kept secret.

If the details of the king's many business holdings ever become public, which they surely will, his veracity will be compromised. As with Sarit, however, they are most likely to emerge after his death and thus to become a factor in the politics of succession.

The Ax

By 1973 the king had gained considerable control over the government and the armed forces. He holds the titular position of head of the armed forces but he has obtained an even more powerful position vis-à-vis. the military: that of withholding royal endorsement. Military leaders cannot form a 'legal' government or make laws without his approval. After a series of military coups in the 1970s, the exile and return of Thanom and Praphat, the succession of Generals Kriangsak and Prem to the position of prime minister,³ the king began to influence the timing of military coups. In the "April Fools Coup" of 1980, a challenge by junior officers to Prem's government, the king insured that Prem stayed in power: 'fleeing' with Prem to the Northeast, inspecting his troops there, and following his victorious armies back to Bangkok. The king now has some influence in determining when a military leader will renounce the position of prime minister, and when another leader--military or political--will succeed him. Some even whisper that the king influences the order of succession of generals waiting in the wings: to 'restore order' or champion 'democracy,' whichever is required when the social order declines.

The extent of King Bhumibol's influence is indicated by the fact that the military leaders of the 1980s lack the options of Sarit, to borrow or not borrow the royal barami at will. They must do so if they are to triumph in their races for virtue.

³Perhaps to emphasize their subordinate status, neither Prem nor Kriangsak offered large kathin ceremonies while prime minister (1979-1982). After becoming prime minister, Kriangsak made a point of leading a 'quiet' kathin ceremony at a temple near his house.

The Libation Cup

By 1980 the king had done more than restore the royal treasuries and recapture the most basic of the royal prerogatives. Through careful alterations of Buddhist rituals and through the use of subtle rhetorical devices he began to make claims of moral superiority over the Sangha and to show incipient signs of being a bodhisatta.

There are several time honoured ways that monks and kings assert claims of moral superiority (cf. Mendelsohn 1975). Certain types of hierarchical interplay indicate who gives and who receives prestige (merit) from an interaction.

One indication of moral superiority is who 'approaches' [pai ha, lit., 'goes to find'] whom (cf. Senevirtane 1978).⁴ Another is whose wai (salute with hands raised to the forehead) is lower and whose head is higher in the interaction. A third indication is who professes to possess greater interpretive abilities. Much of this subtle hierarchical interplay between the king and powerful monks in the 1960s and 1970s occurred in the context of the king's "unofficial activities."

The following are bits and pieces of ethnographic evidence that support this argument and provide a broad picture of the Thai monarchy and the Thai soteriological state in the 1970s.

1. By the late 1970s, the king rarely if ever approached individual monks believed to be saints. For example, he did not visit Grandfather Phang at his mountain retreat in Manchakiri District

⁴The origin story of the kathin, for example, describes the hardships endured by pious monks who 'seek out' the Buddha; their arrival at his side coincides with their attainment of the level of sodaban or "stream-winner," the first stage on the path of purification, at least in the present government's version of the story. This is one reason why Phra Phimonlathams' visit to Burma to seek new meditation techniques created a furor. It acknowledged the superiority of Burmese over Thai religious practice.

in Khon Kaen. Instead, he had Grandfather Phang flown to Bangkok to chant at the palace and to bless amulets, which the king later distributed to his close associates. The palace workers wearing these amulets were quick to assert that Grandfather Phang's visit was an "unofficial activity."⁵ (In the words of one informant, "When I seek you out, it means I do not have the vision to see.")

2. In all of the royal kathin ceremonies I witnessed in 1978 and 1979 and in the books detailing the royal activities of 1971 and 1972, the king's head was never lower than that of the whole monastic congregation or of a particular monk. This was not true in the early years of his reign. When the king chatted with the abbots of royal temples after a kathin luang,⁶ for example, he leaned down to address them from a standing position. Similarly, the book of royal activities of 1972 shows the king leaning down to offer food to the Supreme Patriarch, who is arguably the most powerful monk in the kingdom.⁷ (One informant said that the king always observes the customs of rural areas and sits on the floor when visiting monks in the countryside--which almost makes the case worse from the viewpoint of powerful monks in the

⁵This event was confirmed by Luang Pu Phang's lay supporters in Mancakiri. They reported the airplane flight bothered Royal Grandfather Phang.

⁶A royal favour which demonstrates the king's benevolent interest in the Sangha.

⁷In fact, the only person who did not show extreme deference to the Supreme Patriarch was Phra Phimonlatham. At a religious ceremony performed by the Supreme Patriarch in Khon Kaen, Phimonlatham constantly intruded himself into the ceremony as a 'server' to the Patriarch (or as leader of the ceremony?), much to the chagrin of the Patriarch's assistant. At times, given the height of Phimonlatham's wai, the height of his head vis-à-vis that of the Patriarch and the authority with which Phimonlatham performed his part in the ceremony, it was unclear who was more important, Phimonlatham or the Supreme Patriarch.

ecclesiastical hierarchy.) King Bhumibol does not demand that monks bow to him as did King Taksin, but he does not always bow to them (or sit at their feet). Sometime in the present century the royal kathin ceremony was altered so that the king sits on a golden throne rather than on the floor. Informants at Wat Mahathat said (somewhat defensively) that this new seating arrangement (which elevates the king's head almost to the height of the monks) was more "modern." Finally, the king sits in the North and the monks in the South in most if not all of the kathin luang. According to the royal astrologer, North is a more auspicious direction than South.

3. The official rules for the performance of kathin phrarachathan published by Maha Makut Academy note that the monks must chant blessings for the king before chanting them for the lay congregation who present kathin robes on his behalf. These verses are said to be 'offered' [thawai] (1978:26) to the monarch. Thawai is a verb that signifies a transaction in which the gift-giver (i.e., the Sangha) is inferior to the gift-receiver. It is the former who receive prestige from the interaction, not the latter (cf. Wales 1931). (They are chanted 'for' laity at commoner temples; they are not 'offered')
4. According to an official in the Department of Religious Affairs, most religious ceremonies on the Buddhist calendar have been altered so the king leaves the temple before the chanting of blessings begins. The king "does not listen" to the chants, he said. "It takes too much time." The king's merit influences and is absorbed by others (monks included) and not the reverse.

5. A former monk, a recipient of the Pali Level Nine Award, said that the Royal Secretariat had announced that people should use the classifier ong (which is used to refer to sacred objects and persons) when referring to members of the royal family and that they should use rup (the classifier used for ordinary objects and monks) when referring to Buddhist monks. He disagreed strongly with this edict.
6. The king has begun taking on some of the duties of Buddhist monks. For example, King Bhumibol personally issues phraphuttarup bucha ('sacred Buddha statues for worship') to people who donate to the royal charities. A Thai graduate student, seeing slides of this event following a royal kathin, immediately exclaimed, "That is the monks' job!" He consulted with an older man who was more conversant with royal customs and reported back that he, too, "had never heard of such a custom." Other informants insisted that this was a common custom.
7. A royal astrologer said that only the king can specify the correct dimensions of a Buddha statue (not Buddhist monks?); that only he can 'see the face' of the Buddha and therefore establish its correct dimensions (i.e., make the absent Buddha present). He also said that only the king ("and the Crown Prince," he added) could assign meanings to religious symbols and to the the colours of sacred objects. "Only the king can declare that 'silver means rain,'" he said.
8. The royal astrologer said that national flags were lowered in the presence of the king and no one else. In addition, the flags of military regiments contain hairs (relics) from the king's head, along with Buddha images. This is to treat them the same way

that magical relics of the Buddha were treated in the ancient kingdoms of Ceylon and Thailand: as magical relics to be carried into war.

9. The king meditates in private, which is how men become Buddhist saints or stream winners. This activity is carefully monitored by those closest to him and word of his most recent level of meditation is circulated among the inner circle of the palace. From there it circulates outwards to the rest of the populace as 'rumour.'
10. Finally, the Buddha ('fully enlightened') came from the most pure rank. He was 'without blemish' which means that he was without 'criticism' or 'blame.' As the events of 1976 demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt, no one now dares criticize the king or members of his family in public. Rama IX has, indeed, come a long way from the days when Police-General Phao dared to publish newspaper headlines accusing him of dereliction of duty or of insulting religion.

The Monarchy in Decline: The Ninth King

King Bhumibol has brought the Thai-Buddhist monarchy to the point where it is once again the the high-center [sung-klang] of soteriological process in Thailand; he is what Tambiah (1976) refers to as the "ordinating source of order" in the kingdom. He may have also brought the monarchy to the point of its final extinction. Concern about the decline of the monarchy is expressed in the form of rumours and anxieties about the symbolic significance of the number nine.

Bhumibol is the ninth king of the Cakkri dynasty. The number nine stands for the best, the brightest, the highest and most pure and

auspicious objects and persons in the kingdom. Nine-tiered umbrellas of rank are placed over Buddha statues on the altars of royal temples and over the head of the king at his coronation. The ninth is the highest level of the Buddhist heavens, symbolic of nibbana, and it is the highest level of Pali scholarship award. There are nine auspicious stars of astrology (the nopakhrō). Nine stands for the most complete state of enlightenment, for nibbana, and for the 'fullness' and perfection with which the monarch performs the royal duties and perfects the Ten Principles of kingship.

A former monk-astrologer said the number nine is a 'perfect' number because it divides into three sets of three, an odd number representative of the Triple Gems. Nine cannot be 'divided' into half, into even numbers; it is representative of 'unity' [khwaṃ samakhi] rather than schism.

The number nine, signifying as it does the apotheosis of virtue, also signifies the final moment of existence, that which precedes the Buddha's parinibbana or final extinction (cf. Dumézil 1971). The last ten Jataka tales are those in which the bodhisattva or future Buddha perfects the ten virtues. The tenth Jataka tale, the last, is the one in which the Prince Vessantara renounces his entire kingdom including his son and his war elephants in order to perfect the virtue of dana.

Nine is also an odd number and most Thai are sensitive to the astrological significance of odd and even numbers: Odd numbers are auspicious and represent life and even numbers inauspicious, representing death and sickness. Ten monks chant at cremation ceremonies, for example, nine at celebrations, but not at royal ceremonies, where the king 'counts' as a sacred entity. Thus Bangkok is periodically beset by rumours that King Bhumibol, the best and most

divine king by modern standards, may also be the last: the last Dhammaraja of the Cakkri dynasty to rule Thailand, the last Dhammaraja to hold a throne in Southeast Asia.

There are several reasons why this might be true. First, the king's longterm transfer of merit and ritual privileges to the government and to powerful corporations must inevitably have an effect; one must consider the uses to which these groups put the royal symbolism and how they exercise royal interpretive prerogatives. Second, a monogamous Righteous Ruler has inherent limitations that do not affect businesses, which perpetuate themselves through different mechanisms. The monarchy perpetuates itself through the harem, the major mechanism through which kings produce offspring and contract political alliances. Businesses perpetuate themselves through the mechanisms of the marketplace and are thus subject to a different set of restrictions. Third, the monarchy faces classical problems of succession, and fourth, the ideology of rank upon which the monarchy is based is constantly being undermined by the inflow of capitalist and democratic ideologies--which the king himself helped introduce.

The Strategy Backfires

In the previous chapter I spoke of how Sarit's strategy to keep the king 'above' politics eventually backfired, allowing the king to impugn the morality of the nation's military leaders through his 'disinterested' scrutiny of the nation's economic affairs. The king's ritual strategies to fill the royal coffers had similarly backfired by the end of the 1970s, solving one set of problems only to create another. The ritual strategies generated a new and potentially disruptive balance of power--a new soteriological state--that threatened

the very existence of the monarchy and affected the issue of the succession.

The royal prerogatives were sold and the royal virtue borrowed to the point where government agencies and wealthy capitalists began to take on the prerogatives of kings. Businessmen are now dividing the kingdom into its constituent parts and making the "great classifications" of social life. Acting at first in the name of the king and later on their own, they have patronized powerful monks and royal temples to the point where many of the nation's new supposed saints reside in temples that are almost totally constructed by the new, non-royal power elite.

These new saints no longer need to rely solely on the king's patronage to enhance their reputations. By patronizing these monks, members of the new commercial nobility have begun to create their own monastic lines, extensions, in many cases, of the ordination line of Acaan Man. The question must inevitably arise: Whose barami is it, anyway, that is expressed in the building and restoration of the habitations of these monks?

The Succession

Large commercial enterprises and corporations continue to grow as the Thai economy becomes more commercialized. Meanwhile, the king, a single individual, is faced with the classical problems of divine kings, those of death and succession. The loss of the royal harem and the abolishment of polygamy have seriously altered the dynamics of succession.

Neither the king nor his son can marry the daughters of tributary princes or neighboring kings because no such princes or kings exist. This king is not "rich in sons" who can be sent out to rule the

different parts of the kingdom. He is not rich in daughters, the marriage of whom would, in Dumézil's words, enhance his "commercial possibilities." He and the queen have four children, three daughters and a son. The eldest daughter married an American and refrained from visiting the kingdom and appearing in public until very recently.

None of this has prevented the succession from becoming a bitter source of controversy in Thailand, worthy of mention in the Hindu epics. Bangkok is rife with rumours about conflicts among members of the royal family: between the king and the crown prince, the crown prince and the crown princess, and the queen and her offspring. These rumours represent subtle variations of the themes of the Hindu epics and give some indication of the extent to which the Thai monarchy has reached its limitations.

The king has the problem of the "undutiful son," one who offended not just his father-in-law but his mother as well by taking film stars as mistresses and with whom he is rumoured to have had illegitimate offspring. (By the mid-1980s, pictures of his second family were appearing in Thai newspapers.) The prince's actions are complicated by antinomy problems. If monogamy is indeed a sign of virtue among modern rulers, then the crown prince's amorous exploits raise questions about his fitness to ascend the throne. If polygamy is the ideal as it was in days of old, then the crown prince is a "man of prowess" but he has complicated the succession in the traditional manner, by producing offspring who are potential rivals for the throne and around whom rival factions can congregate. Traditional values notwithstanding, rumours of royal misbehavior occur at a time when serious questions are being raised about the relevance (and cost) of the monarchy in a "developing nation" or in a "Third World country."

The Thai monarchy now identifies itself so closely with American interests that the queen, angered by her son's amorous exploits, announced in interviews with CBS News, The Dallas Times, and the New York Times that unless he mended his ways, he, like the offspring of the "undutiful son" of the Hindu epics, might find himself 'without enjoyment of royalty' (arajyabhaj) (Dumézil 1971:17), something she would never have said inside the kingdom. In fact, when the Asian Wall Street Journal printed an article containing her remarks, it was banned for lèse majesté (Asian Wall Street Journal, 23 December 1981).

As Weber points out, the strength of the sibling dynamic in South Asian kingship was weakened under Buddhism by the monk-king relationship. Thus the queen's questions about her son's fitness to ascend the throne are echoed by Buddhist monks. Three years later, the New York Times (Beech 5 February 1982) carried another article on the crown prince, only this time the issue was the use of monastery land. The abbot of a prominent temple gave a sermon containing a parable about an evil prince. This was generally viewed as a reference to a controversy that had arisen when the crown prince allowed prime monastic land to be used for business purposes at the expense of the poor people residing there.

The succession dynamic is complicated even further by the fact that the king has a "dutiful daughter" who is known for her modesty and accomplishments. In contrast to the "gentle Madhavi," the daughter of Yayati, the Princess Sirinthorn shows her dutifulness to her father not by "selflessly producing" offspring (1977:79) but by not marrying and not producing any offspring at all. Her single state is interpreted as a sign of her moral purity and of her fitness to ascend the throne should the crown prince's indiscretions make him unfit for this post.

It is also seen as a sign of her willingness to avoid complicating this and future successions (i.e., by producing even more rivals for the throne).

In 1978, probably at the king's behest, the Thai parliament stepped into the picture. It officially invested Princess Sirinthorn as crown princess, which raised the possibility that, for the first time in Thai history, a woman might succeed to the throne. In nineteenth-century Cambodia, the succession of a woman to the throne was explicitly interpreted as the end of the dynasty (Leclère 1914:420-421).

The crown princess's receipt of what was apparently a royal favour threw her into competition with her brother, a dangerous state of affairs that might have been predicted from the myth of Yayati. By 1980 the princess's formerly pure reputation was becoming tarnished. One rumour reported that she had fired a shot at the crown prince to protect their father from him (from an attack?). According to another, the king suffered his 1980 heart attack because he had heard that the prince and the princess had an argument in which the prince drew a gun on the princess and threatened her. (A shot may have been fired.) And yet an additional rumour surfaced; the heart attack and disputes among the siblings were supposedly a sign of his own bad kamma come home to roost--that generated by the mysterious death of his older brother, King Ananda.

The princess's promotion may in fact have exposed her to a fate similar to that which befell the "gentle Madhavi": Madhavi tried to please her father Yayati by producing offspring to offset his disappointment in his son, but in so doing she actually incurred his displeasure. Despite the rivalry between father and son, the king could favour no other than his son for the succession, which is probably the

case in Thailand. It must be noted that the crown prince's exploits as a man of the world set the stage for a dramatic conversion to piety--which is entirely consistent with Theravada royal and religious traditions. By 1985 rumours were again circulating: why was the Crown Princess, formerly the king's favorite, absent from the ceremony commemorating King Chulalongkorn's birthday?

The Antinomy Issues

. . . if something were wrong with the affairs of the land, one obvious cause of it is the lack of righteousness of the king. Hence under such circumstances, a king convinced of his own righteousness of rule could resort to the spiritual act of satya kriya (truth act), that is, he could meditate on his own virtue and righteousness and stay motionless in ascetic posture until things were made right. Sri Sanghabodi (307-9) brought rain and stopped the red-eyed demon in this manner. (Mahavamsa 262-2)

As long as Thailand remains a client state of the United States and sends its best and brightest students to study there, antinomy issues will intensify. Young economists return to Thailand imbued with the ideals of free market capitalism. Liberal academics return imbued with the ideals of free speech and democracy.

Democratic and capitalist ideologies share one important set of beliefs in common: those concerning the essential perceptual equality of men, the basis of their assumed inalienable rights to speak up in public and to critically evaluate information concerning the nation's economy and its political process.

Free speech and free enterprise create similar problems for the monarch. Financial experts resent situations in which the king's financial representatives exert undue (and invisible) influence on the market--for which they must take responsibility.⁸ For liberal academics,

⁸A curious folk economic ideology has arisen among young businessmen

the supreme instance of democracy in action is open discussion of the personal finances of the ruler. This rule extends in principle to the discussion of the finances of all other of the nation's rulers, the men who conduct its business. Given this situation, a free press is the ultimate threat to the monarch's ability to represent himself as a selfless king, one who always tells the truth. A Dhammaraja who is criticized for the rapaciousness of his business activities and for the hoarding of wealth (the secret accumulation of capital) is not a true Dhammaraja. According to the most ancient of Hindu and Buddhist notions of rank, blamelessness is the sign of moral perfection (of Buddhahood); in mythic traditions criticism presages the deity's plunge from the heavens.

Thus in the Thai state of the late 1970s, as in the earliest of the Theravada kingdoms, the veracity of the monarch remains linked to the state of the cosmos and the survival of the monarchy depends to a great extent on the handling of the veracity issue as it relates to the king's finances.

This but is the most recent expression of the antinomy problems that have afflicted Cakkri kings for over 100 years. Either way King Bhumibol is an evil king: if he lies or if he tells the truth about his business transactions. Perhaps the real question is if King Bhumibol, like the Sinhalese King Sri Sanghabodi, can right the affairs of the kingdom and resolve the veracity issue by staying "motionless in ascetic posture until things are made right."

in recent years. The king's influence, his business representatives' exercise of undue influence in the marketplace (in situations like that of the Raja Finance bankruptcy, where the royal properties had a large investment and there were charges of mismanagement), is held responsible for the decline of prosperity because it keeps the market from being truly free. Younger businessmen complained of being intimidated by the king's representatives in business transactions.

Conclusion

A new type of race for virtue is developing in the 1980s. As is traditional, this race consists of competition among elite to control manifestations of the Buddha's two bodies, his relic-body and his teaching body. Unlike in the past, the race is not taking place not between the king and powerful nobles or between the king and powerful monks. It is not even taking place between the king and a powerful military leader. It is taking, place between the king his government, and big business.

The divine king's duty to administer punishment [danda], purify the Sangha, and regulate worldly matters [artha] is now being assumed by a professional bureaucracy capable of functioning independently of a charismatic military leader--or even a king. The king's duty to offer magnificent alms to the Sangha is being assumed by the new merchant nobility.

CHAPTER 18

THE NEW RACE FOR VIRTUE: STATE AND CORPORATE BUDDHISM

More than a thousand sons were his, heroes vigorous of fame,
crushers of the hosts of the enemy. (Digha Nikaya iii)

Seest through a man diligent in business? He shall stand
before kings. (Proverbs xxii:29)

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the monarchy at its apogee and suggested structural features that may herald its decline. In this chapter I will discuss the end result of the monarch's lending his prestige to capitalist enterprise: the rise of state and corporate Buddhism.

Unlike the Cakkri kings of the nineteenth century, King Bhumibol has no harem and thus no "reservoir of vitality" that royal princes create for their fathers (Dumézil 1971:21). Capitalist expansion is his reservoir of vitality and wealthy merchants are his potential allies (and enemies). Unlike the protagonists of Hindu and Buddhist epic tales--kings and their feuding offspring--King Bhumibol and his new allies are not related by blood. Once these new allies gain sufficient leverage to stave off challenges from the military, they could very well allow the monarchy to decline--in the interests of efficiency.

Under Sarit, the struggle for royal ritual and religious prerogatives was temporarily resolved. The king and military leaders divided these prerogatives relatively equally among themselves and empowered the government to execute 'royal' commands concerning religion. In the

1960s and 1970s, while the king and a succession of military strongmen continued to eye each other warily, the state began to consolidate its control over royal prerogatives. Bureaucrats--not the king, not military strongmen--took steps to merge the nikai. Bureaucrats took control of sacred objects and began to distribute ritual favours at royal temples. Bureaucrats revealed the 'essence' and true meaning of dhamma and even the secrets of cosmic process to the nation's citizens--'in the name of the king.' By the late 1970s, neither the king nor powerful military leaders could easily wrest these prerogatives from bureaucratic control. Powerful leaders came and went, but professional bureaucrats remained, consolidating their ties with the business community. In the 1930s and the 1940s, professional bureaucrats had no king to legitimate their actions. In the 1970s they did.

A new battle for the Buddha's relics and reminders took shape in the 1970s. Unlike in the 1940s and 1950s, when races for virtue took place between powerful individuals and were generally conducted in public (which entailed a potential loss of face for participants), the new races for virtue took place mostly in private. The protagonists were the king, the government, and power capitalists--individuals and institutions which had benefited from the economic boom of the 1960s. The new battle for virtue heightened ambiguities about which activities were royal and which were not. Eventually it led to uncertainties about the connection between things royal [luang] and things sacred [saksit].

This chapter returns to a central question of chapter 10: What makes a royal temple royal? The question is pivotal point for examining: (1) the soteriological structure of the modern Thai state; (2) the position of the monarchy within that structure; and (3) the changes that occurred in the cultural system as the royal temples changed hands.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first and longest part I describe the royal temple plan of 1975 and examine the cultural properties of Buddhist temples. What are their characteristics as "legitimizing discourse" (Bourdieu 1977)? After summarizing changes in the royal temple system in the last hundred years, I discuss the long-term historical impact of these changes on the prestige of the monarchy.

In the second part of the chapter I reexamine the semiotic properties of royal temples to highlight exactly what is at stake in modern battles over the Buddha's teachings and relics. I argue that, as the royal temple system changed hands and a second tier of state-patronized 'development temples' was created beginning in 1966 (Kromkan Sasana 1980a), the new 'owners' of these elite temples renamed their objects and activities and restructured their message-images in such a way that the messages conveyed by these elite temple complexes began to display the transferring properties of metaphor. Categories of religion and economy, sasana and setakit, traditionally separate and complementary in the Buddhist cosmological schema, have been juxtaposed as the new elite have intensified their efforts to reconcile Buddhist and Western capitalist values. In the push towards the reconciliation of Buddhist and Western cosmologies, the distinction between the 'two wheels of dhamma' began to collapse: Religion was becoming "like" economy and vice versa.

To understand the nature of this semiotic transformation, one must understand how Buddhist temples are like language, a language of images (cf. Munn 1966). Elite Buddhist temples comprise a "language of images" in the three senses used by Mitchell (1980:3). (1) They are images regarded as language. (2) They entail a verbal language that is

informed by images. (3) They entail a language about images. Men use a limited sacred vocabulary, accessible only on a hierarchical basis, to speak of ritual, merit, and thus the types of prestige and symbolic capital that accrue from control of elite temples and extraordinary religious activities.

Elite Buddhist temple complexes are perhaps the dominant source of ideological production in the modern Thai kingdom. The "language of images" associated with such temples is possibly the primary mechanism of ideological domination and culture change. This chapter thus does more than examine the invisible mechanisms through which elite temples changed hands in the 1970s. It examines as well how control of this "language of images" was simultaneously transferred to a new capitalist elite at the same time.

I conclude the chapter with an ethnographic description of the Department of Religious Affairs' 1979 kathin phrarachathan at a royal temple in Khon Kaen. This section demonstrates exactly how outsiders have used control over the new royal temple system to gain control over the use of language in Isan, to control men's "real practical consciousness" (Marx 1965) in ways that advance capitalist development.

The Royal Temple Plan of 1975

Nowhere are changes in the monarchy (and the invisibility with which they occur) more apparent than in the royal temple plan of the 1970s. In or around 1975, the Grand Palace and the government made two decisions about royal temples. The king granted permission to increase the number of royal temples in the kingdom and the government then created new formal criteria for elevating commoner temples to royal status.

This royal temple plan had all the advantages of the state's kathin phrarachathan program. It concerned the business of the monarch, which automatically placed it beyond the realm of public discourse. Thus high-ranking officials confirmed that the above decisions had been made (they are reflected in the records of the Department of Religious Affairs), but they were never publicly announced.

The changes in the royal temple system are most notable for what they did not involve. The king, members of the royal family, and members of the nobility built none of the new royal temples. Rather, the 'owners' or supporters of prominent temples in provincial capitals, some of whom were wealthy Chinese merchants, 'offered' their temples to the king for royal patronage. The king's acceptance of these temples and subsequent conferral of royal patronage is referred to as phrarachathan, 'the royal gift.' Unlike the great Buddhist kings of the past, King Bhumibol never built a temple to celebrate his victory in ascending the throne.

Seven of the eight temples that were elevated to royal status from 1976 to 1979 were located in the rapidly expanding capitals of the Northeast. The eighth, Wat Chaychanasongkhram (The Temple of the Winning of the War), was in Yawarat (Chinatown), the trade district of Bangkok (Kromkan Sasana 1980b).

Gifts from the Sky: the Denial of Change

The appearance of new royal temples on the landscape had the magical quality of all things connected with royalty. Since the program officially originated in the Grand Palace, 'the seventh level of heaven,' its budget and objectives were never subject to public scrutiny. When royal temples 'appeared' [prakot], they appeared as gifts from the gods. The gift of royal status, like the king's kathin gifts, seemed to 'fall from the sky.'

Like the kathin phrarachathan program of the 1960s, the royal temple plan was consciously designed to promote national development--to spread 'royal' influence to every one of the nation's seventy-two provinces--but it was organized according to traditional hierarchical principles, thereby instantiating sacred paradigms. It sidestepped the most disturbing antinomy problems of the day (charges that the government was "using" monks to advance worldly goals) only to generate new ones (the king began to lose his sacrality).

Although informants said "We have always had royal temples. This is nothing new," there was definitely something new about this program. The Department of Religious Affairs, the successor to the ancient sanghakiri, was not carrying out royal commands as much as it was deciding what they were--an expression of the convergence of interests of the Senior Monks' Council, the prime minister's office, and the king. The Department, not the Palace, then developed formal 'programs' [krong kan, lit. 'structures of activities'] to carry out these putative 'royal' commands.

The new system was the logical extension of that created by King Chulalongkorn a century earlier: The king's wealthy subjects built splendid temples and the king made them 'royal.' The meritorious monarch could thus avoid being castigated as a wastrel (wealthy supporters built the temples, not the king). As I shall demonstrate, however, the new system eventually raised crucial questions about the purity of the king and the religious significance of his khaittya status.

Why such concern over royal temples? I argue that, as a language of images, royal temples comprise a mode of privileged discourse that is open to a very few members of the Thai elite. Their messages comprise a silent "linked" discourse on two major topics, Thai Buddhist religious

orthodoxy and the purity of the nation's leaders. They are complex statements about lineage--or the 'line of merit at the head of the nation.'

Control over royal temples entails other, crucial types of powers. It reflects and entails control over the distribution of bun and barami nationwide. (The royal temple network spans the nation.) It is the central source of production of the nation's official celestial hierarchy.

The possession of bun and barami entails related powers over language and discourse. It entails control over the naming of experience and the public interpretation of experience (i.e., authority in evaluating the causal roots and future consequences of events, powers of religious prophecy and interpretation). It entails a reciprocal power, the ability to command the silence of others. When one controls royal temples (and 'development' temples) one thus commands the source of culture change in Thai society--the source of men's abilities to change the system of "symbols and meanings" (Schneider 1968; Geertz 1973) and major themes (cf. Rosaldo 1980:xi) that guide Thai social life.

In effect, control over the royal temple system--over religious orthodoxy in its many manifestations--is the key to the control of knowledge in all areas of social life. Thus the major theme of King Bhumibol's reign is traditional: The quest for knowledge of dhamma (religious purity) is prior to and the prerequisite for the quest for knowledge in all areas of Thai social life. These facets of merit-making help explain the types of symbolic, linguistic, dialogic, and cultural capital that are at stake in struggles for control of royal temples.

In the following section I will examine the semiotic properties of the traditional Thai royal temple system to elaborate on this point, and as a preliminary step in explaining the semiotic changes that have occurred in the system in the 1960s and 1970s.

Royal Temples: A Cultural Description

What is the received wisdom concerning Thai royal temples? Traditionally, the gift of a temple to the Sangha is considered to be one of the most meritorious acts open to the Buddhist layman (Kaufman 1960). Men give temples to the Sangha to support the monastic quest. In Buribhand and Griswold's words (1973 [1958]:1), such gifts are an "indirect way" of eliminating greed, ignorance, and anger, the causes of suffering [dukkha].

Since the king traditionally had the greatest resources at his disposal, he naturally assumed the heaviest building obligations towards the Sangha. The royal temples were thus considered the best of the laity's gifts to the Sangha. In theory, they did the most to eliminate ignorance and suffering. They stood as visual 'models' of perfect temples for the polity at large. Such, at least, was the ancient tradition.

The temple complex can be viewed a system of cultural coherence in which disparate phenomena are linked by an underlying cultural code (cf. Isbell 1985; Burke 1968:359-379; Lakoff and Johnson 1980:117, 44). The principles of this system have been noted throughout the dissertation.

1. The temple complex is a composite, living image of the ideal past, one that is constantly changed or 'purified' by its owner-worshippers and by the monks who reside there.

2. Buddhist temples, and royal temples in particular, have special evocative qualities; they 'remind' men of the past. As Buribhand and Griswold write, royal temples consist of "buildings for practical use" plus an assortment of relics and 'reminders' [cetiya] of the Buddha and the dhamma. Royal temples are traditionally described as 'complete' or 'perfect' temples, temples which are sombun or 'full of merit.' By some they are said to 'create the world of the past life,' that which existed when the Buddha was present (see below).
3. Perfect temples are an 'eye delight' [nayan priti] of the type described by the former monk in chapter 11. They create an interstitial space-time (Munn 1977) that mediates past and present, recalling the absent Buddha (Mus 1959).
4. The entire complex works on Hindu/Buddhist concepts of visual power: on the principle that men are morally and emotionally transformed by the sight of their gods (Babb 1982), or, in the Buddhist case, by the sight of pure monks whose actions and surroundings embody the dhamma.

How is the temple complex like language? It is constructed of diverse media or "elements of discourse": art, architecture, words, texts, rituals, and monastic practices. Messages can be conveyed through a single medium, through ritual practices, for example, or across media, through the combination or juxtaposition of artistic and architectural styles. These messages can be contradictory or complimentary, harmonic or disharmonic.¹

¹Thus monks at Mahanikai temples can perform kathin rituals in the Thammayut style, for example, thereby announcing a break from Wat Mahathat, the head Mahanikai temples in the kingdom. Or they can perform the kathin in the same style as Wat Mahathat, thereby asserting their loyalty to Phra Phimonlatham and the superiority of Mahanikai over

Objects, activities, and persons in the temple complex can perform parallel communicative functions--'announcing' merit, 'welcoming' or 'receiving' guests, etc. The sacred powers of men, objects, and activities in the complex are similar. Thus pure monks, pure kings, and perfect architectural styles are "like" candles on the temple altar in that they are said to 'attract' or 'incline' men towards the dhamma.

The same cultural code that applies to the royal activities applies to a perfect Buddhist temple. Temples can be represented as incorporating all architectural styles (i.e., they signal perfection in the encompassing mode), or they can be portrayed as being built in a single style, one that perfectly recreates 'the world of the past life.' They have their own syntax and grammar, rules of arrangement and tests about what constitutes proper "utterances."

Like metaphor, ritual, and music, the temple complex works on principles of synesthesia (cf. Osgood, May, and Miron 1975). Its messages can be coded across the sensory dimensions of sight, sound, smell and touch. The altar, for example, recreates the world² of the heavens. The light, incense, celestial music and words of homage together are believed to create a sensorily rich world which allows men to remember and worship the Buddha and the dhamma.

This type of synesthesia articulates with Buddhist concepts of person--with the idea that men are but aggregates or 'heaps' of elements and that they are attached to morally positive or negative stimuli through the five doors of the senses. As Tambiah (1970:195-222) has argued, ritual chants (messages in the auditory dimension) are assumed to have magical properties in conveying the dhamma, as are bright colors

Thammayut practices.

²The bhumi or the place-and-religious-state of the heavens.

(messages in the visual dimension). Visual messages can contradict or reinforce auditory ones. Or, like metaphors which invoke multiple sensory messages, messages which are coded literally in different sensory media can have the same cognitive, imaginative, and emotional structures (cf. Isbell 1985).

I argue that the visual takes precedence over other sensory dimensions in the communication process in the temple complex. This is in accordance with Thai-Buddhist concepts of power, in which sight is the dominant idiom, 'the leading organ' [nayana] of perception (McFarland 1944:442), and in accordance with the disproportionate emphasis placed on the taming of the 'eye faculty' over other of the sensory doors in meditation techniques (Buddhaghosa 1976).

The royal temple complex is also an intricate type of "legitimizing discourse" in the sense that Bourdieu (1977) uses the term, except that unlike the legitimating discourse to which Bourdieu refers (i.e., language), the Buddhist temple complex is predominately discourse in the visual mode. As such, it can take on the logical functions associated with rhetoric (argument and persuasion) and the emotional functions associated with metaphor in Western traditions (see below).

Messages in the Visual Mode

How are messages created in the temple complex? What are its dimensions of meaning? I will explore these questions in the following sections.

Temporality: The Semantic Structure

As noted above, the temple complex consists primarily of symbols of remembrance called cetiya. Most if not all of its messages are generated from a tension between between two temporal frameworks, past

and present. These temporal modes are symbolic, respectively, of the Buddha's presence and his absence. These temporal dimensions comprise the semantic and emotional range of the messages conveyed through the temple complex.

Royal temples in particular are dense with powerful symbols of remembrance. They contain trees grown from cuttings of the original Bo tree in India, 'reminders' of the Buddha's final victory over Mara (desire). They contain the Buddha's physical relics, placed in stupas or reliquaries as reminders to people to follow the Doctrine--which will "make their hearts glad" (Buribhand and Griswold 1973 [1958]:5). They contain stupas built to enshrine the Buddha's 'relics of association' [paribhogacetiya], his almsbowl and clothing, and symbols of the great events of his career. They contain stupas built to enshrine the relics of his disciples and other holy men and Buddha images called 'indicative reminders' [uddesikacetiya]. Finally, they contain stupas called dhammacetiya which enshrine words from the Scriptures (1973 [1958]:4-6).

The elements of a Buddhist temple are subject to the same legitimating test as are Buddhist texts and the behavior of Buddhist monks and kings. Are they truly reminiscent of the Buddha and the dhamma? Their authenticity in this respect is believed to determine their emotional and religious impact.

The elements of the temple complex thus create elaborate temporal grids that link the present with the past. Hunn (1982) argues that in some cultural systems taxa (animals in particular) have "activity signatures" which are the underlying organizing principles of their classificatory schemes. I suggest that most religious objects (and actions) in Buddhist temples have distinct "temporal signatures" which similarly comprise the organizing principles of their classificatory

schemes. Objects and activities in Buddhist temples recall specific dynasties, kings, and types of religious activity. They also have related "locative signatures" which indicate their supposed place of origin (e.g., India, Ceylon, Burma, etc.).

Transtextuality: Dialogues with An Absent Other

The objects or elements within the temple complex can be seen as "mini-texts" that speak to each other. In addition, they (or the whole complex) often speak to an invisible, absent Other--other texts and other traditions. It is to this external dimension of meaning I will now turn.

Gerard Genette's (1982) study of the types of relations that exist among literary texts (transtextuality) sheds some light on this dimension of meaning of Buddhist temples. Like the elements of literary texts, temple complexes display relations of intertextuality, which is to say that they derive their meanings from an absent Other. Or, using the term in its more narrow sense, one text (or tradition) is often present in another. The ways in which some traditions are "present" in others casts light on the dynamics of change and conflict within the Theravada tradition. It tells us how monks and kings fight.

Buddhist temple complexes assert at least one of three types of relations to other traditions. (1) They assert a generic or derivative relation with a source tradition (i.e., South Asian or Sinhalese). (2) They claim to encompass other, lesser traditions, regional traditions, for example. (3) Or, they engage in silent and often vituperative criticism of rival monastic orders or national traditions.

Paratexts

Taking these in order, temple complexes, like literary texts, often claim (or display) relations of paratextuality, in which one text supposedly relates to another on all levels (i.e., of form, content, symbols, organization, plot, etc.).³ Royal temples thus often claim to be total replicas of earlier, generic religious traditions--those which existed in South Asia during the 'time of the Buddha' under the patronage of Great Indian kings like Bimbisara, for example. Thai government officials claim this type of relationship for modern 'development temples.' Modeled after the religious practice of Acaan Cha in Ubon, following the architectural plans drawn up by the Department of Religious Affairs, development temples are supposed to be perfect replicas of religious practice as it existed during the time of the Buddha.

Intratexts

The elements of the temple complex often display relations of intratextuality (e.g., quotes within quotes), which is to say that one tradition often claims to encompass (and transcend) another. These relations have important political ramifications. The appropriation of sacred objects by conquering princes is the sign of the military cum moral defeat of a people: It signals their incorporation into a new kingdom and a new realm of dhamma. Captured religious objects, in Thailand, the Emerald Buddha or Holy Emerald Jewel foremost among them (Reynolds 1978), are the visual-iconic means through which regional histories are incorporated into "national" histories and further transformed into a history of Buddhism.

³As in the relation between James Joyce's Ulysses and The Odyssey, for example.

For example, ever since the turn of the century, Thai kings have self-consciously incorporated Laotian religious objects and practices into an encompassing 'Thai' tradition. Intratextual relationships are indicated, for example, through the arrangements of objects on an altar: At Wat Thepsirin, statues of the Isan saint Ubali are placed below those of the Cakkri kings.

Hypertexts

Temple complexes also display relations of partial derivation, of what Genette refers to as hypertextuality. These are relations in which one text is (supposedly) derived from another (e.g., the relation which exists between an historical text and an historical novel). Hypertexts are of particular historical interest insofar as they relate to the dynamics of monastic schism and the creation of new modes of religious practice. For example, the prince-monk Mongkut pointedly derived the most important aspects of his new Thammayut practice from the Mon (Southern Burmese), which was viewed by many as an act of treason. Phra Phimonlatham's meditation practices, also pointedly borrowed from the Burmese, are equally controversial hypertexts.

New and equally controversial hypertexts are also being generated as the kingdom "modernizes." These take the form of lay religious organizations (like that of Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, for example [Keyes 1978]) with right- or left-wing affiliations supposedly derived from (modeled after) monastic practice (cf. Swearer 1981). Pin Muthukan's program for training former monks as army chaplains was likewise represented as a secular version of monastic practice.

Architexts

By far the most embittered and longstanding monastic battles of the Thai kingdom concern the rivalry between the Mahanikai and the royally-sponsored Thammayut order. Specific rivalries between these orders often display relations of architextuality, in which the relation of a text to a genre is addressed (e.g., that of a poem to poems or of a novel to novels). For example, in the 1970s the superiority of Acaan Man's versus Phra Phimonlatham's meditation techniques was the focal point of battles between the Mahanikai and Thammayut branches of the Isan monastic order. Is 'breathing through the nose' or 'breathing through the mouth' the more efficacious meditation technique? Which is samadhi (a technique for stilling the mind preliminary to the attainment of wisdom) and which is vipassana (the whole act of meditation and enlightenment)? Relations of architextuality are also implied in situations in which the verb pattana (which means 'to develop' in a soteriologically neutral sense) is substituted for the verb burana. Is 'developing' a temple-and-its school the same thing as 'restoring' a temple? (Is building a school an act of merit in the same way as is building a temple?)

Metatexts

Finally, temple complexes and their elements display relations of metatextuality, which is to say that one text comments on another without directly referring to it (e.g., allusion or criticism). These relations are at the heart of monastic disputes. Monks conspicuously change the ways in which they wear their robes (rolling them in or out at the shoulder, or covering or uncovering a shoulder), mark the boundaries of their temples, or perform their ordination ceremonies.

These acts stand as implicit criticisms of preexisting (i.e., 'less pure') monastic practices, and, as in the case of prince Mongkut, were enough to cause an uproar in the palace. A barrage of such silent criticism stands as an index of the king's loss of virtue.

Genette notes that these categories vary in relation to each other in terms of the explicitness with which one text refers to another. This raises an important point about the nature of communication within the Theravada tradition. As a general rule, the less (verbally) explicit a statement, the more powerful it is. This is due to the premium placed on Buddhist monks' total detachment from worldly things. It is also due to the fact that argument, especially the spectacle of monks arguing in public, is an index of spiritual decline for everyone involved.

Genette notes that the above relations can exist alone or in combination, which is obviously true of the Theravada tradition. Although experimental in nature, these categories are nonetheless useful in advancing our understanding of the structure of communication and meaning in Buddhist temples, and the structure of religious change.

There are other, equally important, dimensions of meaning involved in the temple complex, those concerning the status of the gift givers and the act of giving. It is to these performative dimensions of meaning that I will now turn.

Discourse in the Act of Giving: Performative Dimensions of Gift-Giving

The meanings involved in merit-making--in the act of constructing or transforming a temple--can be seen in terms of what I will call their "performative" dimensions: how the act of doing something is also an act of saying something. My usage is the opposite of Austin's (1962), who uses the term with reference to language, to examine how the act of saying something is also an act of doing something (cf. Tambiah 1977).

Three levels of performative meaning can be isolated: (1) the "autotelic," which refers to the status of the gift giver (2) the "referential," which refers to the status of the gift and (3) the "metapragmatic," which refers to the act of giving. These dimensions of meaning become fluid (and controversial) during periods of rapid social change.

Why are these performative dimensions of merit-making important? The creation and restoration of Buddhist temples can be viewed as a type of bricolage in which the bricoleur (formerly the conquering prince, now the government) appropriates objects and practices with distinct historical and/or regional values (their "old meanings"), recontextualizes them, thereby imbuing them with new meanings, creating of them new messages. In indigenous terms, the objects and practices are put in a 'more pure place.' By thus combining them with a new set of elements, the bricoleur has thus created a new tradition or mythology that retains the old meanings of its elements as part of the new. In the Theravada tradition such acts of appropriation are acts of dominance, the stuff of domination, the primary mechanism through which history and myth is created, represented, and appropriated.

"Dynastic merit-making" activities of this sort often entail the creation of new levels of meaning. They refer as much to the religious status of the gift giver and the act of giving (or building religious monuments) as they do to the gift itself. (And, in the Theravada tradition, silent actions on behalf of the dhamma are considered to be gifts, a form of dana.) It is through conspicuous acts of merit that the most dramatic messages of the complex are conveyed. The temple's incipient langue is converted to parole, into a visual utterance or speech act. In the following sections, I will examine these three performative dimensions of merit-making in greater detail.

Autotelic Meanings

Merit-making is first of all an act of purification. It is a statement about the religious purity of the gift giver: 'This person has a pure heart.' For virtuosi, kings and princes, acts of merit also constitute implicit claims that their actions resemble those of the Buddha or of past, great kings. As Buribhand and Griswold note, when Thai kings built great monasteries or turned their pleasure gardens into monastic retreats, they were following the Tripitaka and emulating the actions of great Indian kings like Bimbisara of Rajagriha and the Sakyas of Kapilavastu. These kings had presented monasteries to the Buddha and his disciples (with whom they shared membership in the khattiya caste) (1973 [1958]:5). When Buddhist kings built temples as a final act in claiming a territory, perfecting it as a dhamma realm (cf. Wolters 1973; Reynolds and Clifford 1980), they were likewise emulating the great Indian King Asoka or King Dutthagamani, the king of Sri Lanka whose installation is described in the Mahavamsa and the Sasanavamsa. Such autotelic meanings are rich, varied, and compounded during the long religious careers of great men.

Referential Meanings

Autotelic meanings work in combination with referential meanings, those concerning the history and significance of the gift, its provenance (or semantic range). When King Rama I installed the Emerald Buddha next to the Grand Palace in Bangkok, for example, he was implicitly asserting 'This is the Emerald Buddha, the former palladium of the kingdoms of Chieng Mai and Vientienne' (cf. Reynolds 1978). By installing the Emerald Buddha in the Royal Chapel in Bangkok, General Cakkri added yet another dimension of meaning: he announced its incorporation into his realm of dhamma.

An additional level of historical meaning is added when the act of giving a gift is also an act of naming the gift or naming it as a token of a type (cf. Silverstein 1981). 'This is the genuine Emerald Buddha' or 'This is a Buddha statue in the Sukhothai mode.' These often controversial assertions about the gift likewise reflect on the moral capacity of the gift givers.

Metapragmatic Meanings

The third, metapragmatic level of meaning refers to that dimension of merit-making which is a statement about the action itself. In particular, in the case of virtuosi, the act of giving the gift is often also an act of naming the action, especially during periods of intensive "modernization."

Some acts of merit make specific claims, 'This is an act of temple restoration,' [burana wat], for example, or, as King Mongkut attempted to claim, 'This is a proper mode of ordination' (i.e., that on the river raft). King Wachirwawut may have been attempting to assert that building a school rather than a temple to commemorate his succession to the throne was an act of merit-making [kan tham bun] rather than a more generalized act of goodness [kuson] (i.e., a virtuous act performed outside a religious context): that building schools improves men's rebirth chances for the next life.

Like the intertextual dimensions of the temple complex, the referential, autotelic, and metapragmatic meanings of gift-giving are complex and interdependent. Kings traditionally built temples to commemorate their moral victories--in war, in ascending the throne, in their careers as monks. Rama V, for example, built Wat Thepsirin, The Abode of the Angels, which was named after his mother (who was named

after the Buddhist heavens). He built Wat Rachaphit, which means 'Adorned by the King,' and Wat Benchamobophit, which means 'The Fifth King.' His actions referred as much to his own status and that of the Cakkri dynasty (situating it within the lineage of the Buddha) as they did to the status of the gifts themselves.

Whether or not the signature of a gift "takes," whether or not it is considered authentic, is in large part a function of the purity of the gift-giver. As the royal astrologer said, only the king can 'see' the face of the Buddha and therefore prescribe the correct dimensions of a Buddha statue. Only the king can say that 'Silver means rain' and otherwise declare the meanings of religious symbols and objects. Similarly, whether a gift is successfully assigned the appellation 'Lao,' 'Indian,' or 'Burmese'--another source of controversy--is also in large part a function of the supposed purity and insight of the gift-giver. The ability to decree that 'This is a "royal" temple' or 'That is a "royal" ritual [phrarachapithi]' is also a function of the purity of the giver, as Luang Phibun found out to his dismay.

This is where the question of pure lineage once again enters our story. The ability to play with these various levels of meaning and enter into this type of privileged discourse is a function the religious purity--or pure lineage?--of the gift giver. The exercise of naming functions, formerly a royal prerogative, is at the crux of Thai social dramas and questions of "modernization."

Temples as Privileged Discourse

I suggest that elite temples (and temple building activities) comprise a "privileged" mode of legitimating discourse for three reasons. First, it is a mode of discourse that is open only to members

of a privileged class, traditionally, to those laity who have the wealth or bloodlines to enter and alter royal space or to elite monks (the most powerful of whom were, in the past, also of royal blood).

Second, its many levels of meaning are accessible only on a graduated basis. For example, few men understand the historical and emotional significance of Mahanikai monks accepting white cloth during the royal kathin ceremony, but this custom has a devastating impact on those who understand its implications. For the older members of the order in particular, it recalls a humiliating historical incident in which the abbot of Wat Mahthat (the head of the whole Mahanikai Order) was forced to acknowledge the superiority of Thammayut ritual practice (see below). It is at this most privileged level of meaning that one encounters the 'waves beneath the waves' of Thai political life, the truly severe monastic schisms that divide the kingdom.

Third and perhaps most important, the royal temple complex is privileged discourse because its subject is most often the purity of living Buddhist kings and their ancestors. It is a form of "lineage talk." When Thai kings build, restore and name temples, they also claim their place in the lineage of the Buddha.

For example, beginning, reportedly, in King Mongkut's reign, Thai kings caste Buddha statues with the facial characteristics of their ancestors. When Cakkri kings enshrine the relics of their ancestors along with those of the ("Cakkri") Buddha's, they provide visible proof that marriage to them or their offspring conjoins the bloodlines of ordinary men with that of the Buddha; The sharing of the king's blood through marriage, like the sight of his meritorious actions, mediates this-worldly and supra-worldly realms. Marriage to the king and proximity to the Buddha are thus structurally similar--acts of purification both.

The lineage concept is the basis of the exclusionary rule that governs the performance of kathin rituals at royal temples. Only the highest ranking members of royal families can offer kathin at royal temples; these temples contain the relics of their ancestors. When they make merit, they venerate the Buddha and the ancestors in a single act. Ordinary men would no more perform rituals at royal temples than they would call on the deities of Bangkok for help in their personal affairs. In the words of the king's secretary, "They know their [ritual] place."

The analysis of the temple complex as a system of cultural coherence enables us to make comparisons between Southeast Asian and other cultural traditions. As Isbell (1985) writes, for example, in South American cultural systems, myths and metaphors, the figurative and metaphorical answers to life's puzzles are based on images of motion through space. These images evoke comparison between nature and culture. (Men, birds, or jaguars ascend to the tops of trees and down again or vice versa.) In Thailand, metaphorical answers to life's puzzles are formulated in religious symbolism, in images which evoke movement through time, in which time is a symbol of religious purity (being near or far from the Buddha and his practice). This movement is coded spatially in Buddhist rituals through proximity to sacred objects and, in royal rituals, through proximity to the king. The most pure--and the most conspicuous--acts of merit (the building of whole, 'perfect' temples) represent the most powerful movement through time--back to the very time of the Buddha.

This retrograde movement is achieved through dana, which, in turn, is a function of the accumulation and renunciation of wealth. This brings us back to the question of who is now controlling the elite temple system in Thailand and what are they doing with it.

The Owners

Men who venerate the dhamma are said to be its 'owners' (Maha Boowa 1976). As the above analysis indicates, men who venerate or 'own' royal temples gain control of a rich and powerful system of representation. How does this take place in practice?

Temple committees influence the disposition of the temple's relics. They determine the temple's architectural plans, methods of "attracting" kathin sponsors, ritual practices, and even the practices of its monks. (King Rama VI reportedly forced the abbot of Wat Mahathat to accept white cloth during the kathin ceremony as a condition for retaining royal patronage.)

In the following section I will detail the steps through which the royal temple system changed hands, passing from the hands of the king to the hands of the nation's most ambitious bureaucrats and entrepreneurs.

The Transformation of the System: 1880-1980

Royal wat are those that have historically been founded by royalty or nobility and given royal recognition. In fact, prestigious commoner wat, their prestige deriving from their large size and/or from historical claims, can petition to be upgraded as royal wat, and this process again helps royal wat to be larger than those of commoner status. (S. J. Tambiah, World Conqueror, World Renouncer)

Tambiah tells us something about the modern royal temple system, but what is the history of this system?

The impetus towards the present system first occurred in the early nineteenth century when the financial structure of the Thai state was challenged by Westerners and then radically changed. The king's treasury and that of the state were defined as being ideologically separate, which forever changed the merit-making activities of Cakkri kings.

King Chulalongkorn created a three-tiered temple system so wealthy merchants could offer third-class temples to the throne. This saved him (or the "state") the cost of building and maintaining royal temples. Above all, it avoided the question of the distinction between the royal treasury and the state treasury.

Chulalongkorn's successor, Rama VI, built a school instead of a temple to commemorate his ascension to the throne. His successor, Rama VII, "improved" the school and issued the first printed edition of the Tripitaka in Thai letters to celebrate his moral victory in succeeding to the throne. This was done in much the same way he would have built or restored a royal temple in a bygone era (Buribhand and Griswold 1973 [1958]).

The building of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat represents a total break from previous traditions. It was the first royal temple not built by a king, not commemorating events in the career of a king, not containing the relics of kings and not honouring the ancestors of kings. It was built by Luang Phibun and his cabinet as a state-royal temple in a bold attempt to merge the nikai and perhaps to establish a pure lineage of warrior-merchant elite. If anything, it was an act that simultaneously venerated the Buddha and the overthrow of kings, or (depending on which version one accepts), an act of expiation for having done so.

By 1958, when Buribhand and Griswold wrote "The Royal Monasteries and their Significance," the distinction between temples built by a king and those "improved" (or patronized) by a king was already becoming blurred.

Royal monasteries are of two types, those built under the direct sponsorship of the Sovereign and those built by others, with or without grants in aid from him, and offered to the Sovereign with a view to being better cared for and supported in the future. It is not always possible to make a sharp distinction [between the two types] because sometimes a monastery of the second sort may have been so much improved by the Sovereign that it is virtually a new creation. (1973 [1958]:4)

In 1975 the distinction between royal temples built by the king and those built by others was becoming nebulous, but not for the reasons that Buribhand and Griswold give--that the king had so improved commoner temples that it was impossible to determine whether he or they had built them. The distinction was blurred because it was difficult if not impossible to ascertain what contribution, if any, the king had made to the new 'royal' temples.

Despite the "un-royaling" of royal temples, their numbers continue to grow.⁴ Of the thirty-six temples that were elevated to royal status between 1935 and 1968, only five were in the Bangkok-Thonburi region and the rest were in outlying provinces. This trend eventually resulted in an inversion of royal traditions; there are now more royal temples outside the capital than there are in it (cf. O'Connor 1978:158). The balance tipped around 1969.

The records of the Department of Religious Affairs (Kromkan Sasana 1980b) indicate that by 1979 there were 169 royal temples in the kingdom. Officials said the recent additions to the royal temple list were part of a broader "plan" to have royal temples in every province in the kingdom. Seven of the eight temples elevated to royal status after 1968 were located in the provincial capitals of the Northeast.⁵

⁴By 1934 there were more than 125 royal temples in Thailand, seventy-three of which were in Bangkok (Wales 1934:23). In 1968 Thailand had 161 royal temples, thirty-five of which were in Bangkok and forty-three of which were in Thonburi (Tambiah 1976:270).

⁵The elevation of Isan temples to royal status began in 1976 with Wat Suphataram in Ubol (1976) and Wat Buurapharam in Surin (1977). Five were selected for royal patronage in 1978: Wat Klang in Kalasin, Wat Mahawanaram in Ubol, Wat Bungphralanachai in Roi-et plus two in Khon Kaen. The Khon Kaen temples were Wat That, a Mahanikai temple whose abbot was a former student of Phra Phimonlatham, and Wat Srican, the Thammayut temple visited by 'White-robed Pin' as a young boy.

By the 1970s, neither the king nor members of the nobility were building royal temples. Those in the Northeast were originally built and restored by members of the indigenous Laotian nobility or by the half-brothers of King Chulalongkorn. These temples were later 'improved' (or originally built) by wealthy Chinese merchants. These temples were not built or improved to commemorate great victories in war, but great victories in the marketplace. The exception in the Fifth Reign--that men of non-royal blood could build royal temples--had become the rule by the Ninth.

The new system raises uncomfortable questions about the sacrality of the king. If he was not sacrificing personal wealth to support the Sangha, how sacred (i.e., renunciatory) were his actions? Since the temples and monetary gifts offered to the Sangha by the new elite outstrip those offered by the king, who are the most meritorious beings in the kingdom, the king or members of the new merchant elite? If the king is not renunciatory he is not saksit, and if he is not saksit he is not the true lord of the land. He has no right to appropriate its finest religious objects.

As Tambiah notes, the most important points about royal temples of the present concern their kathin ceremonies and the ranks of their monks.

While in the past royal wat enjoyed royal endowments and gifts, today the chief prerogatives of being wat luang are that the king or his representative must present it with the annual kathin gift at the end of Lent and that certain high ecclesiastical titles are reserved for monks residing in them. (1976:270)

This means that ganthathura or teaching monks cannot receive high ecclesiastical rank if they do not reside at (and follow the practice of) royal temples.

The temple plan of 1975 took control of royal temples away from the king and local temple committees and placed it in the hands of the bureaucracy. The best regional temples in Isan, temples whose abbots determine religious practice throughout the area, received state patronage--but at a cost. The state--not the king, not local temple committees, not Isan monks--determines the shape and content of Isan religious practice.

Becoming a Royal Temple

The Department of Religious Affairs sets the criteria for 'lifting' [yok wen] commoner temples to royal status. These criteria are part of its long-term strategy to eliminate undesirable regional ('Lao') variants of Theravada Buddhism in Isan and to destroy the influence of Phra Phimonlatham.

What must a temple do to become royal? According to a high-ranking official in the Department of Religious Affairs, members of the temple committee must first request [khō, lit., 'beg for'] royal alms, meaning they must formerly request royal patronage, beginning at the Department of Religious Affairs. The department scrutinizes the temple and the activities of its monks to see if they meet formal criteria. According to this official, the temple must be at least fifty years old. Its monks must have 'stuck together' [titakan, or been 'united'] for at least five years (in the eyes of the state) and the temple must have at least twenty monks. "It must have both meditation and teachings monks, and education in a good kind," the official explained, which means that it had to have a Pariyatham School (whose curriculum was prescribed by the Department of Religious Affairs) and that its meditation practices had to conform to government standards--or at least not be openly identified with those that Phra Phimonlatham brought back from Burma.

The department passes its recommendations to the Council of Elder Monks whose recommendations are then sent to the prime minister's office. If the prime minister approves, the list goes to the Grand Palace where it receives final approval.

Some temples have chosen to remain independent of government control. The official mentioned that the monks of Nongkai, the Isan capital across the river from Laos, had "still not requested" royal status.

"Men Diligent in Business . . . ": The New Sponsors

The records of the Department of Religious Affairs show that powerful ritual sponsors from Bangkok began to offer kathin at royal temples in the Northeast at about the same time the king made the decision to increase the number of royal temples in the region. The lists of kathin phrarachathan sponsors show the convergence of business and bureaucratic elite under royal patronage noted in other contexts by Thak and Girling: in royally-sponsored marriages and in business partnerships, for example.

The emergence of corporate capitalist 'big men' in the Isan royal temple system is the following. In 1968, the Department of Industry offered kathin phrarachathan in Roi-et. In 1971, Bangkok Bank offered at Wat Suthatcindaa in Korat. In 1972, a royal princess offered at Wat Phra That Phanom in That Phanom Province. The Telephone Company and the Teachers Training College also offered in the Northeast that same year.

The Forestry Department (Sakorn Nakorn), General Chatchai Chunhawan (the son of Field Marshal Phin Chunhawan and head of the right-wing Thai Nation Party) (Korat), the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (Udorn), and Bangkok Bank (Udorn)⁶ were the major

⁶General Chatchai was particularly diligent in business. Born a millionaire because of his father's business ventures, (Bangkok Post 28

non-indigenous sponsors of 1975 and 1976. In 1976, Pote Sarasin's Thai Thanu Bank and the Department of Industry offered in Korat. In 1978 and 1979, the Department of Public Welfare, the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT), the Land Department, the Department of War Sciences, and Bangkok Bank were major sponsors in the Northeast. In 1978, the Department of Religious Affairs went to Wat That in Khon Kaen to offer royal kathin gifts, followed by Bangkok Bank a year later. No members of the royal family appear on the royal kathin lists for Isan after 1972.

The 1970s policy was the perhaps inevitable outcome of the temple system begun a century earlier by King Chulalongkorn. Under his new system, the king cannot be accused of being a "rich man" or a man who "wastes" the people's money, but he might very well be characterized as a "stingy man" or perhaps even as a man who is not a true Dhammaraja, especially by those least enamoured of the monarchy. This is where the antinomy issue resurfaces.

The Battle Continues: Relic Transferrals

"May I have . . . the power to procure relics that others hold in their possession." (The brahman Nanduttara, upon seeing the Master take the Dussa-thupa into the Brahma-world upon his outstretched hand [Mahavamsa XXXI.14])

Subtle struggles for control of the Buddha's 'reminders' (and the creation of new ones) have continued into the 1970s. The ambiguities attending these relic transfers are reflected in uncertainties about whether the protagonists were acting in 'official' or 'unofficial' capacities and whether the activities are royal or not royal. These relic wars, as opposed to the great relic wars of the 1940s and 1950s,

January 1973), in 1979 he and his party were embroiled in an oil scandal (Bangkok Post 3 March 1981).

take place in private. They are the new 'waves beneath the waves' of Thai religious life. The following are some examples.

The Competition: Bricolage

As noted in a previous chapter, the king cast seventy-two statues identifying himself with the Buddha in 1973 and sent them to each of the nation's seventy-two provinces with instructions for worship. In the course of field work, it became apparent that the Department of Religious Affairs was also casting uniform Buddha statues (in the Sukhothai mode?) and distributing them to new royal temples: temples soon "but not yet" to be established in every province. Once temples are elevated to royal status, they become royal space [boriwen nai luang] and their most valuable objects can be appropriated by the king or by 'the state' (powerful bureaucrats)--by whoever arrives first?

In 1979 the king celebrated Wat Chaychanasongkhram's elevation to third-class royal status by personally offering the kathin gift there. After the ceremony, the head of the palace ritual unit supervised the removal of an exquisite Buddha statue from the temple's altar: It was being sent to the palace 'for restoration.' The king can appropriate sacred objects from royal temples because they are 'royal space,' but can he appropriate them from national museums?

In 1979 the head of the Property Division of the Department of Religious Affairs headed a little publicized committee organized by Prime Minister Kriangsak. Its purpose, like that of Phibun's 'Buddha circle' committee of 1944 (headed by Praphat), was to gather 'all the best Buddha statues' in the land and place them 'in a pure place,' a national museum built by the Kriangsak government. Kriangsak fell from power before the plan came to fruition.

The king and members of the nobility are no longer involved in the business of restoring relics and monuments on a full-time basis, but the government is, and as a result, new types of merit-making partnerships have been springing up between businessmen and bureaucrats since the 1970s.

At Wat That Phanom

The great king, mindful of the welfare (of the people), issued the command: 'So far as they are able the people shall enshrine relics.' And above the great relic-treasure did the people, so far as they could, carry out the enshrining of thousands of relics. Enclosing all together the king completed the thupa (Mahavamsa XXXI.122-124)

For example, in 1980 the royal family made a special trip to the Northeast where the king performed a ceremony marking the restoration of the reliquary at Wat That Phanom, the oldest in the region. The temple was officially restored by 'the government of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and his people,' the restoration begun 'in the thirtieth year of his reign and completed in the thirty second' (Committee to Restore Wat That [Fine Arts Department] 1979; cf. Phra Maha Somanon 1979). The government (The Fine Arts Department?) paid for the renovation, even though the volume made a point of noting that the event had occurred solely in response to the overriding power of His Majesty's virtue--to bring him 'closer to his people.'

This type of situation, in which the king officially restores a great monument, occurs on a relatively infrequent basis, however. (The king spends most of his time inspecting development projects.) In contrast, the head of the Property Division of the Department of Religious Affairs spends all of his time receiving a steady stream of visitors, phone calls, and letters requesting help in the restoration of temple

buildings and religious artefacts--throughout the nation. Like the Fine Arts Department, he has an official budget at his disposal for such purposes. He also maintains close ties with representatives of major commercial banks. They contribute to the department's annual kathin ceremony and in turn have a hotline to the department--from which they receive news on the latest developments in the monastic world (chapters 19 and 20).

The history of Isan meditation monks provides the best example of how the longterm transfer of control over religious objects has occurred in the last twenty years. King Bhumibol was an early patron of the Isan Thammayut meditation line, but the Department of Religious Affairs, through its Development Temple Program, gradually began to assume direct control of this lineage and its offshoots.

For example, the king presided over Acaan Fan's cremation in Sakorn Nakorn Province in the 1960s. The cremation turned into what Keyes (1973) has characterized as a "tug-of-war of merit." The king appropriated the ceremony and the most important relics, leaving local officials and Acaan Fan's followers to struggle over the rest. Local supporters later built a shrine at the site of Acaan Fan's final resting place, and the government built a provincial museum to house his relics of association. Afterwards the men who possessed Acaan Fan's relics watched them carefully for signs of miracles--but the Grand Palace retained the last word on whether they were, indeed, turning to sand and crystal. Such an observation would have confirmed Acaan Fan's status as an arhat and immeasurably increased the prestige of the living members of his ordination line. Control of amulets is, I suggest, one of the most important means of social control over meditation monks.

By the late 1970s the king and the new meditation masters were engaged in a silent and accelerating race for virtue. As Weber (1967) notes in his study of early Buddhism, sainthood is achieved through the practice of meditation and not through the performance of ritual. King Bhumibol receives constant updates on the status of these meditation monks, the nation's potential saints, and distributes their amulets to his closest associates. He is also engaged in a race for virtue against them, however, more so as his reign progresses. For example, an American scholar reported that the king brought a Tibetan monk to the Grand Palace in the early 1970s to teach the king tantric meditation. This non-indigenous source of religious power was unavailable to the monks of the Northeast; it was taken as a sign that the king's religious powers could eventually surpass their own (if they had not already done so).

The king's actions triggered a reaction among the monastic community, however. When a plane carrying monks to Bangkok to chant for the king crashed in the Northeast in 1980, rumours circulated. Why were the monks going to the king and why was he not coming to them? The plane crash was taken as a sign of the decline of the royal barami. Similarly, the monk Suchart, the head of the Hupasawan movement (a lay religious movement whose followers observe rules similar to those which guide Buddhist monks), not only predicted that King Bhumibol would be the last king of the Cakkri dynasty, but also predicted that he (Suchart) would succeed him (Olson 1984:46-49). This was the probably the first time such a prophecy had been publicly made during the Ninth Reign; Suchart went to jail on an arms charge.

The king's building a palace in Sakorn Nakorn and his subsequent discovery and patronage of Acaan Fan led to the modern meditation

movement and helped create the by now well-documented upsurge of interest in meditation practice and Isan monks among urban elite. By the late 1970s, after the monks in the Thammayut line had been discovered by the World Federation of Buddhists (whose director is the head of the king's Privy Council), the Northeast became the center of the nation's religious life. The Thammayut meditation movement began to overshadow that begun by Phra Phimonlatham in the 1950s. In the mid-1970s, shrines marking the resting places of Acaan Fan's followers began springing up throughout the Northeast (and the North). It was about this time that the Department of Religious Affairs accelerated its 'development temple' [wat pattana] program, one effect of which was to place these temples under government patronage.

Development temples are selected for state patronage because they are believed to be models of pure religious practice--practice which is in harmony with the goals of national development. (In the words of a Thai bureaucrat, the establishment of the development temple system was a way of "keeping up with the West.") The department, not the king, must approve the teaching and practice of monks before their temples can receive state patronage. Afterwards the temple must follow uniform architectural plans drawn up by the department.

According to a high-ranking Isan official in the Department of Religious Affairs, a forest meditation temple in Ubon, Wat Nong Pa Fang, is the model for the program; it is the model of religious practice for the entire kingdom. The story of Wat Nong Pa Fang brings us back to the continuing saga of the Isan monks who trace their lineage back to King Mongkut. It is also part of the continuing saga of the state's efforts to bring Buddhism under bureaucratic control.

The Story of Acaan Cha

A former student of Somdet Uan's at Wat Thepsirin gave the following lineage history of Wat Nang Pa Fang. He began with the story of Phanthumaloo (Di). "Acaans Man and Saaw were pupils of Phanthuloo (Di)," he explained. "They separated to go meditate and find a peaceful place to teach. Because of Acaan Man, Saw, Sing and Luang Puu Waen in Chiangmai, these monks and their students [the modern meditation masters] came to teach, and travel like a boxer [laughter]."

Acaan Man's travels eventually led him to Sakorn Nakorn. In the words of the informant:

Once a year I saw Man at Sakhol Nakorn. His pupils from Korat, Khon Kaen and Loei flocked together to stay at Wat Suphawaat ('A Pure Living Place'). Now a monastery is being erected there. These monks meditate all the time. This group began at Isan and came down to Bangkok because of Man. They have no television, no radio, no approach to the person.

These new meditation practices are metatexts, silent criticisms of the Thammathut and Thammacarik Programs of the past. Both the government and the monks who participated in these programs were criticized for the monks' 'uninvited approach to the person,' and government officials remained sensitive to these charges well into the late 1970s.

Acaan Cha, the abbot of Wat Nong Pa Fong, was one of Accan Man's students. The same official told a story about the ordination of Acaan Cha which he called 'the story of Mahanikai at Ubol.' This story reveals the subtleties of the state's attempts to merge the nikai, to assume the prerogatives of kings.

Acaan Cha (a Mahanikai monk) went to live with Acaan Man. "I have to be converted to Thammayut," he told Man. Man replied, "Don't worry about nikai. No matter. Be Mahanikai, no matter. But practice to the rule. You are a pure monk. It is not necessary to change." Now Cha is cao khun (a royal monk, one with a high ecclesiastical title awarded by the king). He never changed. He is popular.

Acaan Cha respected Man daily but his temple is a forest temple. He is very perfect. He wears his robes Thammayut style. But Thammayut is always Thammayut, like at Wat Benchamobophit.

The history of Thai leaders' attempts to merge the nikai must be reviewed before the import of state patronage of this temple can be fully appreciated. At the turn of the century, King Chulalongkorn tried to merge the nikai by building Wat Benchamobophit, a Mahanikai temple whose monks followed Thammayut practice. In 1941, in an aborted attempt to create a unified 'Siam nikai,' Luang Phibun built Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, a temple which combined Thammayut and Mahanikai religious practices. In the mid-1970s, the Department of Religious Affairs tried to merge the nikai by patronizing Wat Nong Pa Fang, a Mahanikai meditation temple with Thammayut practice, and making it the model for their development temple program.

The transfer of patronage from the Grand Palace to the state, plus the restructuring of state-royal finances, raised questions about the new meaning of royalty [luang] and 'religious excellence' [phra]. Is the king or the state perceived as venerating these monks? There are other complications. With the economy changing at such a fast rate, how long can the king remain truly royal (king-like) without personally sacrificing splendid gifts to the Sangha? How long can wealthy merchants offer splendid gifts to the Sangha without become kinglike?

If the king is the most renunciatory and the most pure layperson in the land, the source of fertility and social harmony, then he has a natural right to kin muang or 'eat the polity,' to appropriate its most sacred objects. Furthermore, he is believed to sacralize everything he touches. If he is not, he cannot appropriate the nation's most sacred religious objects and he does not sacralize everything he touches. There is evidence that some men are taking this latter position.

I suggest that King Bhumibol made a dangerous break from the ancient Theravada tradition (albeit in a direction established by King Chulalongkorn) when he developed the idea that the monarch's most important gift to the Sangha was his energy in attracting donations from wealthy businessmen and not the material gifts he offered from his personal treasury. As Buribhand and Griswold's article indicates, this new ideology of merit contravenes tradition in that the most resplendent acts of dana have always been the king's gift of a monastery (of material support) to the Sangha. The move was also dangerous because of the enduring linkages between gift-giving and veracity: Sibi's status as the "mastery of veracity" resides in the fact that he was also the "master of gifts."

King Bhumibol made another risky break from tradition when he began advancing the idea that the primary expression of the great Dhamma King's concern for his subjects was his sacrifice of personal energy and gifts of practical wisdom (royal advice) rather than material gifts: taxation privileges, ranks, titles and/or land. Although this modern ideology directs attention away from the royal treasuries, which are overflowing, it has serious repercussions with regard to the telling of the history of the Cakkri dynasty as kings protecting and defending religion. I will discuss this point in the conclusion.

Commoner temples do not need royal patronage to become development temples, and the new development temple program inadvertently raises serious questions about the sacrality of the present king. Which are the best temples in the land, royal temples or development temples, those built by the king or those built by commoners? Which are the most auspicious kathin ceremonies, those performed by the king or those performed by wealthy businessmen? Which of the king's activities are

truly royal (i.e., renunciatory), and which of them are merely "official," performed in his capacity as the formal head of state and requiring no personal sacrifice?

Informants' answers to these questions reveal the most fundamental meaning of royalty in the modern Thai Theravada tradition: that it is a state that is achieved entirely through pure religious practice and not merely (or even) through the possession of pure blood. The following section provides ethnographic evidence of this dilemma.

The Best Temples in the Land

A high-ranking, pro-Thammayut official described Wat Nong Pa Fong (which is not a royal temple) as "the best wat" in the land, as a perfect temple. "It has the most expensive bot and it uses Krom Kaan Sasana [Department of Religious Affairs] plans," he said. "The surroundings are like scriptures. They recall the past." He then added with great enthusiasm:

This monk, Acaan Cha, can create a world of the past life. It is part of thirty years' effort. It is Mahanikai adapted from Thammayut. He is a luk sit of Thammayut.

Acaan Cha's temple and religious practice is thus a paratext, a perfect replica of religion as it existed in the time of the Buddha. It is also a metatext, a silent, running commentary on the inadequacy of Mahanikai religious practice.

The informant next explained that forest monks "are the most respected monks, more than somdet or the Supreme Patriarch." Why was this? "Because not every monk has a pure heart," he said. "People respect high monks formally," he said--the implication being that they genuinely respected Isan meditation monks. "The king respects both," he added rather hastily.

If 'people's temples' were becoming the best in the land, whose were the best kathin ceremonies? An Isan informant, a former monk, was evasive about the importance of monks receiving their kathin gifts from the hands of the king. "Kathin luang are poor kathin," he said. "The king gives only \$150." (The kathin gift is a major source of temple income.)

A high-ranking Isan bureaucrat echoed this opinion. In speaking of the king's kathin ton at Wat Raykhing in 1978, he made a distinction between the king's royal and non-royal religious activities. "Wat luang are poor temples," he said. "The king's kathin at Wat Raykhing was personal." He then qualified this statement by saying that "Kathin luang are official kathin. Wat ratsadorn are people's wat. If the king gives to people's wat like at Wat Raykhing this is not luang (royal)." Since when are a Buddhist king's activities not royal? Since when are the temples built by commoners more resplendent than those of kings?

This line of interpretation of things royal, advanced by Pin Muthukan's Isan clients within the Department of Religious Affairs, reflects Pin's own glossing of the word rachakhana in his dictionary of religious terms (chapter 17) ("Racha does not mean royal in this case" [translated in O'Connor 1978:132].) This type of glossing activity, which dissociates the king from things royal, may be a bureaucratic manifestation of longstanding Isan antipathy towards Thai kingship.

The Spoils of Ritual Warfare: The Temple as a Symbol of Knowledge

The repercussions of the royal temple plan were even more far-reaching than the above data indicate, however. As Buribhand and Griswold note in the introduction to their essay, the building and

restoration of temples represents the 'cutting of impurities' (ignorance) and the building of wisdom. Temples are at once the physical repositories of sacred knowledge, central symbols of knowledge, and symbols of the knowledge and purity of their patrons.

The royal temple system defines a universe of discourse⁷ as well as its obverse, a universe of silence. It defines religious orthodoxy, an acceptable heterodoxy (the Thammayut versus the Mahanikai) and, most important, it defines the doxic or taken-for-granted aspects of Thai social life. It stands, for example, for the implicit assumption that religious purity is a key to social order. It is silent testimony to the principle that the quest for truth in its subtle aspects is open only to pure monks or to men of pure lineage. Control of temple space entails control of knowledge in all its forms: textual, linguistic, artistic/visual, and personal. It has the properties that Bourdieu (1977), following Marx (1965), identifies with language in revolutionary situations.

Like language, the complex is an "objective sign" of what can be spoken, and by whom. Its monks write and rewrite local history and its lay owners build and rebuild it. Men who control temple space determine the shape and intensity of other men's religious experience. They can shape and reshape the visible 'material aspects of dhamma,' highlighting some themes--the purity of a past king--and eliminating others from the discourse at hand. Temple 'owners' can raise themselves in the celestial hierarchy⁸ and lower others in that same hierarchy. They can

⁷A range of ideas which is either expressed or understood as containing the whole matter under discussion.

⁸A rector of a major university said that some people "still believe" that they will be reborn in heaven if they set the sima stones of five new temples--symbolic of five levels of heaven.

restructure the ritual order, placing their enemies far from the Buddha and the dhamma, in the outer and lower precincts of the temple, symbolic of men's inability to decode information.

Like language, the texts, rituals, shapes and forms of the temple complex are "real practical consciousness" (Marx 1965) in that men "recognize themselves in the public objectivity of an already constituted discourse" (Bourdieu 1977:170). When changes occur in this medium, men's private experience "undergoes nothing less than a change of state."

I suggest that the transfer of temple 'ownership' is the primary mechanism through which interpretive and naming privileges of royalty are being transferred from one class to another in Thai society. The transfer represents a redistribution of speech norms among the populace; men are assigned new perceptual roles vis-à-vis the cosmos. It creates new classifications of social life: new sets of dyadic relations of men who stand above cosmic process and thus can interpret it to lesser beings as opposed to men who are entangled in it, blind to the kammic implications of their actions. As John Strong (1979) notes, above all, pure religious practice entails full awareness of the effects of one's actions--the ability to see past and future, i.e., to make informed judgements on matters concerning oneself and one's community.

Most important, because changes in the religious system are portrayed as acts of purification, as a return to the more pure past, men who control Buddhist temples can make fundamental changes in the system and repress recognition of that fact. "We have always had kathin (or royal temples). This is nothing new."

Men who are literally and figuratively 'close' to the Triple Gems in all of its manifestations (including the monarchy) are the most pure in

the kingdom. To those men accrue the naming and interpretive prerogatives of royalty. They become the principal agents of social change which is why, I suggest, commercial banks are now struggling to take control of royal temples and magical meditation monks. One reason why they want control of religious practice is to rename its various components.

Purification: The Naming and Glossing Traditions

Men of ritual purity are not only said to 'have names' (fame), they bestow names--on other men, on ritual practices, and on social activities. They do so in ways that are considered both to be 'in harmony' with changing cosmic conditions and 'straight with dhamma' [trong kan kap thamma].

Naming and glossing operations are based on the same principles of purification that guide ritual change. The 'true' meaning of key words and phrases (their behavioral content), like the 'true meaning' of ritual, must constantly be sought after; to remain pure (true), the meaning must 'change according to time and place.' This is a fundamental condition of order.

As noted previously, the naming process works two ways. New practices can be given old names (i.e., sponsors of interregional kathin can emphasize kin terms even though they are unrelated to their new ritual followers) or old practices can be assigned new names (temple 'restoration' can be called temple 'development'). I suggest that this indigenous ideology of signs endows Thai Theravada society with a peculiar semiotic "openness" which may account for its adaptability to alien forces in times of duress.

Men who control royal temples can and have changed the language of religious experience in Isan. Unlike the crises to which Bourdieu refers, in which men experience an awakening of political consciousness because of the "havoc" wrecked by new words--words which describe formerly unexpressed experiences and cause revolutions--the capitalist revolution in Thailand came from the top down. Elite reshape language and ritual experience primarily to suppress recognition of change.

The Isan royal temple network is now controlled by outsiders, men whose most pressing concern is in enforcing an order of silence--in determining what cannot be said in public. At the same time, these men are reshaping language and ritual experience so as to resituate the semantic and cognitive domains of religion and economics--in ways that are totally alien to the Theravada cosmological tradition. They have juxtaposed images of pure religious action against images of diligent action in the marketplace--which is to destroy the ancient cosmological dynamic inhering in the 'two wheels' of dhamma.

I will conclude the discussion of the King Bhumibol's reign with the following thesis about the relation between Buddhism and the most recent stages of U.S.-inspired capitalist development: As a direct result of the imposition of Western patterns of development on the Thai countryside, elite temples and elite ritual performances have taken on the synthesizing functions of metaphor. When this latest class of (Western-trained) pious entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial bureaucrats took control of the elite network, they changed and renamed the visible facets of religious experience to reconcile the opposed values of Buddhism and Western capitalism. In so doing, they did not merely transfer meanings from one domain to another, as occurs in metaphor, they transferred meanings in such a way as to reconcile opposites, to

continue the task of resolving antinomies that were first generated during the colonial experience. The theories of Ricoeur (1975;1978), Isbell (1985) and Osgood (1975) provide theoretical tools for understanding how this process occurs, how Buddhist rituals have taken on the synthesizing functions of metaphor.

The Metaphorical Functions of the Ritual Complex

"To place things before the eyes," then, is not an accessory function of metaphor, but the proper function of the figure of speech. (Paul Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor)

What are the properties of metaphor? Metaphors are inconsistent utterance, deviant in some respect. They create mental images that evoke a rich stream of emotional and sensory associations. They effect a 'transfer of meaning' from one semantic domain to another, what Aristotle calls epiphora, causing men to contemplate similarities and differences between disparate concepts or images.

Metaphors convey untranslatable information and give rise to new insights about reality. They create productive ambiguities: they have a poetical function that "does not obliterate reference, but makes it ambiguous" (Jakobson 1960).

Ricoeur's and Isbell's studies of metaphor provide insight into temple-oriented mechanisms of culture change in Thai society--with some emendations. Ricoeur, for example, locates the study of metaphor in language in relation to the study of poetics and rhetoric; he argues that metaphors perform the emotional functions of poetics and the logical, persuasive functions of rhetoric (argumentation), albeit through different cognitive processes. As is common in Western philosophical traditions, he automatically grants primacy to the word (or sentence) as the most potent instrument of persuasion, arguing that

even figures of speech can perform the logical and persuasive functions of rhetoric.

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, the sight of the perfect Buddhist temple and the silent presence of the virtuoso are believed to be the most potent forms of persuasion: Visual experience is granted primacy over the verbal. Silence and not speech is the political tool par excellence, the means of "commanding and dominating others" (cf. Vernant 1982:49). I suggest that the functions of persuasion and semantic transfer that are identified in metaphor, in linguistic forms in Western societies, can be found in 'the material aspects of dhamma' in Theravada societies: in monastic, architectural, and ritual traditions, in the exemplary behavior of the religious virtuoso. I further suggest that these media of persuasion acquire the transferring properties of metaphor when elite exercise naming prerogatives in deviant ways.

How are temples like language and metaphors? Metaphors are single linguistic utterances which "place things before the eyes." They create iconic images which evoke a rich chain of sensory and emotional associations: The one image creates many. In the Thai temple system, multiple images and sensory experiences are used to create a single, logical image. Images are literally "placed before the eyes" and men's senses are physically assaulted by the sounds and smells that envelope them in the ritual experience.

As Isbell points out, diverse metaphors often have the same logical structure and underlying code; they have similar cognitive, emotional, and psychological structures. As I demonstrated earlier in the chapter, the same is true of the Buddhist temple complex. Metaphors and temples produce mutually-reinforcing sensory images.

The Misnaming

Ricoeur (1978) argues for the importance of a theory of feeling and imagination in the study of metaphor. He identifies three moments in the metaphorical process which help explain how the mis-naming of religious activities works in Thai society.

First, metaphor has a "picturing function"; it places an image before the eyes. Second, it has a logical "depicting function"; it depicts two categories in relation to each other. Third, it incorporates a dimension of feeling that occurs when the image triggers a moment of comparison. A moment of negativity prevails--when men imagine what the entity being metaphorically imagined is not-- and then a synthesis occurs. Epoche, the suspension of reference (and feeling) occurs, before the new synthesis is made.

As Isbell points out, for Ricoeur, imagination concerns categories, not images. Imagining

. . . is not to have a mental picture of something, but to display categorical relations in a "depicting mode."
Imagination is the "seeing" which effects the logical distance between entities or categories being connected by the metaphorical process. When a connection is made the semantic distance is reduced. (1985:10)

The metaphor creates a flow of images which effect a reapproachment of two domains, one which runs against previous categorization. This new categorization "resists but at the same time, yields the new insight into likeness"; it works much like an expanding and contracting rubber band, increasing and reducing distance between logical categories (1985:1, 10).

Isbell argues for the importance of a theory of synesthesia in developing a cultural theory of metaphor, one capable of addressing the relations among the domains of kinship, ritual, and mythology.

Synesthesia (Osgood 1975:39) is a process of human thought which involves the translation of messages from one sensory modality to another along dimensions made parallel in perceiving (the visual/auditory, for example). Metaphors can evoke multiple images and sensory experiences so the same message is conveyed and reinforced through multiple sensory dimensions. As I argued above, this process occurs literally in the temple complex, reinforced by linguistic metaphors.

Isbell argues that synesthesia provides the structured coherence which is essential to the creation of an emotional base in metaphor production (and in ritual production). It is a means of establishing likenesses between different entities: for example, drawing parallels between the traits of animals and relatives (nature and culture) in South American systems. Most important, she suggests that the more numerous the sensory modalities that are translated, the more powerful the interiorization of thoughts (Ricoeur's notion of feeling). The "sensory depth" of the temple complex, is, I suggest, what makes its messages effective--and often subliminal.

The messages of the Buddhist temple are piggy-backed onto each other through the sensory dimensions of sight, sound and smell. They are conveyed both literally and figuratively; light is the symbol of wisdom; it bathes the altar upon which the Buddha statue is placed. The images are literally "placed before the eyes"; sensory stimuli strike literally at the 'five doors' of the senses of the ritual participant. They are also conveyed linguistically, in metaphors equating light and purity: "Also the theras who have overcome darkness with the light of insight, those great shining lights in the conquest of the world's darkness" (Mahavamsa II.42; Wray 1972:48ff.).

Ricoeur raises other points about metaphor which are of interest to this study. In the Poetics Aristotle speaks of metaphor as incorporating a "foreign" or borrowed term which triggers the work of resemblance and the transfer of meaning. Ricoeur (1977; 1978) argues that the sentence rather than the word is the relevant unit of study and that the heaviest work of the metaphor is carried by the copula, by the construction "something 'is' or 'is like' something else." The work of resemblances occurs not in denomination but as an "impertinent predication" which connects a logical subject and a predicate in a new way. This is what occurs in "predicative assimilation"; or "imagination." Subjects and activities are juggled or mismatched; an act of cultural miscegenation takes place.

I suggest that something similar to predicative assimilation occurs in the temple complex. It occurs first in a prior act of denomination, through the (mis)naming of an object or activity, and then comes alive as social experience in subsequent ritual activity. It is "activated" in the ritual experience. The renaming process performs the work of the copula: implying that x "is" or "is like" y.

For example, the name 'development temple' triggers comparisons between development activities and ascetic practices: development "is like" purification in some respect. The name-images are then reinforced in subsequent religious practice, expanded upon through a continuing praxis.

As in the metaphorical process, two images are created at once. Things remote now appear close: there is a "proximity" of ideas despite logical distance (Ricoeur 1978:6). A tension is created that retains the previous incompatibility while establishing a new compatibility. By linking subjects with new predicates--new types of action--things or ideas which were remote now appear close.

The New Lords of Language

Value is truly constituted in a system of signs, but people use and experience signs as the names of things. (Marshall Sahlins, Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities)

As has been evident throughout this thesis, men in power thrive on exercising the naming prerogatives of kings. I argue that this renaming process demonstrates an historical progression.

In the nineteenth century Western visitors identified 'lords' [cao] with despotism, an association that was reinforced by successive generations of Thai politicians. In Isan in the 1960s, property became "private," a commodity. Land was no longer circulated naturally from parents to children, as inheritance to those who were willing to work the land, but bought and sold to the highest bidder. Land 'owners' [cao khong] and ownership became a bitter source of controversy; traditional usages became associated with upadana, with extreme attachment to worldly things, with greed, anger, etc.

We saw how Thanom, Praphat and their bureaucratic allies called the 'owners' or 'lords' [cao khong] the 'chairmen' [prathan] of kathin, a linguistic feat which juxtaposes images of religious piety against those of efficient corporate management (and democratic practice). They substituted the Pali word burana, which refers to the 'restoration' of sacred objects as an act of veneration of the Buddha, with pattana or 'development, the same term they used to legitimate their business ventures.

Instead of residing in 'pure living places,' the supposed saints of Phanthumaloo's meditation line now reside in 'development temples.' The elite even went so far as to replace the term 'mental purification' [tham citcai hai borisut] with 'mental development' [pattana thang]

citcail]. In the 1960s monks, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs alike were called nak pattana, 'proponents of development.'

In his introduction to Bangkok Bank's (Wicit 1977) booklet on proper words of worship for major Buddhist holidays, Somdet Phraphuta Khosanacan uses the term "phra phutta borisat" or the "Buddha company" instead of the traditional thayok, thayika (male and female followers) to refer to religious devotees. Borisat is the word for businesses and corporations.

As Isbell notes, the images that fit together in a metaphorical system share a general concept rather than a consistent image. The above messages, that economic and religious activities resemble each other, were thus also conveyed iconically in the ritual context. The king offers oversized carpentry tools to Buddhist monks as part of his annual kathin gift. Work is a mode of world renunciation?

These new ritual and linguistic usages "place things before the eyes"--literally and figuratively--causing men to constantly measure the similarities and differences between commercial and religious, this-worldly and other-worldly activities. They present two images at once, the "concrete" aspect of the metaphor (the basic image)--e.g., the "company"--and the "intended" aspect--"religious devotees"--thus juggling the activity signatures of pious worshippers of the Buddha with those of efficient entrepreneurs.

Epoche or suspension occurs in all of these usages, both in reference and in feeling. Trading companies and religious devotees are different in a crucial respect: the activities of the former represent upadana, attachment to worldly affairs, while the activities of the latter represent dana, detachment from worldly affairs. A moment of negativity must occur before this assimilation is made.

The new metaphorical usages create productive ambiguities and I argue that the elite avoid antinomy problems precisely because of these ambiguities. They are not explicit statements of resemblance--that market activity and ascetic practice are the same thing--which would provoke outrage. Rather, they are "suggestions," made on parallel emotional, cognitive, and sensory planes of experience. They can be called "staggered metaphors" because they are constructed across time and space and through diverse media. The king does not exhort his subjects to "work hard" when he offers carpentry tools to monks with magical meditation powers. As indicated in chapter 9, in many cases the king makes a point of introducing new values in contexts separate from their application ("hard work" never being advocated as a virtue in relation to road building, for example).

Ricoeur notes that metaphors have a "reversibility effect," an observation which is also crucial to this study. The above usages not only suggest that religious activity "is like" market activity in some vague, undefined way, they also suggest that commercial activity "is like" religious activity--in an equally undefined way. This "reversibility effect" brings the Thai closer to adopting a Protestant-like ethic, moving them towards the idea that work is a form of salvation (of asceticism).

The new constructs are structurally similar because they are "out of place" in the same way. They do not connect merely disparate domains in new ways (i.e., "My love is like a red, red rose," a statement which connects emotions with flowers) they connect opposite domains of religion and economy, sasana and setakit, in new ways. In addition, these images imply the reconciliation of mutually negating cosmological principles, those of direct and indirect causality. This, too,

represents the continuation of a longterm historical movement. In conclusion, I argue that the net effect of these changes in the religious system is the production of ambiguities which transform an idiom of ascetic practice into an idiom of "practical reason" (cf. Sahlins 1976).

Nature-Culture/Economy-Religion

A comparison of Thai and South American data highlights the significance of these changes within the Theravada religious system. Isbell argues that metaphors focus on problematic life experiences. Like rituals, they propel men along the path of maturation by 'picturing' the solution to these problems in intellectual and emotional terms. The individual is constantly propelled through syntagmatic and paradigmatic mazes of mythic and ritual expressions whose significance remains open or changes through successive stages of maturation.

Rituals and metaphors likewise provide solutions to worrisome problems in Thai society, only the most threatening of these problems now concern the disruptions caused by capitalist development, the loss of land and threats to the soteriological integrity of the kingdom. These new linguistic constructs, reinforced by changes in the 'material aspects of dhamma,' help solve puzzles for men in Thai society. Individuals are propelled along the path of (economic) maturation by images which bounce not 'from culture to nature and back again,' which is what Isbell argues occurs in South American societies, but in images which bounce 'from religion to economy and back again.'

The kathin, formerly a village and intervillage phenomenon (a fertility and life-cycle ritual) is now a national ritual that may function primarily as an economic-crisis ritual insofar as it addresses disruptions which threaten the entire national community.

Isbell and Turner reject Mary Douglas' argument that the human body functions as an image of society in South American cultural systems. Instead, they argue that this function is performed by the juxtaposition of natural and and cultural images. This raises a point of comparison with South and South Asian societies. These latter societies have no culture/nature distinction as is found in the West. In Theravada societies, for example, all phenomena are dhamma-chat, 'arising from' or 'born of' dhamma. The human body does function as an image of society--the Purusha myth being a prime example. This comparison suggests that social tension in Thai society would be reflected in changes in biological or bodily metaphors of the state.

I suggest that Thai Buddhist transformations of Hindu biological metaphors of the state have taken a further, action-oriented twist as a result of recent historical events. Men propel themselves to higher positions in the body politic through pure ritual action. By commandeering royal merit ceremonies, military strongmen (and Chinese merchants?) propel themselves from the middle to the top rungs of the social-soteriological ladder: working their way from the 'arms and legs' (the army) to the 'eyes and ears' (the king's councilors) and even, as Sarit attempted to do, to the all-important 'heart and mind' of the body politic, the symbol of the whole, its kammic center. 'Supreme in the world is mind.'

I have thus far suggested how the temple complex is like language. Control of the complex also enables men to control language, however, and thus to control men's ability to define reality. I further argue that the government's most recent attempts to control the religious system of Isan had as a deliberate goal the suppression of local challenges to capitalist development: the denial of naming, interpretive and analytic prerogatives to local leaders.

One objective was and is to create moral self-doubt among the rural populace, to prevent criticism of new economic and social practices in order to facilitate a massive transfer of control over land. The transfer of control over land took the form of the transformation of the debt system--removing it from the hands of Chinese merchants and placing it under control of national commercial banks. This process began around Isan roughly in 1960 and was completed roughly by 1980. The Department of Religious Affairs is well aware of the linguistic dimensions of merit-making, as the following data from their 1979 kathin phrarachathan in Khon Kaen demonstrate.

The Bureaucrats Make Merit in Khon Kaen

Thus do the pious themselves perform pure deeds of merit in order to obtain the most glorious of all blessings; and they, with pure heart, make also others to perform them in order to win a following of eminent people of many kinds. (Mahavamsa XXXI.126)

In November 1978 the Department of Religious Affairs offered kathin phrarachathan in Khon Kaen, Phra Phimonlatham's Isan stronghold. They offered at Wat That, a Mahanikai temple recently elevated to royal status. Its abbot was a luk sit of Phra Phimonlatham, as were most of the abbots of the town's most prestigious Mahanikai temples.

The head of the property division was instrumental in the department's decision to offer at Wat That. He was a luk sit of the abbot of Khon Kaen's other royal temple, the Thammayut Wat Srican (which was also elevated to royal status that same year). The department's kathin ceremony formally brought Wat That under the umbrella of royal (government) patronage. Wat Srican had long since been there; its abbot had close ties with Colonel Pin Muthukan. The rivalry between the abbots of these temples was fierce. They were said to be keng barami or

'racing barami' against each other to the point where one refused to 'sit ritual' with the other.

The department's 1978 kathin phrarachathan was a highly calculated affair designed to shift patronage away from powerful independent local temples controlled by Phra Phimonlatham to state-controlled temples like Wat That. It was also designed to lessen some of the tension that had been created by the department's decision to elevate Wat That to royal status instead of other, older Mahanikai temples.

The elevation of Wat That to royal status created bad feelings locally. The abbot at Wat Srinuan, for example, was the most senior monk in the province and his temple was one of the oldest in Khon Kaen but Phra Phimonlatham and a powerful member of the local police force were prominent supporters.

The ritual worked at two levels, as religious experience and state policy. Department workers were told they were offering kathin in Khon Kaen because they had the duty to demonstrate the correct way to perform royal ceremonies to the local people, to be models of propriety. The clerical workers and their families were in a festive mood; they were on a sight-seeing trip. Higher-ranking officials, who had already spent many grueling hours at royal kathin and who were instrumental in deciding which temples should receive royal status, were less enthusiastic and some were downright cynical. "This kathin is just for show," said one. Like many other government officials, he complained about the hundreds of baht he spent every year making 'voluntary' contributions to the kathin of his superiors.

Before the ceremony, the head of the Property Division feasted the director-general of the department at the home of his wife's parents. They offered gifts of Isan pillows as signs of hospitality.

The ho kathin assembled at provincial headquarters, and the cars and busloads of merit-makers paraded down the streets of Khon Kaen to Wat That.

The Ceremony

Before the ceremony, the king's kathin gift was set on a golden offering tray and handed over to the governor of the province (a graduate of the University of Illinois). A multi-colored umbrella of rank was held over his head by a department functionary, in the same way it was for the king at kathin luang. Flanked by the high-ranking officials in the department and followed by local officials and a Boy Scout band, the governor led a procession circumambulating the temple three times before entering to offer the kathin, passing a statue of Chulalongkorn's half-brother, Krommaluang Pracak Sittiprasat, the former ruler of the Isan circle in Udorn.⁹

Temple supporters remained outside during the ceremony, with the exception of a chosen few older people in traditional dress. They were seated on the floor at the rear of the bot to demonstrate that the ritual was 'democratic.'

The Order of Giving

Pin's successor, the director general of the department, led the ceremony proper. The governor and the highest-ranking officials followed him in offering gifts to the highest ranking monks. A department division head and the head of the local Village Scout troop distributed the remainder of the gifts to their followers. The people at the back were the last to be invited to offer the king's gifts.

⁹Members of the local Socialist Party told stories of Prachak's cruelty and "torture" of Isan people.

These men, their faces darkened by years of toil in the sun, were clearly awed by the experience.

There was little interaction between the department workers and the local residents who feasted them. The bus left soon after the ceremony to go sight-seeing. It stopped at a national park west of Khon Kaen, formerly a 'communist stronghold.'

In Thailand as in Sri Lanka (Seneviratne 1978), bureaucrats have taken control of some of the state's most prestigious rituals. In the case of the kathin in Khon Kaen, the Head of the Property Division, a native of the province, returned as an honoured guest. He brought with him his superior, a new ritual patron of one of his town's most prestigious temples.

The Thai case differs from the Sinhalese in that (1) the king retains control of the nation's most prestigious ceremonies, and (2) bureaucrats often participate in formerly royal rituals as go-betweens. This preserves the ritual's status as an integrative device, one that links capital and periphery through the creation of apparently spontaneous religious events.

Kathin at Khon Kaen is a Mere Accident

The Department distributed several booklets commemorating the kathin. These booklets implicitly addressed the burning issues of the day: (1) the state's takeover of the local temple system, (2) the influence of Phra Phimonlatham, the symbol of regional autonomy from the lay authority, (3) and the threat of communism. When Phra Phimonlatham dies, there will be few if any men with the seniority to challenge the government's interpretation of religion and reality.

Like Thanom and Praphat's 'unity kathin' in the 1960s, the department's kathin is heavily represented as a spontaneous event when in fact the opposite was true. Verbs of travel and nouns referring to anonymous 'groups' (phuak) of men were used and stressed to indicate the spontaneous and accidental quality of the ceremony. One booklet (Kromkan Sasana 1978a:1) opened with the following explanation.

This year our department takes the sacred kathin as royal alms to offer to Wat That in the old city in the province of Khon Kaen. The group of us having 'drifted' (or 'floated,' long tay) southward for two years in succession, this year the department will 'veer' [ben] to the Northeast. This is the result of following one another's example [phon phloi].¹⁰ This is the result of having gone together to make merit. We will wander around to see the land in that vicinity, too. Since we have not yet had the opportunity to go there, the department's arranging to take the royal kathin cloth there is a good activity and we will continue to offer in the various regions of the country.

They were continuing Colonel Pin's pattern of circumambulating the kingdom and offering the royal kathin gift, but no longer in the clockwise direction of the sun.

The New History of Khon Kaen

A hand-stapled booklet (Kromkan Sasana 1978c) contained a history of Khon Kaen written not as a traditional history, the unfolding of the dhamma (stories about the religious exploits of Laotian kings or the magical properties of local religious relics), but as a statistically precise statement about the presence of dhamma. It was a colorless version of tamnan (regional history told as a history of religion) and pongsawadon (told as the history of kings protecting religion). (Charnwit 1976:1). "There are 1,236,537 people in the province," it states. "of which ninety-six point eight percent respect Buddhism . . .

¹⁰The event was leaderless and the decision to visit Khon Kaen was a spontaneous one.

There are 1,254 temples in the province, 6,779 monks and 6,555 novices."

The story of the town of Khon Kaen implicitly represents local people as foolish beings, easily tricked by appearances; their hot-hearted nature prevents them from carefully thinking through what they see or hear.

Khon Kaen means 'Log Stump.' The town's major civic monument is a log stump mounted in front of the train station. According to local legend, the tree died and then came back to life as a religious miracle.

The following introduce the department's history of the log stump.

Old Khon Kaen means there was a log stump that was turned into the symbol of the city. The group of us [phuak raw], taking each other to see kathin aims, will also take each other to find this log.

The story of the log is a silly myth, however.

. . . In these days, the log is little, and we shall go see for ourselves, okay? [in vernacular]. Nowadays this is a 'fun story' [ruang sanuk]. It is better to listen to the tales first. They are stories circulated by villagers, who relate them to each other, right? Villagers speak of these tales, which are 'truly strange' [plæk thae]. If they are not too 'risque' [yap], it will probably not 'hurt' [sia] to listen to them. True, yes? Then listen together, because in that case they are not true. So listen together, okay?

The Principles of Buddhism

Words wreck havoc when they find a name for what had up to then been lived namelessly. (Jean-Paul Sartre, L'idiot de la famille)

In a much more serious vein, the department wrote and distributed a 131-page booklet on the fundamental principles of Buddhism (Kromkan Sasana 1978b). The same messages about the unruly characteristics of rural people were incorporated into a discussion of the laws of kamma.

The booklet contained a formal history of Khon Kaen and the Isan region, written in a colorless manner from the perspective of the

central government. The history of Khon Kaen is told as a history of its inclusion in different Laotian and central Thai royal circles (rajanca). The history of Wat That is told as a history of its relics and religious monuments and of the accomplishments of its abbots (i.e., their attainment of government-issued ecclesiastical ranks). The excellence of the temple's Pariyatham school is listed as one of the temple's major distinctions.

This formal history was distributed to all sponsors of kathin phrarachathan at Wat That and included in their commemorative volumes. The department writes similar "canned" histories of royal temples and distributes them to kathin phrarachathan sponsors.

The religious tract was framed in the traditional question-and-answer style of Buddhist texts, purporting to address the most vexatious issues about religion. It addressed two vexatious questions in particular, one concerning the morality of modern capitalist development and the other the law of kamma. If the Isan people were truly devout (as they were known to be) why were they not receiving the benefits of virtue? And why were people who appeared to be doing bad (i.e., cheating villagers of their land) not receiving the bad effects of their actions?

The department's response was to question the virtue of men who would ask such questions.

People who think like this have the characteristics of a hot heart The Buddha taught that all kinds of kamma divide up into different kinds of fruit (results). Some have fast results and some have slow results, but either way, people will certainly receive the results Regardless if the benefits are slow or fast, they will eventually appear. (1978:38)

Evil Words

The department offered four explanations of why people who had consistently performed good deeds had not received the benefits of merit. All four concerned invisible aspects of kammic process and reinforced traditional speech norms which presuppose the contrast of visible and invisible worlds.

First, the person could actually be "grasping onto something he does not own," which is a characteristic of "animals in the world [sat yu nai lok]" (and, as some were saying, a characteristic of the new landowners in the region). Second, the person might have wrong practice [praphut phit]. Third, he might have lied. Fourth, he might have "spoken evil words" [phut saosiat] or demeritorious words [kham bap], those arising from an impure mind. Such men must have 'poisonous ideas' or wrong ideas [khvam hen phit], which is to say incorrect and uneducated views of events "in this world." The booklet explains that one reason the Buddha taught that the fruits of good deeds might not appear for a long time is because the effects of bad kamma might not yet have faded [sia]. That person's mind might have not been meritorious even though his actions appeared so.

The essay reaffirms the opacity of the universe to lowborn people at the same time it holds out the possibility that men of low birth might still go to heaven.

The Buddha said, "Observe bhikkhus, because the causal reasons of the heart are not clear to observe, some groups of animals [sat] in this world will go to heaven when they die Good and bad kamma will give fruit that one cannot find."

A diagram was included to demonstrate that impurities created bad kamma and bad kamma created hardship [wibak]

(1978:45).

Why were Isan people with faith not receiving the benefits of merit?

"Because there is faith with and without wisdom," says the author.

Faith without wisdom

means that a person does not consider the causes of an action carefully enough before judging it. One should not grasp onto words that are heard-and-listened to [kham sup] incorrectly. Do not guess yourself about what is good and bad kamma. (1978:48)

Democracy and the Principles of Social Order

The most successful ideological effects are those which have no need of words, and ask no more than complicitous silence. (Pierre Bourdieu, A Theory of Practice)

The essay featured a section on the true meaning of democracy. This interpretive exercise equates individualism and a tradition of open dissent with its opposite, with collectivism and a tradition of silence. It attempts a major semantic shift, to reconcile opposed values of hierarchy and egalitarianism through its exercise of naming and interpretive prerogatives. The essay is of two voices, one of which links democracy with the dhamma and the other of which rejects it as being fundamentally immoral.

First off, the author observes that "The people must have complete and perfect value in themselves"¹¹ (they must be morally pure) before democracy will appear." Democracy is not a permanent political principle but a state that arises naturally when men follow the dhamma.

The author gives two examples of pure democracy, monks voting to dedicate the kathin robes and the laity's unity kathin. "Buddhism is the oldest model of democratic ideology in the world [yu nai look]," the author explains.

¹¹kha sombun nai ton eng.

The Sangha is the most pure example of equality because its members are men of high, middle and low birth who must respect each other in order of ordination rank [tam lamdap yu nai buat]. Only by obeying the laws of the Sangha according to this order will men come truly to reside in the principles of democracy. (1978:52)

The rules of Sangha action [sangha kam] provide a model of democratic dissent in which the final goal is the attainment of perfect unanimity (men 'seeing together'). In meetings of the Sangha,

each monk has the right to show his ideas [sadaeng khwam khit hen] in the way of protest in the process of agreeing together [nai thang hen duai]. If monks agree they will use the method of silence [hai chai withi ning]. If they disagree they will protest and divide further. In that case, if there are dissenting people, they will have to perform activities for understanding each other until they agree. (1978:55)

The author then states that "monks residing together in unity is the principle used in developing the nation [pattana prathet]."

This passage is a classical expression of the tensions that are created by attempts to reconcile Buddhist and Western values and traditions. In the Theravada system the presence of dhamma is indicated by social harmony and moral-perceptual unanimity: by silence. Dissent and argumentation automatically indicate the absence of dhamma.

The discussion ends with a reaffirmation of traditional values. The principles of Buddhism are permanent (i.e., pure) and those of democracy are ephemeral. "Democracy is but one kind of principle that is good, that is high in the present," the author states. He makes a distinction between dhammacracy and democracy (Buddhist democracy and Western democracy), equating it with the distinction between true and false monks.

"Buddhism is the religion that teaches ones to believe that dhamma, the pure root-cause of dhammocacy, does not teach one to grasp oneself as being big," the tract explains. The breaking of precepts and

impurities are a-dhamma, actions opposed to dhamma and dhammocracy. Two such mental impurities (kilet) are "the belief that oneself is big" (i.e., important), a rejection of Western individualism, and "the belief that the world is big"--a rejection of men who show unseemly concern over worldly matters. True democracy is "thinking that dhamma is big," which means "doing good for the sake of goodness, not being selfish or wanting 'fame' in society" (1978:69). Fame is, in any case, legitimately reserved for the sponsors of kathin phrarachathan.

Three Affinities

These data demonstrate three additional affinities between Buddhism and Western capitalism, affinities that are based on persistent strands of the Theravada tradition noted by Weber in The Religions of India. One is what Weber calls the tradition of "fame by piety." Fame is only legitimately open to men of piety (i.e., to men who control the religious system). All else is notoriety?

The second is what Weber refers to as the tradition of "quietism" or "silence with respect to the bad." This tradition is based on the idea of sila, that the perfection of morality is indicated by men's increasing detachment from worldly affairs, by their decreasing interest in the fruits of their own actions and of the actions of others. Excessive interest in worldly affairs is a sign of impurity, indicative of men's lack of moral authority (veracity) in speaking of worldly affairs.

Most important, the third, related affinity concerns what Weber refers to as the "narrow tradition of knowledge." According to this tradition, the search for knowledge ('lighting the dhamma') is the only legitimate quest for knowledge. All else represents an unhealthy

attachment to worldly things. It produces samsara: greed, anger, and illusion.

These ancient traditions were mobilized by Thailand's contemporary elite to create an ambience in which rural farmers and local leaders hesitated to 'guess' at the longterm effects of capitalist development--of new land tenure laws and the new commercial banking system--until it was too late. The same ten-year period in which the royal temple network changed hands, when 'big men' from Bangkok first entered and then dominated the lists of kathin phrarachathan sponsors, is the same ten-year period in which prime Isan farmland changed hands.

The King's New Family Members

By 1978 some of the nation's most powerful capitalists were not only "standing before kings," i.e., accepting titles or Buddha statues in return for contributions to the royal charities, they were assuming the ritual duties of junior members of the royal lineage.

"It is to men of my own blood that I disclose my secret," says Yayati to his grandson Astaka (Dumézil 1971:33). Yayati's great secret was his name and the details of his lineage (that he was "son of Nahusa, father of Puru"). This secret revealed the logic of his celestial activities and the hidden bonds that tied him to the ever-competitive celestial princes.

King Bhumibol has few men to whom he can reveal his deepest secrets, those involving hidden business transactions. Instead of revealing them to blood relatives in position of power, of whom there are few, he reveals them instead to his financial advisors, to men who now use his name to transact business in the marketplace and perform rituals of purification at royal Buddhist temples.

For centuries Thai kingdoms have adhered to the rule that only the king and the 'big men of the royal lineage' [phu yai chuprawong] can offer kathin robes at the temples containing the relics of kings, of their ancestors. The breaking of this rule (e.g., when General Cakkri offered the kathin at Wat Arun) signalled the end of one dynasty and the beginning of another. There are signs that this rule is being broken in the modern polity.

Every year the Grand Palace issues a schedule detailing the kathin activities of the king and high-ranking members of the royal family. Members of the royal family perform kathin ceremonies at the sixteen first-class royal temples and any others the king has selected for personal patronage. In 1972 and 1974 two new temples were added to the list of sixteen first-class temples, and two new names were added to the list of "family members" offering the royal kathin there. Thus Thai Farmers Bank and Bangkok Bank joined Queen Sirikit, Crown Prince Wachiralongkorn, the Princesses Sirinthorn and Chulaphorn, the king's mother and sister and members of the privy council in assisting the king in his ritual duties by offering the king's kathin gift at these two new temples (Kromkan Sasana 1972; 1974).

Charnwit notes that the Thai kingdoms have long had a tradition by which merchants [sethi] can legitimately become Buddhist kings. He also notes that Thai history shows a steady assimilation of Chinese merchants in the social hierarchy--to the point of marriage with members of the royal family and the assumption of royal ritual duties. This phenomenon dates back at least to the kingdom of Ayuthaya; but since when have Chinese-owned corporations assumed the ritual privileges of royalty?

The End of the Dynasty?

The following is a rumour about the decline of the Cakkri dynasty that has been circulating in Bangkok for over a decade. The U.S.-educated students who repeated it defined rumour as "speaking of royal things."

Someone (?) assigned names to the reigns of the Cakkri dynasty. The Seventh Reign, that of King Prajadipok, was "the reign of the people asking for democracy." The Eight Reign, that of the unfortunate King Ananda, was "the dark reign." The Ninth Reign, that of King Bhumibol, is "the reign of the foreigners," and the tenth, the last, will be that of "chao civiliz" (civilized people).

Did they not mean "chao ariya," ariya being the Pali word for things civilized and noble, for men who have 'entered into the stream of wisdom' (McFarland 1944:972)? No, they insisted, the word was "civilized" [civiliz]. The allotted timespan for the Cakkri dynasty to protect and defend Buddhism ends when the polity becomes "civilized." Is this when Buddhism and capitalism have totally merged or when Thailand has become a fully perfected capitalist polity and all knowledge of dhamma has declined?

Phra Phimonlatham expressed this dilemma over the loss of tradition in his own inimitable way. When asked whether Sarit went to heaven or hell after his death, Phimonlatham laughed and said "He went to America."

Conclusion

Thailand is no longer ruled by powerful warrior-kings who claim membership in a pure 'bloodline of warriors' [sai luat kasat]. Rule by the lineage of warrior-kings is being replaced by rule of the merchant nobility.

A new concept of noble lineage was developing in the 1970s. The principles of membership resemble those laid out by Buddhaghosa as they relate to the religious activities of Buddhist monks. The traditional, Hindu-derived concept of royal lineage, based on the idea that Buddhist kings shared 'pure blood' in common and that this pure substance was the source of their innate inclination towards morality, was being replaced by another, that there is a 'pure lineage at the head of the nation' [sai bun hua chat]. Membership in this noble lineage is open to anyone with enough cash to perform resplendent acts of merit. This notion of lineage is based on the idea that 'pure lineage' (one conjoining businessmen and bureaucrats of disparate backgrounds) is created solely by pure action. It has little or nothing to do with the sharing of pure blood.

When asked to define the meaning of kasat (warrior) and sai luat kasat ('the bloodline of warriors'), a young Thai scholar said that kasat was used to refer to the king and that sai luat kasat did not really "make sense" because it was a combination of Thai and Sanskrit words. Besides, he argued, "Kasat is not really a Thai term. The Thai borrowed it from India"--making the term (and the institution) inappropriate to contemporary Thai conditions?

Perhaps the most convincing evidence about the decline of the monarchy is to be found in General Saiyud Kerdphon's (1975, translated in Girling 1981:31) The Future of Thailand, in which the general advances his own version of the ideal body politic. "The government should function like the brain, the various institutions of government should function like the body, and the organisations of the people like the limbs." There is a resounding silence on the subject of the king's place in the future body politic.

In the following section, I will discuss how Bangkok Bank, the largest and most powerful bank in Thailand, has assumed the prerogatives of kings. Through conspicuous acts of merit, aggressive publicity techniques, and participation in the ritual process, a commercial bank is beginning to mark the great territorial divisions of the kingdom and the great classifications of Thai social life.

PART VI
BANKING ON MERIT

CHAPTER 19
BANKING ON MERIT

Introduction

"What are the benefits of virtue?" asks Buddhaghosa in the The Path of Purification. "For the householder, there are five," he answers. Among other things, one who is virtuous

comes into large fortune as a consequence of diligence a fair name is spread abroad whenever one enters an assembly, whether of khattiyas or brahmans or householders or ascetics, he does so without fear or hesitation (1976:9)

People who offer kathin phrarachathan are commonly said to receive honor [kiat], name [chu] and fame [chu siang, a name that is voiced]. They receive credibility [khwam chua] and believability [khwam chua-thu, lit., a name that is grasped]. They are called 'big men' [phu yai]. Phu yai 'have face and eyes' [mi na mi ta]. "They can go anywhere," said one informant, echoing Buddhaghosa.

In the Northeast, where rural areas are divided into separate spheres of influence under control of rival military and police units, the ability to go anywhere "without fear or hesitation" is indeed a boon. This is particularly true if one seeks to beat out one's business competitors for new markets, to do business among the rural peasantry.

In the mid-1970s Bangkok Bank began to play a dominant role in introducing capitalist practices and ideologies in Thailand, at the same time it began to exercise royal prerogatives. By the end of the decade the bank had achieved a dominant position in the credit markets of the

Northeast, in part because of its aggressive merit-making policies. It systematically utilized the royal temple network to make contacts and build prestige in provincial capitals, branching out from there to 'make merit' at temples in isolated rural areas.

Like the governments of the early 1960s, the bank created elaborate ritual policies that were integral to its plans to dominate and transform the economy of the Northeast. Like the government, the bank does not publicize these policies; they violate the ideals of merit-making and destroy the fiction of disinterested gift-giving.

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the bank's history and the symbolic significance of its logos, demonstrating how it has taken on the attributes of a great Buddhist king. This discussion provides insight into the specific cultural mechanisms that support the expansion of commercial banking in Thailand and demonstrates how new structures of domination are created through the replication of ancient traditions. In the second part of the chapter I present excerpts of an interview with an assistant vice president of the bank. This interview reveals the bank's most general strategies for penetrating the markets of the Northeast. It also provides insight into the antinomy problems of Thailand's "new technocrats," the nation's young and creative entrepreneurs who are charged with the task of reconciling Western with Thai-Buddhist values. As the interview indicates, however, this task generates a type of Buddhist "salvation anxiety" among young technocrats. They worry about the ill effects of excessive attachment to worldly things (consumerism) on themselves and on Thai society, but most important, they are uneasy about the bank's intentional subordination of religious to economic goals. According to Theravada Buddhist ideologies of kamma, the intention [cetana] or 'purity of

heart' with which an action is performed is the primary determinant of its outcome, whether it produces positive or negative 'fruits' or material results.

The History of the Bank

Bangkok Bank is the wealthiest and most powerful bank in Thailand (cf. Suthy 1980) with branches in most if not every province in the country. Its toplic relations department is one of the largest and most sophisticated of any enterprise in Thailand, rivaled only by those of the government and the Grand Palace. In a 1980 interview an economist at a major Thai university somewhat cynically referred to Bangkok Bank as "the biggest landlord in the Northeast."

The Bank is owned by one of Thailand's "big five" Chinese families, that of Chin Sophonphanit. In the period between 1951 and 1957 the bank allied itself with the two most powerful ruling factions in Thailand, those of Police-General Phao Sriyanon and General Sarit Thanarat. Members of both cliques sat on its board of directors (Girling 1981:110).

Like all business or charitable transactions involving the Grand Palace or the Royal Properties, those between the palace and the bank are generally unpublicized. What is known is that Bangkok Bank is one of five banks to receive royal patronage. The krut or garuda bird of ancient Hindu-Buddhist mythology, the official emblem of the royal Thai government, is the sign of the king's patronage. The bank is allowed to use the krut in return for unspecified 'sacrifices' to king and nation, but again, the details of such sacrifices are generally not public knowledge. An elderly informant in the Grand Palace said the krut was given to the bank early in the 1950s (when powerful military leaders and

bureaucrats entered into partnerships with powerful Chinese merchants). A bank official said the bank received the krut because of its lending policies to Thai farmers in the mid-1970s, which he characterized as a form of 'donation' [boricak] to the nation.

In return for its services to the nation, the bank acquired the right to use the krut as its logo and to perform kathin phrarachathan 'in the name of the king.' Bangkok Bank is the only one of the five banks receiving royal patronage to exercise this ritual privilege in the Northeast on a systematic basis.¹

Chin Sophonphanit is one of the richest men in the world, one of Asia's "quiet billionaires" (Queck 1986). Unlike less powerful Chinese entrepreneurs in Thai society, however, Chin does not make a point of disavowing his Chinese ancestry. He maintains strong ties with the major Chinese banking families of Southeast Asia and Hong Kong and a low public profile in Thailand. Bunchu Rochanasathien, the bank's director and a leading member of M.R. Kukrit Pramote's Social Action Party (SAP), represents the bank in public. Bunchu held several ministerial positions in the 1970s, including that of minister of finance.

The Chinese Problem: the Bank's Corporate Identity

In the last twenty years Bangkok Bank, a Chinese-owned family corporation, has assumed a position of political influence in Thailand that is not open to individuals claiming Chinese ancestry. Though 'Chinese people' have long exercised power in the Thai marketplace, they rarely, if ever, head political parties (Skinner 1958). Political office, positions of public leadership, have traditionally been open only to 'Thai people' identified in large part by their support of Theravada Buddhism.

¹Thai Thanu Bank offered once in Korat in 1976 (Kromkan Sasana 1980c).

In the 1970s, through the activities of its president and its connections with the SAP, the bank began to take an active role in formulating social policy. Bunchu and some of its highest-ranking employees began to advise the government on economic matters--in the capacity of "technocrats" or economic "experts," however, not as 'Chinese people' or merchants. Meanwhile political discrimination against Chinese continued. A 1980 law prohibited men of Chinese ancestry from running for political office unless they could satisfy certain educational requirements. Since many men such of the older generation were educated at Chinese schools or at commercial colleges abroad, they often could not satisfy these requirements. Thus, for example, a former member of parliament and a leading member of the Democrat Party in Khon Kaen was barred from running for office in the 1980 elections. In contrast, that same year newspaper pictures showed Bunchu being swamped by members of the press asking him how he planned to solve the nation's energy crisis.

The Lotus of the Law

The bank's logo is a stylized 'lotus of the law' of the Buddha's teachings, a symbol of wisdom and prosperity. The bank's lotus is tightly budded, not yet in full bloom, a sign of things to come, the beginning of a resplendent order.

The bank's officers and its publicity department have spent many years formulating an ideology of resplendent order that portrays the bank as a moral-economic leader of the polity, an enterprise whose officers display 'social responsibility' of the Buddhist sort. According to his schema, the bank's officers are 'social innovators,' its Western-trained economists the gurus of the new economic order.

The new ideological schema is couched in traditional terms: as the perfection of virtue. Prosperity does not flow naturally from the purity of Buddhist monks or from the presence of a great king, however. Instead it 'flows naturally' from the perfect practice of new economic precepts, from the 'complete' implementation of policies which promote free market capitalism. Bank officers have elevated 'economic precepts' to the level of 'religious precepts' in this new paradigm of moral generativity, i.e. they portray them as having the same cosmic effects as the practice of the five Buddhist precepts. The unrelenting 'search' for new and more proper 'economic practices' under constantly changing market conditions--like the unrelenting 'search' for new and more proper 'religious practices' under constantly changing cosmic conditions--will generate prosperity and harmony throughout the land.

In concrete terms this means the bank's officers believe strongly in the powers of efficiency and rational economic planning. Their job is to formulate bank policies that promote the development of the nation's industrial and agricultural sectors and encourage Thai farmers to diversify their crops. Above all, ambitious bank officers are searching for ways to encourage Thai farmers to change their attitudes towards the use of capital and existing agricultural practices. Farmers must recognize that agricultural methods should change in response to the laws of supply and demand. They should borrow money from commercial banks instead of from local Chinese merchants and deposit it at commercial banks and receive interest rather than 'wasting' it on religious ceremonies. If the bank's economic precepts are 'fully' and correctly followed, the nation's economy will grow and prosperity will reign throughout the land.

The Garuda Bird

The bank's other logo is the krut or garuda bird, the symbol of the Royal Thai Government and of the monarchy. The lotus is a symbol of wisdom and prosperity, the krut one of secret knowledge, unrestricted travel, and magical powers.

In Hindu mythology, the garuda bird is the helper of King Rama, in Buddhist, the servant of the Buddha (Sonakul 1976). In both traditions, its actions are invisible to ordinary men. It has powerful enemies, of which the naga snake, the symbol of the terrestrial realms, is foremost.

The garuda bird is a perfect symbol of the bank's role in contemporary society, a perfect symbol of its discretionary powers, and of the manner in which it conducts its business, and the benefits it receives from 'latching on' to the royal virtue. Like other mythical beasts of the ancient cosmology, the garuda bird has polymorphous qualities that endow it with special powers and place it outside the established social order. Half man, half bird, the krut "circles in the skies" beyond the sight of ordinary men. In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, such celestial travel symbolizes the transcendent knowledge of the gods; Buddhist saints fly through the air as do wheel-rolling monarchs. King Lithai describes the krut as the 'bird who knows all signs' in the Traiphum.

The garuda is a fierce fighter whose enemy and equal is the naga snake. Both of these beasts are morally 'tamed' in the presence of the Buddha or of the Prince Rama; they are subservient only when protecting the virtuoso. Bangkok Bank is locked in a fierce power struggle with other major banks in Thailand, particularly with those which receive royal patronage. It is also engaged in struggles with the terrestrial powers, in this case, with opposition politicians who oppose its

activities in rural areas. All of these banks and all of these politicians are subservient (or silent) when performing the king's business, however. The banks are dependent on royal patronage to achieve success in their business ventures.

The bank's owners, director, and top officers are part Thai, part Chinese, socially polymorphous beings. As such, they have access to a wide range of information that is unavailable to ordinary men. This is the bank's key to power--in much the same way the king's knowledge of tantric Buddhism is the key to his moral superiority over Buddhist monks who 'might be' saints. The bank possesses information on the international market, on the national economy, and on new sources of revenue (e.g., oil fields in the Northeast) that is unavailable to the general public. It has access to financial data on powerful individuals and small and large businesses (some of which may find its way to the Grand Palace).

Because of its alliances with bureaucrats, generals and political parties, the bank has inside information on high-level government transactions and on power struggles within the military. It maintains strong connections with the Department of Religious Affairs and from it receives information on potential saints and "political monks." The bank's senior vice president is from a Sino-Thai Isan family with close ties to powerful Isan Thammayut monks. The head of the bank's public relations division has strong ties with the highest-ranking Mahanikai monks in the kingdom.

The most crucial information available to bank officers, their most exclusive source of power, concerns transactions in the international marketplace, however. Chin Sophonphanit is linked into a powerful network of Chinese banking families whose interests span Southeast

Asia,² which is really what makes the bank like the krut. The garuda bird 'circles above the earth' where it observes the affairs of ordinary men without being seen. The bank is part of a business and intelligence network that spans the globe; its participation in this network is what enables it to collect and analyze information on a grand scale. Similarly, its major transactions take place well out of sight of the public, as do the king's personal financial transactions.

Ancient hierarchical traditions and the bank's close association with the monarchy protects the secrecy of its transactions within the country, as does its strong ties with the military. In addition, traditional prohibitions against criticism of powerful leaders have been reinforced in the last decade by the bank's conspicuous charitable activities. The only way some major business deals become public knowledge is when powerful political parties (backed by rival commercial banks and military factions) feud in public. Such a feud occurred between SAP and the Thai Nation Party in 1981 over rights to an oil deal with Saudi Arabia (The Nation, 25 March 1981).

In general, however, the secret activities of the bank, like those of the king, manifest themselves to ordinary men suddenly and sporadically, as natural disaster or as gifts from the gods. Like the kathin robes, economic benefits appear to 'float from the sky' [loi fa]. The bank's strong identification with the king, and the royally-endorsed portrayal of its loan policies as 'sacrifice to the nation,' only reinforces this perception. For example, the citizens of Khon Kaen have very little say in determining whether a jute mill will be built in their province. The

²This information was provided by an employee of a major bank in Chicago whose job was to appraise the bank of the kinship ties and economic transactions of the most powerful Chinese banking families in Southeast Asia.

decision is made in Bangkok, the 'City of Angels,' by bureaucrats and financiers. The jute mill, like a new royal temple, just appears out of the blue, the result of a government order endorsed by the king. Such projects are generally indirectly associated with with the benevolence of the Buddhist king, a sommutithev or 'supposed angel' who promotes development.

'Circling in the sky,' a symbol of omniscience in Hindu and Buddhist mythology, has been assimilated to knowledge of causal-roots of events in Buddhist doctrine. This perceptual paradigm and its related celestial event structure are most significant insofar as they governs farmers' perceptions of long-term changes in the economy. For example, no one 'knows for sure' if it is true, but Bangkok Bank was rumoured to be the largest single holder of land titles in the Northeast in 1980. If the bank should decide to take up these mortgages, or convert large blocks of agricultural land to industrial use, the decision-making process would be invisible to the men most affected by it, small farmers. In accordance with Buddhist mythology and doctrine, the changes would appear [prakot] suddenly, as natural disaster, or gradually, as material manifestations of the bad kamma of Isan farmers.

This paradigm of change reinforces the perception that farmers are but mute witnesses to catastrophic events--to the play of the gods--and that only superior beings can correctly interpret the causal-roots of events on this scale. This is where the advance work of the Department of Religious Affairs in depressing the interpretive pretensions of local elite (chapter 18) may have its greatest effect. Given the conspicuous nature of the bank's merit-making activities, coupled with its access to inside information, bank officers can interpret economic change any way they want. Are radical changes in the life circumstances of Isan

farmers caused by "inside trading" or secret manipulation of land titles, by international market forces, or merely by their own bad kamma? The use of this symbolism offers the bank and range of interpretive options.

The Attributes of the Great King

Bangkok Bank's role in the development of capitalism in Thailand can be placed in historical perspective by reference to the "five attributes" of great Buddhist kings (Gokhale 1969; Mahamakutrajaavidyalay Foundation 1977). A great king has (1) a perfect lineage, (2) a full treasury, (3) the advice of able ministers, and (4) a loyal army, all of which lead to (5) 'the king's glory.' This last attribute refers to the monarch's total control of his kingdom and his ability to vanquish all enemies: an ability that arises from his transcendent knowledge of the dhamma. In the following sections I will examine each of these attributes in light of the bank's position in contemporary Thai society.

Perfect Lineage

Bangkok Bank, a corporation, cannot have "pure lineage" in the traditional sense. Through its social policies and participation in kathin phrarachathan, however, it can and is creating a social identity as a great world renouncer and social benefactor.

The Theravada Buddhist ideology of pure lineage is based on the idea that pure action creates and transforms men's place in the social-celestial order. Membership in a noble lineage is achieved through perfection of the ten kingly virtues. Since dana (almsgiving) and boricak (renunciation) are foremost among those virtues, commercial banks have a natural edge in the national race for virtue.

In the words of Buddaghosha (1976), "Materiality is kamma-born." In Thai society, one's 'name' [chunam] or social identity, one's place in the social hierarchy, is an aspect of 'materiality,' part of the flow of kammic process. Like barami, one's 'name' or reputation can be built [sang] or it can decline [sia]. Name is created as part of the 'tangle' of human and cosmic interaction, governed by invisible laws of kamma and dhamma.

In the last decade or so, Bangkok Bank began to enhance its 'name' through a sophisticated publicity campaign and by taking on the ritual prerogatives of men of pure lineage. These changes occurred at about the time it began to penetrate the markets of the Northeast. For example, in 1967 the bank joined members of the lesser nobility and high-ranking government officials in offering kathin at second and third-class royal temples: It performed kathin phrarachathan at Wat Boromniwat³ at the 'suggestion' of the Department of Religious Affairs. This wat is the headquarters of the Isan Thammayut movement with links extending to the leading Thammayut temples in Isan, in the provincial capitals of Ubon, Korat, Khon Kaen, and Udorn. In 1972 the bank joined the immediate members of the royal family, the 'big men of the royal lineage,' in presenting the king's personal kathin gift at a temple in Phitsuanulok (Kromkan Sasana 1972).

Since the present king lacks a harem, he is not "rich in offspring" as were kings of the past, and the kings of the Hindu and Buddhist mythology. He must turn to commercial banks rather than to his sons, the celestial princes, to conduct his business. By 1980 at least, Bangkok Bank seems to have won top billing among those banks to whom the king was telling his secrets, and offering his business.

³The famous Isan monk, Somdet Phra Mahawirawongse (Uan) was abbot of this temple before he became abbot of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat at the instigation of Luang Phibun.

A Full Treasury

A bank, especially one headed by a powerful Chinese family, can hardly make lineage claims that rival those of a great king, but it can rival and surpass him in the size of its treasury and in the resplendence of its merit-making activities. This is especially true given the current antinomy problems of the king.

To avoid being castigated as a rich man and drawing attention to the size of the royal treasuries, King Bhumibol gives only \$150 to royal temples when he offers kathin. He must separate Western concepts of property ownership from traditional ideas of Buddhist lordship: fulfill the duties of the Dhammaraja without being accused of "owning" anything. To maintain his throne, he has had to represent himself as circulating [munwian] resources rather than owning them, as a man who spends his time distributing alms rather than buying cement companies or hotels. He can 'attract' donations to the Sangha but does not want his religious sacrifices to be identified with a large personal fortune. These restrictions must eventually invite invidious comparisons between the king and corporate enterprises. The king's \$150 seems paltry indeed when compared with the \$20,000 Bangkok Bank reportedly donated to a royal temple in Khon Kaen.

Like the Thai king, Bangkok Bank has a full treasury. Unlike the king, however, the bank can devote itself wholeheartedly and publicly to filling its treasury even more. The king's business activities must remain secret and therefore restricted. The Buddhist king's duty is to administer the law, not to engage in commerce. In contrast, the duty of merchants is to trade, and their virtue is legitimately reflected in the

success of their business ventures, as long as they donate wealth to the Sangha. Unlike the king, the bank does not lose credibility if it openly engages in enterprise.

Nevertheless, the bank uses the king as a model for its business and religious transactions. As much as possible it represents its business activities as the circulation [munwian] of wealth for charitable purposes, as dana, rather than as the accumulation of wealth for selfish purposes [upadana]. This makes the comparison between the bank and the monarchy potentially more invidious: Bangkok Bank did not just offer more wealth to Wat That in Khon Kaen than the king did at his own kathin luang it also 'attracted' more wealth to the Sangha (from its clerks and customers) than did the king.

The Bank's Ministers

Bangkok Bank is steadily acquiring "ministers" and business contacts whose expertise rivals those of the king. The bank receives advice from "able ministers" inside and outside the nation, inside and outside the business world.

Since the bank allied itself with Kukrit Pramote's Social Action Party in the early 1970s, for example, it has had a prince of royal blood advising it on political matters. It has strong ties with multinational corporations, and with the business elite in Hong Kong and Singapore. In addition, it has ties with Citicorp in New York, Bank of America in San Francisco, and Texas Commerce Bank in Houston. One might say there is a natural affinity between the symbolism of the krut (an extraterrestrial being), the extranational origins of corporate capital, and the extranational business transactions of commercial banks.

The bank sends its employees to study the operations of these banks and to learn new publicity techniques as a reward for personal initiative. It invests capital for foreign banks. Its officers consult with representatives of the World Bank and of foreign banks (with Citicorp, for example) and thus plan Thailand's economy from afar. In addition, the bank's officers have become ministers and advisors to the royal government. Bunchu Rochanasathien was Minister of Finance in 1980.

The bank, like the king, has powerful advisors in the monastic world. The senior vice president comes from Ubol and his family reportedly had strong ties with Somdet Uan and with Wat Phra Sri Mahathat. Since Uan was referred to as a nak pattana or 'proponent of development' by members of Sarit's inner circle, this suggests that the bank was aware of the government's earliest plans to development the Northeast.

The bank has hired its own religious consultant, a former monk of Pali Nine status. He writes booklets on religion and ritual which the bank distributes to Buddhist temples and to its new customers. This religious consultant in turn consults with the highest ranking abbots in the land, men who head the royal temples of Bangkok.

A Loyal Army

It is unclear to what extent Bangkok Bank has a loyal army or commands the loyalty of different factions of the police and armed forces. The bank's owners allied themselves with powerful military leaders in the early 1950s. Praphat Charusathien sat on the bank's board of directors (and may still do so today).

The power of Bangkok Bank, like that of other commercial banks, grew as the economy expanded in the 1960s. It is highly unlikely that the

Thai military or individual military strongmen will ever again be able to control the bank's activities as they did in the past, when American military aid gave the military a disproportionate lead in the race for power. The bank is too closely associated with the monarchy and with American corporations. Bank officers are the valued advisors of military governments, which somewhat decreases the possibilities of harassment.

The bank, a business corporation, has decided advantages over individual military leaders in the race for virtue. Military strongmen, like the kings and princes of Hindu mythology, are subject to sudden and violent shifts in fate. At any moment they may be plummeted from the heavens to the earth or even to the hells (or even exiled in Switzerland). In contrast, the bank's power grows steadily as the economy grows; its stability increases to the degree to which the Thai economy continues to 'latch on' to the world market system. The more a capitalist economy develops in Thailand, the more foreign allies the bank acquires, and the less susceptible it is to the whims of individual military leaders.⁴

As I will demonstrate, the bank does equally well under military and democratic governments; it merely derives different types of benefits from each. In contrast, the prestige of military strongmen waxes and wanes as the nation passes through alternating cycles of democratic and military rule. Perhaps because of the potentially violent nature of some of its military business partners, Bangkok Bank began allying itself with high-ranking bureaucrats in the 1970s, both in Bangkok and in the provinces, further diminishing the military's power.

⁴Sarit, for example, single-handedly chartered a national commercial bank (cf. Riggs 1966).

The King's Glory

The fifth attribute of a great king is his 'great glory' which arises from his perfection of the ten Buddhist virtues (dana foremost amongst them), from his perfection of the Tenfold Practice, from his transcendent knowledge of dhamma, and from his boundless generosity. This knowledge enables the great king to vanquish all enemies, inside and outside his kingdom.

The king's glory is indexed by his structural position in society: by the fulfillment of his role as a universal gift-giver and bestower of alms. For example, the great Buddhist king confers rather than receives benefits from his subjects. He has a great 'voice' in public affairs, but rarely, if ever, is a great audience, 'absorbing' the moral lessons of others.

The king's actions are characterized by the symbols of totality and perfection. He knows all of the dhamma and the cosmos. He perfects all of the ten virtues of the Righteous Ruler. His personal behavior exhibits these perfections to the highest and most perfect degree (especially that of almsgiving). He goes all places, patronizes all worthy subjects, and sponsors all worthy projects. He provides perfect gifts to the Sangha, gifts which fill the exact material needs of Buddhist monks. He gives perfect gifts to the laity in the form of the royal advice (words of wisdom), thus constantly inclining them towards the practice of dhamma. He supports both monks and laity, and advises the laity on proper conduct, inside and outside the temple, and on right livelihood.

The totality of the king's activities mark the "great social classifications" of Thai society and the great moral-territorial divisions of the kingdom. The 'official royal work' supports

traditional values, activities and social groups, while the 'special royal work' [ngan luang phiset] carves out new hierarchies of merit and social activity. The royal activities implicitly rank individuals and social practices in terms of their value to the nation. The great Buddhist king does not merely follow the path of purification, his actions define it for his subjects. The phrarachabarami (transcendent royal virtue) is the implicit model of commercial expansion.

Finally, a great king is the focal point for the distribution and redistribution of wealth. Wealth circulates around him and through him, it is not owned by him. This circulation of wealth has powerful soteriological overtones: the king's distribution of alms and advice lessens the suffering of his subjects.

Through its ritual performances and the activities of its publicity department, Bangkok Bank is becoming a great teacher and moral exemplar to its customers. It advises them on how to conduct themselves inside and outside the temple. As the bank attracts new customers, it teaches them the ways of good capitalists, how to save and invest their money. Following the model set by the king, the bank educates farmers on new and more efficient modes of agricultural production, 'decreasing their suffering' by improving production. The bank represents its commercial activities as benevolent, renunciatory activity, 'caring' for the deposits of farmers and returning them with 'interest' [phon]: not taking but conferring benefits. Like the king, the bank circulates money benevolently throughout the kingdom.

Through its extensive charitable activities, Bangkok Bank has begun to represent itself as conferring benefits and patronage on all worthy activities in the kingdom: religion, sports, cultural events, education, etc. The bank does not merely patronize existing charities,

it creates new charities as a response to 'changing [cosmic] conditions,' thereby redefining the socio-moral order. This is a popular theme among bank officers, who speak more of the bank's creation of new charities than they do of its contributions to existing royal charities.

The bank no longer offers kathin phrarachathan occasionally at a few temples; it offers kathin phrarachthan every year, throughout the entire kingdom. Its officers self-consciously perform the kathin in the ancient pattern, in the manner of the 'king of the four quarters' who ceaselessly circumambulates his kingdom performing resplendent acts of merit. The bank has not merely expanded its branches in rural areas, it has established branches in every province.

A great Buddhist king protects and defends the Sangha. He commissions recensions or purifications of Buddhist texts and purifies Buddhist rituals. By the end of the 1970s, the bank had begun to do the same, in part through the activities of its publicity department. It began to publish religious literature on Buddhist rituals and precepts for distribution as "permanent property"⁵ to Buddhist temples and to its new customers. In so doing it began rather subtly to define the path of purification for Buddhist monks and Buddhist laity.

A great king discovers and venerates great Buddhist monks; the bank has begun to do on a systematic basis through the agency of its provincial branch managers. One of the bank's most important criterion for advancement is that its personnel demonstrate 'social responsibility.' This trait is demonstrated primarily by managers' and clerks' discovery and patronage of pious Buddhist monks (possible saints). Bank employees seek out monks with miraculous powers. They

⁵Permanence is the sign of eternal truth, of the dhamma.

venerate them, help organize their cremation ceremonies, and control the distribution of their relics and amulets. Since the bank has branches throughout the country, it can do this on a kingdom-wide basis, just like the king. Following the king's example, the managers' and workers' discovery and veneration of new new thudong monks is defined as their 'unofficial' work.

In the following section I will present excerpts from an interview that reveals how these themes are integrated into the bank's general ideology of 'supporting society'. They reveal the bank's longterm strategies for penetrating the Northeast in the guise of a great world renouncer.

Pathways into the Northeast

The interview took place in 1979 at Bangkok Bank's head office in Yawarat, the Chinese business district of Bangkok. A young assistant vice president who had received an M.B.A. from an American university was assigned the task of answering questions on the bank's kathin in Khon Kaen.

The bank officer was wary about explaining Thai customs ("superstitions") to an American, an attitude I encountered among most Western-educated Thai. He prefaced the interview by saying that he did not know much about religion. "Belief in chat na (the next life or rebirth) is according to your faith," he said, but not, I gathered, according to his. "This is khosana (publicity)," he said, referring to the bank's kathin phrarachthan in Khon Kaen.

The antinomy issue was omnipresent. What was legitimate from an American point of view (shared between us) represented the transgression of indigenous ideals of merit-making. (Was I aware of this?) How could

he explain to an American why a religious ritual should be a part of the bank's "rational" plan for developing the Northeast? Should he, or the bank, even admit to having a highly-planned ritual policy?

The interview was characterized by a plurality of social time, indicated by language switching from Thai to English. We discussed economic policy in English and merit-making in Thai. This dual temporal framework was reflected in the bank's records of its branch openings in the Northeast and in its bookkeeping system. Records are kept in 'Buddhist time,' phuttasakarāt, time measured from the Buddha's parinibbana to the end of the kalpa: to the year 5,000 when all traces of the rupa-kaya and dhamma-kaya will disappear and a new Buddha will appear. The first several minutes of the interview were spent changing Buddhist-time into Christian time, into a temporal framework that envisions a different type of Armageddon. This was necessary in order to figure out when Isan branches had been opened. The branch openings date almost exclusively from the year 2500 (1957), the year of Sarit's 'revolution' [pathiwat] and the mid-point between Gotama the Buddha's parinibbana and the end of the kalpa.

The bank executive immediately identified 1967 as the first year the bank offered kathin phrarachathan. "The Department of Religious Affairs suggested we offer at Wat Boromniwat," he said. Although the bank was supposedly offering kathin phrarachathan in a different area of the country every year, its business records and other evidence suggest that its ritual policies were developed primarily for the Northeast.⁶

⁶Since the South has a large Muslim population, one assumes an elaborate kathin policy would not be as effective a device for winning new customers. The North and Central Plains have been integrated into the world market since the turn of the century. This conclusion is drawn on the basis of conversations with anthropologists who have done fieldwork in northern Thailand, on the bank's records of its its branch openings, and on evidence from the records of the Department of

The Story of the Krut

The informant explained that the krut was given to banks which were stable, literally, to banks which were 'stable in their credibility'. It was presented by the king as an act of phrarachathan. "It is royal charity," he said. Only five banks in the whole country had received the krut, and he promptly listed them: Thai Phanit, Krung Thai, Thai Military Bank and Thai Farmers' Bank.

He explained that the bank received the krut because of its enlightened social policy. "The government got ten percent," he said. (Ten percent of the bank's profits?)

We raise funds in the local area and get deposits. We (re)invest at least 60% of local deposits to give as credit for people in the area. Twenty percent goes to farmers, 40% to merchants.

This statement was a reference to the 1975 government's policy to 'spread capital' throughout the countryside.⁷

Religious Affairs about the elevation of royal temples. The majority of the bank's new branches in the 1970s were opened in the Northeast. Eight of the nine new royal temples of the 1970s were established in the Northeast. The bank began to open branches in the North only recently, in the last five years. The only booklets commemorating kathin phrarchathan I received from the bank were for those in Udorn, Khon Kaen, and for one temple in the South. Workers in the publicity department looked for but could not find a commemorative volume for Ubon.

⁷As Anan writes:

In 1975 commercial banks were required to raise 5 percent the percentage of credit of loans earmarked for agriculture (up from 2 percent in the previous year): an additional 2 percent of the banks' total deposits were subsequently supposed to be devoted to the same purpose every year henceforth. (1984:111)

This policy imposed no hardship on commercial banks.

With the period of economic downturn during 1975-1978, when commercial banks were left with large excess reserves, the banks were more than willing to expand their agricultural credit programs, especially when there was almost no risk involved. (1984:111-112)

Policies for Building Business

The assistant vice president called the bank's ritual activities and its benevolent lending policies ways of building business [sang gnan]. He stated proudly that the bank had the biggest publicity staff of any bank in Thailand. Employees who devised new publicity strategies for building business were given trips to the United States as special prizes [ranwan].

I questioned him closely about the bank's kathin phrarachathan "policy." The Thai word for policy is nayobai, a word which implies calculation or deliberation in the performance of an activity, characteristics opposite to those found in pure, spontaneous religious activity inspired by faith.⁸ He corrected me impatiently on my choice of words. "Kathin is not policy," he said, "It is boricak, donation, like funds for students. This type of boricak is part of the bank's social

The plan encouraged market expansion into rural areas and commercialized agricultural production. The financial backers of the Social Action Party and Bangkok Bank benefitted the most from this policy because commercial banks carried out the transfers of capital into rural areas (Kroekkiat 1975:83-89). The policy was suspended in 1977. As Anan also notes, there was never any way of enforcing or verifying the policy. This and similar programs benefitted "only a small number of rich farmers, while contributing markedly to the exacerbation of rural conflicts, not only between landowners and tenants, but increasingly also between employers and laborers." It also "increased the integration of peasants into the labor markets as more of them became destitute and dispossessed of their land" (1984:106).

⁸According to one informant, nayobai, which is derived from the Pali, connotes trickery or deception. A Thai political scientist said that no such negative connotation existed with regard to 'government policy'--but said nothing of the ambiguities surrounding a secret government 'religious policy.'

policy. The bank has a policy to support⁹ sports, the arts, and religion." How long had the bank had this policy? "For the last ten or twenty years."

A clerk at the Khon Kaen branch had mentioned that the head office sent 20,000 baht (\$1,000) to organize the kathin phrarachathan at Wat That, which seemed to indicate that the event was orchestrated by the head office. The officer denied this.

How was money collected for kathin phrarachathan? The managers of the sixteen branches of the Northeast collected the money and gave it to the public relations side [fay phracha samphan, literally, 'the side that binds people together'] of the bank. "Bank workers and staff, friends of the staff, and the bank's customers also contributed." The contributions were called boricak and were made to the temple 'in the name of the bank' [nai nam thanakhan]. "Everyone is a host," he stated.

If "everyone is a host" the bank's kathin was a kathin samakhi, united and ownerless ('lordless'). To refer to it as kathin samakhi, 'unity kathin,' the common usage at the branch in Khon Kaen, was to emphasize its spontaneous qualities, and implicitly to deny that it was part of a highly-calculated policy designed to maximize bank profits.

The informant was uncomfortable discussing the bank's merit-making activities. He referred to them as part of the bank's "social policy," not its "economic policy." This linguistic usage, supporting a tenuous separation of knowledge and interests, was at the crux of the antinomy issue. Excessive concern with ritual violated Western standards of

⁹The Thai word for support [songsoem] is the same word used to indicate support of religion.

efficiency in business and impugned his integrity as an economist. On the other hand, the self-conscious use of kathin as a sophisticated advertising device and business strategy violated Thai standards of merit-making and impugned his personal integrity. After spending several years training as an economist, why should he have to "waste" his time and expertise organizing or attending merit-making ceremonies? What were the personal implications if he knew the bank was "using religion for personal gain"?

Choosing the Temple

How did the bank chose temples to which to offer kathin phrarachathan or kathin ratsadon?

The Social Relations Department ('side') choses the temple, depending on whether or not the people are poor or whether they have gone to that village before The Social Relations or Publicity Department of the bank represents the bank at regional kathin. Other people can join choey choey (indifferently, at will).

As for kathin at wat thammada (ordinary temples),

the wat must have accounts here. The kammakan wat (temple committee) decides where to deposit the temple's money. Kathin is at places where we have good connections.

The bank was most anxious to get individual accounts of Thai farmers, and kathin was one means of getting those accounts. "It is the job of our staff, the managers of the branches, to have good relations with both medium-sized customers and small-sized customers," he said. (The bank was seeking the largest share of the credit market.) Bank employees had to go to the temple because

mostly Thailand is a religious country so public relations are done from the wat. We beg to build stability¹⁰ because Thai people are people who respect Buddhism. They go to the wat often, so if we go to the wat people will admire

¹⁰Literally, a 'stable name.' [raw kho sang chu siang day mangkhon.]

us. If we go to help the wat the villagers will like us.¹¹

The last statement was made somewhat cynically.

He led the conversation back to the subject of the bank's profits, before and after taxes, and to the percentage of bank profits that came from rural branches. He was proud of the increase in profits over the last several years. "Kathin phrarachathan is part of the policy to reinvest the bank's profits in rural areas," he said.

The head office made the final decision about where the bank would offer its official annual kathin. At first the informant said the provincial branch office chose the temple where the kathin would be offered, and then amended the statement saying that the head office in Bangkok and the Public Relations Department "also decided." The bank's kathin did not seem very samakhii after all.

"Kathin is a way of supporting religion and helping society," he explained. He was quite proud of the bank's newest civic activities, especially its support of sporting events like the Asian Games and the arts.¹²

These activities are for representation of the country and for the good of the people. This social policy [nayobai] shows that we are leaders and initiators [khon riroem] in society. We support education for students, for the poor who have no scholarships.

Furthermore, temple support was "part of supporting Thai culture." "We enter good temples to lead and control them (khrop gnam).¹³ We must

¹¹Tha rao pai wat raw chuai lua wat, chao ban chop rao.

¹²In 1980 the bank's idea of supporting "the arts" was to bring Marie Osmond, an American rock singer, to Bangkok for a major concert. The bank sponsored the event and profited from it as well. It was difficult to see how this fit into the category of charitable activities since the tickets were expensive and sold out immediately.

¹³Krop also means 'to manage,' 'to take possession of' or 'to manage the affairs' of a person or organization.

take care of wattanatham thai. Kathin is part of religion."

The assistant vice president added that one of the bank's criterion for selecting good managers was their "social responsibility [khwam raphitchop] to society", as indicated by their participation in merit-making activities. Did bank managers and their followers believe they would be reborn together if they made merit together (the ideology of merit advanced by the Grand Palace)? "This is according to faith," he said. "I don't believe it."

What, then, did it mean to pour water at the end of the ceremony dedicating merit? (Could corporations make and transfer merit?) Could the bank dedicate this merit to society, i.e., to the living rather than to the dead? "No. This is for dead people."

Merit-making as 'Just Ceremonial'

Somewhat irritated at my ignorance, he launched into a (functional/practical) explanation of the meaning of religion and ritual in society. "The kathin phrarachathan is just ceremonial [pithi kan]," he explained.

Another example of pithikan is opening a new bank branch. We have a ritual for opening the curtain which is part of the ceremony. We have to invite monks to push the button (to open the curtain). This is part of culture [suan wattanatham]. Kathin is religious ritual [pithikan thang sasana], one part of dhamma. It should be done according to faith.

He believed in Buddhism but not strongly [may kreng]. Having considered what Americans perceive as the "supersititious" aspects of Buddhism, he believed in the laws of kamma: "Do good, receive good." He characterized the wai, the traditional act of "raising hands to pay respect" (the most fundamental means of acknowledging status difference in Thai society), as pithikan and advanced what was clearly a well thought-out personal theory of the same.

Pithikan means that one is in society and must act accordingly. Society is made of ceremonial which must not be lost [mai sia hai]. It doesn't hurt me to do these things, to wai. If we don't do this, some people will think that we are people outside religion [pen khon nok sasana], that we are people without religion [khon may mi sasana], that we are bad people. They might not respect us . . . but this is pithikan only.

Like others of the self-styled "new technocrats," he felt restricted by what he considered the 'ceremonial' aspects of Thai society.

Furthermore, as he well knew, the performance of merit-making ceremonies without belief in their efficacy meant that technocrats performed them with wrong intentions or even bad intentions. The informant felt that too much attention to pithikan prevented him and the bank from doing their work efficiently. In his opinion, the bank should stick to the business of banking.

Did Thanom respect religion? "Probably," he answered. Did Praphat? "No!" (Praphat sat on the bank's board of directors).

Barami and the King

There was no tension when we discussed "economic policy" that was unrelated to religious practice. There was no tension when we discussed the meaning of barami, which he immediately identified with the king. "Barami is something you build," he said. "The king has barami. The king is in an exceptional position. He has the highest rank in the nation. One can't criticize him, like Queen Elizabeth." As for Kukrit Pramote (a man of royal blood), "Kukrit has barami and can be prime minister." Does the king have amnat (the ability to use force)? "He has amnat but he does not usually use it." Can one lose barami? "Yes. If we lose power, we lose barami also. This happens to a prime minister when he loses his rank."

He spoke of his frustrations with Thai society after returning home from America, but he was equally alienated from American values. "Western customs, like disco, are spoiling Thai culture," he said heatedly. That was why the bank had created its social policy, to "protect Thai culture from foreign influence."

Was he wearing an amulet? He immediately pulled one out from under his shirt and spoke enthusiastically of the monk whose image it contained. The monk was a meditation monk in Acaan Man's Thammayut line, famous for his magical powers (including his ability to read minds and fly through the air). "This monk knew the true meaning of religion," he said. "He really did not care about the world."

As I turned down a noisy lane in Yawarat to return home, he added a final note, as if to set the record straight. "Kathin and social policy really aren't a major part of what we do," he said. "We are a profit-making institution."

Branch Openings and Antinomy Cycles

The bank's records indicated that the bank had opened nineteen branches in Isan between 1961 and 1976. Twelve were opened in the 1970s, five in 1972, a year before the Thanom government was overturned by student protests. No new branches were opened in 1973, the first year of the "experiment in democracy." One was opened in 1974, none in 1975, and eight in 1976, the year the military returned to power.

Military governments seemed to favour the bank's plans for expansion. In fact, the rash of openings in 1976 seems to indicate that (1) the bank planned to expand with or without military support (since the coup did not occur until October), or that (2) the bank and the military were in some kind of collusion: the bank planned to open the new branches because it knew the military would return to power.

The bank's power increased under both military and democratic governments, however. The bank could expand its operations without 'obstruction' under military rule. On the other hand, it was during the 'democratic' period, from 1973 to 1976, that Bunchu played a direct role in planning national economic policy, creating and implementing the loan policies that were necessary to commercial rural economies.

The following is the list of branch openings in the Northeast. the 'path of action' followed by the bank as it expanded its business operations was remarkably similar to that of White-robed Pin as he 'wandered and made merit' in Isan half a century earlier (chapter 15).

Branch openings in the Northeast were the following:

1. 1950: Ubon
2. 1961: Khon Kaen (the year Sarit declared it the development capital of the Northeast)
3. 1963: Roi-et
4. 1965: Yatsothorn
5. 1966: Muang Phon, a wealthy district in Khon Kaen with a central railway facility
6. 1967: Korat
7. 1968: Udorn
8. 1972: Buriram, Chayaphum, Nongkhai, Mahasarakham, Surin, and Sakorn Nakorn (the site of the king's Isan palace, built after Luang Phibun fell from power, and the home of the famous meditation monk, Acaan Fan)
9. 1974: Sakorn Nakorn (a district)
10. 1976: Ubon (Amnat Caroen District, the birthplace of Colonel Pin Mutukan); Loey; a district in Srisaket; a district in Korat; Chumphae; Ubon (Keetudom District).

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the attributes of a great Buddhist king and compared them to those of a great bank, suggesting ways in which capitalist ideologies are portrayed as ideologies of merit. The comparison indicates how the bank's activities are becoming increasingly "king-like" in nature, scope, and content. In contemporary Thai society, the 'royal activities' is a "structure of reproduction."

As the above interview indicates, the bank's ritual policies are controversial. The bank's kathin ceremonies, even more than those of Thanom and Praphat, were performed with the explicit aim of promoting capitalist development, of increasing profits in Isan, but the bank portrays its ritual performances as spontaneous and unplanned to disguise the calculation involved. In 1980 the bank's ritual policies, the extent of these policies, was a closely guarded secret. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, its kathin phrarachathan policy was only the tip of the iceberg.

Like the military dictators Thanom and Praphat, the bank portrayed its kathin ceremonies as spontaneous and egalitarian 'unity kathin' (kathin samakhi). This was to present a similarly distorted view of the world, namely, one in which the owners of the bank and the ritual were mere group members, operating in unison with their employees. Their highly planned ritual activities were mere 'accidents of virtue.'

A paradox is developing as a result of bank workers' heavy involvement in executing the bank's ritual strategies. If the ritual is performed without religious motives, i.e., as a "rational" activity that supports business and society but does not promote detachment from worldly affairs, it can be performed in good faith. If, on the other hand, bank employees are supposed to perform it as a religious activity,

with no thought of worldly gain, they cannot do so in good faith: They know too much about the bank's business policies. Thai farmers may or may not be grateful to the bank for supporting their temples in ten years' time, but then they are not as skilled as the bank's own economic experts at foreseeing the future.

Subtle ideological inversions and transformations occur as the bank expands. The bank's ideology of growth, taken in conjunction with its charitable activities, supports a world view in which rational economic planning is a form of ascetic, renunciatory activity, and thus the ultimate source of prosperity. Ritual and religious activity are valuable insofar as they promote the attainment of material goals. The kingdom is still represented as a soteriological state, as a dhamma-realm of sorts, but the principles of order have been reversed. Religious purification is less an end in itself than it is the most efficient way of doing business in a Theravada Buddhist polity. A soteriologically neutral ideology of pithikan implies the adoption of Western cosmology, of Western concepts of "efficient" or "direct" causality. Why make merit for the next life when there is none? What possible effect can ritual activities have on the price of corn?

As the 1970s drew to an end, Bangkok Bank was beginning to define the proper role of the Sangha in society, a royal prerogative par excellence. Traditionally, it is the duty of the Buddhist king to decide when the loss of knowledge of dhamma warrants the purification of texts and a search for new methods of practice. The bank's idea of new and more proper religious practice was to have Buddhist monks participate directly in development activities, and perhaps even serve as its unofficial business agents.

For example, the following is a profession of faith from an Isan monk, a member of the provincial monks' council in the Northeast district of Thung Tae. It was printed in Thailand into the 80's (Office of the Prime Minister 1979:50), published by the Kriangsak government. Bangkok Bank's Publicity Department was distributing copies of this book, encased in specially printed jackets with the bank's logo, making appear as if the bank had published it. Officers in the Publicity Department said they helped write it, but interestingly enough they were not acknowledged as authors.

"Phra Pim feels that ensuring the well-being of the people is his main responsibility," the passage begins. According to Phra Pim:

Good and evil are less clearly delineated now than they were in more relaxed, earlier times when everyone was able to live easily in strict accordance with Buddhist teachings. I think that close cooperation between parents, teachers and monks could do much to alleviate the sense of dislocation many people feel as a result of the accelerated pace of modern life. Though monks are basically teachers, I feel the monkhood must directly participate in village life We can no longer just be benign influences and mediators. We play as large a role in the development of the countryside as anyone.

The radical nature of the bank's new religio-economic ideology is best indicated in its definition of Thai culture (watthana-tham thai). 'Culture' (watthana-tham) is no longer represented primarily as 'the material manifestation of dhamma,' religion. Rather, religion is portrayed as but one 'part' [suan] of 'Thai culture.'

CHAPTER 20

FROM RELIGION TO CULTURE: KATHIN IN TWO CITIES

The doctrine of Buddhism belongs to wise men who have discernment. (Acaan Man)

Introduction

When the warrior-king Taksin rode his war barge to offer kathin robes at Wat Arun in the eighteenth century, he was celebrating his victory in battle and consolidating his kingdom as a dhamma-realm. When the monk-king Mongkut performed the same act in the nineteenth century, he may have indeed done so to show Westerners that he believed he was "a man and not a god," but the event was highly sacred; it was primarily ruang bun, 'about merit.'

In 1967, when Cambridge-born King Bhumibol rode the royal barge to offer the kathin gift at Wat Arun, the event was co-sponsored by the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT). Its main purpose was to entertain American service personnel, and to counteract Thanom and Praphat's loss of control over the kingdom. The king's barge was flanked by those carrying police and government officials, not members of the nobility. The prows of their barges were decorated with characters from the Ramayana (TOT 27 October 1967).

The 1967 kathin luang was not so much a statement about Buddhism as it was a statement about Thai culture, wattana-tham thai. The 'material aspects of dhamma, traditionally the 'outer shape' of religion, had become the 'inner essence' of nationhood.

By the late 1970s the kathin had taken on the status of an "attractive cultural performance" of the type described by Singer (1972). Thai leaders single it out as a symbol of modern nationhood; it is periodically "shown off" as an example of the best of Thai customs.

In this respect the kathin is similar to the Perhala festival in Ceylon (Seneviratne 1976). Like the Perhala, spectacular performances of the kathin generate immediate commercial possibilities. What is of far greater significance, however, is that structural changes in the ritual, presaged by changes in the royal kathin, have important consequences nationwide with respect to the development of capitalism.

I suggest that the Thai elite are using the kathin to introduce a new concept of culture: one that is pro-capitalist, materialistic, and de-soteriologized (or perhaps soteriologically neutral). This concept of culture is a Janus ideology in that it can be read positively by Western, Thai elite, and Thai rural audiences alike. Like other Janus ideologies discussed throughout the dissertation, it is transitional, a sign of things to come.

The indigenous concept of culture, which traditionally refers to the Buddha's relics and to pithikan, to the material aspects of dhamma, is gradually being assimilated to an American textbook definition of culture--the "customs, beliefs, handicrafts, religion, music, etc." of a people: Just as gradually, it is being relieved of its sacred overtones. This new concept of culture, embedded in the ritual performance, is then used to formulate new, pro-capitalist identities for the nation's citizens. Thus the Thai data raise the possibility that when "new nations" highlight cultural performances as being representative of their identities in the world community, they are simultaneously introducing new concepts of culture as well, the

significance of which must also be analyzed as part of that national identity.

In this chapter I will discuss Bangkok Bank's ritual policies in two northeastern provinces, Khon Kaen and Udorn, which is where the research odyssey led. I conclude with a discussion of the publications of the bank's publicity department in Bangkok, which is where it ended. These data reveal the extent of the bank's rural kathin activities. These policies reveal the fate of ancient royal prerogatives in the hands of Sino-Thai bankers, as well as the fate of the religious networks created by Phanthumalo (Di) and the rebel monk, Phimonlatham. They demonstrate exactly how the reproduction of a structure, the ancient kathin, has become its transformation (Sahlins 1981:8).

Kathin in Udorn: 1975

In 1975 Bangkok Bank sponsored a kathin phrarachathan in Udorn, an Isan capital 100 miles from the Laotian border. The kathin was held at Wat Phothisomphan, a Thammayut temple that was built in 1906, four years after the holy men uprisings.

The publicity department published a commemorative volume containing a formal history of the temple similar to that written by the Department of Religious Affairs for its kathin phrarachathan at Wat That in Khon Kaen. This semi-official history notes that Wat Phothisomphan was the first Thammayut temple in Udorn. Its official name was bestowed by the supreme patriarch, the abbot of Wat Benchamobophit, in 1906. He named it after its builder, Phraya Sisuriyaratchawaranuwat, the second superintendent commissioner of Udorn Circle under King Chulalongkorn's thetsaphiban system (Bunnag 1977:276). The temple's sima stones were set in 1924 in a ceremony in which the ranking Isan Thammayut

monks--including the abbot of Wat Thepsarin and Somdet Uan (then Phrathepmuni, the abbot of Wat Suptatharam in Korat and head of the monks' council in Ubon Circle)--officiated. The temple's first abbot was a native of Udorn, but its second abbot, Phanthumalo (Cum), was sent out from Bangkok, from Wat Thepsarin (Bangkok Bank 1975:3). The essay notes that the major historical significance of Wat Phothisamphan lies in the fact that it was the first temple in Udorn to teach (central) Thai and Pali languages (1975:9).

The document refers to 'Isan' and not 'Lao' customs and culture; Isan culture is portrayed as a harmonious sub-category of the greater Thai society. This 'history' is silent on the question of the holy men uprisings, and on the controversy that arose when native-born Thammayut monks carried out Prince Damrong's educational reforms. These uprisings and reforms are still remembered by local people, by some with extreme bitterness. A Isan teacher (probably a supporter of Phra Phimonlatham) said that Uan had ordered the burning of religious texts written in the Lao script. "Uan was a Quisling, a traitor to the Lao people," he said in a disgusted tone. "He and Ubali tried to destroy Lao culture."

The booklet indicates that Bangkok Bank was offering kathin phrarachathan on a regular basis by least 1975, and, furthermore, that it was doing so in a self-conscious munwian pattern of circumambulation. As the introduction states,

'Requesting'¹ kathin phrarachathan cloth to offer at royal temples by rotating [munwian] to a different area of the country each year--to the North, Northeast, Middle and South--has been an annual activity of Bangkok Bank for a long time. The benefits of this activity are satisfying for everyone, for government servants, merchants, traders and people in the provinces All are made happy in this time of royal charity, joining hands and joining hearts by showing very strong unity. This is pleasing to the people at

¹Khoo phrarachathan lit., 'begging for royal alms.'

Bangkok Bank. It is a part of merit that the bank will make, creating faithful hearts evermore.

Why was Wat Phoothisamphan selected to receive the bank's annual kathin gift?

This year the committee of Bangkok Bank has asked to receive kathin phrarachathan cloth to take to Wat Phothisamphan, one of the royal temples in Udon Province. The committee looked closely and observed that this royal temple, besides being the 'center of the heart-mind' [sun ruam citcai] of the Buddha's followers, is still foremost in education in this province. The temple is respected as a place that supports benefits to the nation and religion and it is therefore appropriate and proper that the bank help support it. It will support the position of the temple, from which merit benefits and progress will be 'drawn' [sup] henceforth.

The Displacement Process: The Men at the Edge of the Ritual Circle

A subtle process of displacement and absorption, a restructuring of the local celestial hierarchy, begins when the bank begins to dominate a town's temple system. This process is analagous to that which occurs in the marketplace. In the same ten year period that Bangkok Bank entered the lists of kathin phrarachathan sponsors in Isan, it may, as one young economist commented cynically, have become the "biggest landlord of the Northeast," it probably earned the largest market share of all commercial banks in the region, and it and other commercial banks most certainly replaced local Chinese merchants (and without a doubt, the abbots of Buddhist temples) as the primary moneylenders to Isan farmers. Instead, these merchants and temples became its favoured customers.

Since the bank has almost infinite resources at its disposal, it can offer kathin at the best temples in provincial capitals; the men whose ancestors built those temples, powerful local merchants and descendants of the old Laotian nobility, must offer elsewhere. The government employs their offspring in low or middle-level bureaucratic positions; the bank employs them as clerks or in middle-level managerial positions.

Thus, in a reflection of this process, men whose ritual roles formerly placed them at the high 'mid-center' of temple space, symbolic of the Buddhist heavens, keen analytic abilities, and 'coolness of heart,' find themselves in the low outside positions identified with the the earthly realms and the Buddhist hells, symbolic of stupidity and 'hotness of heart.' The leaders of the city's most prominent kathin ceremonies become followers, intermediaries or ritual servers to outsiders.

I suggest that the idioms of ritual purity, hierarchical speech norms, and the spatial organization of the ritual comprise a system of cultural coherence in that they are expressions, all, of an underlying opacity principle. This system of cultural coherence in turn entails an indigenous theory of events and an indigenous theory about the interpretation of events, both of modern which are crucial to the study of capitalist development. I will discuss these facets of the ritual in the following sections.

Ritual Displacement: Power in the Perceptual Idiom

As noted above, the transfer of ritual privileges marks the formal transfer of moral/perceptual prowess and speech rights among the populace. The nature of the power transfer is reflected in the following idioms of ritual purity.

Face and Eyes

Men who are the owners of kathin ceremonies are said to 'have face and eyes' while poor men who lose ritual privileges (and their land) are said to 'lose face.' Ritual leaders receive fame (literally, 'name voiced') and 'have a voice' in the organization of the ritual and in community affairs; the king's edicts are issued in a voice that

"reverberates like the roar of a lion." In contrast, ritual observers 'have no voice' in the organization of the ritual and they gradually lose their voice in local affairs. Men of little ritual purity are said to see only the face (formal rank) of powerful ritual sponsors while the latter are believed able to see into their 'hearts and minds.'

Face and Name

Sunanda looked up but was so dazzled by the Bodhisatta's beauty that he did not recognize him at first. (The Temiya Jataka)

These idioms derive from Buddhist theories about knowledge and the interpretation of events. Like Yayati, men of ritual purity are assumed to 'know the names' of men in power (of the gods). This expression symbolizes their knowledge of causal dynamics--who is "really" doing what to whom in the heavens, and who is upsetting the cosmic order. In contrast, men of little merit do not dare 'speak the names' of powerful ritual sponsors, nor are they assumed to 'know the names' of the men in their entourages (cf. Reynolds and Reynolds 1982). They dare not look them in the face, and they are assumed to have no knowledge of their activities elsewhere in the kingdom, just as they are assumed to have no knowledge of the hidden dynamics of social events which originate out of their sight, in Bangkok, 'the city of angels.'

Idioms of Purity and Speech Norms

The monarchy stands as the center of this system of power in the perceptual idiom and its related system of prohibitions. This is, I suggest, one compelling reason for capitalists to retain a king as the symbolic leader of the nation. In contemporary ideologies of kingship, the king is referred to as the "'head" of the nation' [pramuk khong

chat]. He supposedly has a powerful 'voice' [mi siang] in community affairs, a penetrating gaze and a pure mind. He 'sees and knows' (scrutinizes) all on behalf of his silent subjects, while his pure ritual practice demonstrates his selfless nature and guarantees that he acts with his subjects' best interests at heart. And, in the words of a former Isan monk of Pali Nine status, "No one dares criticize the king. It's like having a mouth but not having a mouth." Similar prohibitions apply to criticism of the Sangha. "The Thai have a custom of not criticizing religion because it is a good activity," said a former Thammayut monk. Similarly, it is improper to speak of disputes concerning the Sangha; they are called the 'waves beneath the waves,' the hidden aspects of monastic life.

The above idioms of ritual purity thus entail a related set of speech norms. For ritual audiences to speculate on the possible nefarious intentions of ritual sponsors is automatically guesswork, speech that is gossip or rumour, 'indirect speech.' One word for gossip is krasip, which means 'to whisper or speak softly.' Another is nintha, which means 'to blame in one's absence.' Rumour is khao lu, 'reported news,' information that is not known directly or for certain. These types of speech acts fall into the traditional categories of 'wrong speech' and 'evil words,' prohibited if one follows the five precepts of the Buddhist layman (especially as interpreted by Bangkok Bank; see below).

A Thai anthropologist objected to the use of the above words to characterize a situation in which Thai villagers are suspicious of the intentions of rich outside ritual sponsors because they were too formal. "We say 'Wa!' if we think they are doing something wrong," he said.

Farmers might see them as doing a good thing and believe in what they do, but we [Western educated people?] know what they are doing. Some farmers might say among themselves that men are making merit for profit, to get a big name, or they might gossip, but they normally would not say so in public.

Seeing Dhamma

Catching sight of the celestial chariot as it shone above their heads in the sky, they marveled at it and wondered what it might be . . . they realized that it must be Sakka's own vehicle come to their king, whose righteousness had caught the eye of the gods. (The Temiya Jataka)

The above principles of power and rank are encoded in the spatial organization of the actual ritual performance. What men 'see' in the ritual is an analogue of what they can 'know for sure' about the dhamma and about social events. What they see, touch, and give in the ceremony codifies their mental acuity, their perceptual positioning with regard to the interpretation of events. In contrast to South Asian rituals, in which purity is coded primarily in relation to cardinal directions (who faces what direction) (Das 1977:18-22) or in terms of the left-right opposition, purity in the kathin is coded primarily as proximity to the altar, to Buddhist monks (i.e., to the relics and teachings), and especially to royal monks and royal ritual objects. This is the same spatial code that structures the kathin origins myth: Once monks with 'disturbed hearts' have traveled long distances and endured great hardships to reach the Buddha's side, he speaks words of wisdom and they gain 'clear hearts.' In the official government (Phra Rachamongkhon Muni [Thet] 1978:1) version of the myth, they become arahants, Buddhist saints.

The near/far, inner/outer distinction also codifies an epistemic order with regard to men's abilities to 'see dhamma.' The dynamic is based on the complementary opposition of monks and laity and the assumption that the ritual performance encodes men's relative abilities to 'see dhamma,' i.e., their spiritual (and perceptual) acuity.

For example, the ritual can be seen as a set of complementary transformational operations in which Buddhist monks transform nama into rupa, the invisible essence of Buddhism into a visible, physical presence and the Buddhist laity transform this momentary physical presence [rup-tham] into an invisible, spiritual essence or 'name' [nam-tham]. When monks pull their fans before their faces to chant the words of the Buddha, they are said to be hen tham or 'seeing dhamma.' Their perfectly still bodies provide visible models of detachment for the lay audience. When lay worshippers pray, they use a method which is also called 'seeing dhamma' (Center for Buddhist Studies, n.d.). They 'take a visible sign'--the Buddha statue on the altar, the monks sitting in the samruam position--close their eyes, and meditate on this sign, 'taking it into their hearts.' The whole process is called transforming the 'shape of dhamma' [rup tham] into its 'essence' [nam tham].

Seeing Dhamma and the Epistemic Order

The near/far, inner/outer distinction is an analogue of the epistemic order in society; by encoding men's abilities to 'see dhamma,' it automatically encodes their perceptual positioning with regard to the interpretation of events. The ritual audience, men who see only the outer, visible face of the ritual event--the temple walls and the fancy parade--and who hear the sounds of the ritual floating from the temple's inner sanctum, are the same men who are presumed able to see only the outer face of events. The men who now 'stand and wait' for ritual sponsors, who receive and feast them after the ceremony, are the same men who must 'wait and see' the physical outcomes of their actions and events (and government policies) before they can speak publicly and critically of the morality of those actions, policies, and events--and

the invisible intentions (i.e., 'see into the hearts') of their perpetrators.

The men who are inside the temple, men who 'know for sure' what happened before and during the ceremony, are the same men who now 'know for sure' about the hidden dynamics (and effects) of economic policies and social events that shape Isan social life from afar. The men outside the temple must 'guess' [khít], at the hidden dynamics of the ritual and at the invisible causes and dynamics of social events. They thus have access only to those speech forms called 'gossip' and rumour.

Sila and the Interpretation of Events

This interpretive paradigm is based on the concept of silá or morality, noted by Weber (1967), that men 'outside the precepts' are inside, not above, social process. Men 'inside the precepts' stand more outside social events and are thus better able to interpret them in a disinterested manner.

These are not trivial dynamics. By the time the effects of Bangkok Bank's actions and ritual policies were 'clear for all to see' in Isan, it was too late: a massive transfer of control over land had already occurred through transfer of the debt relationship from local merchants to commercial banks.

Udorn: the Religious Life of a Bank Manager

Udorn is a highly Americanized town with a large American airbase and consulate. The latter is surrounded by concrete walls and barbed wire, and radio antennae loom overhead. In 1980 it was staffed by unfriendly men wearing white shirts and narrow ties.

Udorn's elite consist of high-ranking government officials, wealthy Sino-Thai businessmen, and U.S. officials. Relations between Thai and Americans were so close that in one case the wife of a consulate official was a member of an elite social group, a paramilitary unit headed by the governor's wife.²

The branch manager of Bangkok Bank in Udorn was one of the town's leading citizens and one of the bank's most enterprising officers, slated for promotion to the head office. Her office was full of business awards, civic awards, and Buddha statues. One of her jobs was to identify promising clerks for advancement in the bank's national organization.

The manager had demonstrated her business acumen by developing a provincial kathin policy, of which she was quite proud. Before the kathin season she had all the bank workers (i.e., the natives of Udorn) survey the temples near their homes. Their task was to find a poor temple, "discover its needs," and report those needs at a meeting organized by the bank's Commercial Development Section. Once they reported a temple, workers were responsible for attending kathin there 'in the name of the bank.' This is an ancient Buddhist purification paradigm brought to its fullest expression as commercial artistry: A pious Buddhist laity (the clerks) discover 'monks in need,' ascertain their exactly material requisites, what they 'lack' in their search for the dhamma, and then offer these requisites in a perfect act of merit. (Were these temples or their supporters in need of loans?)

²The women learned to shoot M-16s and parachute from airplanes together.

The development section coordinated the bank's other kathin activities. Clerks were sent to attend the kathin ceremonies of favoured customers on weekends. In addition, the bank usually organized its own kathin ceremony or hosted the bank's national kathin phrarachathan on a rotating basis. Its highest-ranking officers attended the most important kathin in the province and the bank manager represented the branch at the national kathin phrarachathan.

The Manager as Moral Preceptor

In a 1980 interview, the branch manager listed knowledge, virtue [khunatham], good understanding, and social responsibility as the traits she looked for in clerks with managerial potential. At her bank, one sign of 'social responsibility' was clerks' enthusiastic participation in the local kathin program.

In practice, this meant that if local clerks wished to advance in the bank hierarchy they not only had to identify local temples 'in need'--those with business potential or in areas with commercial possibilities--they had to attend these kathin in their 'free time' [wela wang]. This was an incipient antinomy issue. By Western standards, this was "work without pay"; by Thai standards, it was merit made with an 'impure heart,' with the explicit intent to receive worldly gain.

The manager cast herself in the role of moral preceptor to her employees, perhaps to counter the negative implications of the bank's ritual policies. "Attending kathin is good for workers," she stated. "People should go to the wat to have a beautiful spirit [citcai suai ngam]." Workers who went who to the temple regularly would 'be in the Buddhist precepts' [yu nai sin]. "They will not steal or lie," she said.

They will have the virtues of khunatham, good heart-mind, good thoughts and inclination towards dhamma. They will have metta and karuna, good will and lovingkindness. They will know right from wrong. If they know how to enter the wat they will be good employees.³

Meditation as a Managerial Tool

Just as in military training a student is forced to undergo various exercises until he is able to withstand all kinds of weapons, so in spiritual matters a disciple is made completely immune to tempting and threatening influences, with his mind well-balanced in the midst of any and all disturbances. (Acaan Man, "Spiritual Invulnerability")

The atmosphere at the bank was tense. There were signs that relations between the Sino-Thai managerial elite (sent out from the head office in Bangkok) and Isan clerks were strained. The manager seemed most concerned about how to handle worker-management disputes and how to guarantee the honesty of her employees. Although she did not have much time for it, meditation helped in the former task because "Vipassana gives one a cool heart. The middle way solves disputes." In further explanation: "Meditation helps because attachment causes suffering; It helps one realize that things aren't as they seem."

Further discussion of her policy of having employees attend kathin as part of their 'work' made her uncomfortable. "They volunteer," she said. "The bank pays for gas." Did the bank give workers money to donate at these kathin? "No. They give according to their faith!" Did the head office send money for provincial kathin? There was no response.

She was on the verge of terminating the interview when I asked her about kathin she had personally sponsored. Her face lit up as she described kathin ceremonies at the forest retreats of the meditation

³'Entering the wat' indicates one's general familiarity with 'propriety' [khwa riap roy].

monks Mahabua and Acaan Khao, students of Acaan Fan.

She told a miracle story about the discovery of Luang Puu Ween, who was discovered by air force pilots in the 1960s during the Vietnam War.

Five planes left on a bombing run to Vietnam. On the way over, one of the pilots saw a monk meditating on a cloud. Only his plane returned of the five. The rest died. Once he had landed, he sought out a monk living near the airbase and asked him if he was the monk on the cloud.

A true arahant is omniscient, but boasting of miraculous powers is grounds for expulsion from the Sangha. This moral lemma was born out in her tale: The monk did not answer the question directly, but instead described the pilot's trip to Vietnam and the suffering and fears he had experienced. "Then the pilot knew this was the monk he had seen," she concluded.

Why were Thammayut meditation monks good? "They don't make amulets," she replied. (Since she was wearing several, the distinction seemed to be that their followers made the amulets and the monks blessed them.) As I walked out the door, she repeated an earlier statement. "Workers are sent to poor temples, with no one to look after them," she said. It was if she was denying the calculation involved in the formulation of the bank's kathin

Kathin Phrarachathan in Khon Kaen

The bank's 1979 kathin phrarachathan was at Wat That in Khon Kaen, seventy-five miles south of Udorn. The abbot, who was in his seventies, was a former luk sit of Phra Phimonlatham and paid Phimonlatham extreme deference on his visits to Khon Kaen. The bank offered kathin at Wat That, which was built by a prominent local Chinese merchant, Mr. Bo, while Mr. Bo's relatives offered elsewhere.

The Guest List and the Distribution of Honour

The kathin phrarachathan in Khon Kaen was preceded by a massive publicity effort. The bank issued 1200 invitations two months before the ceremony. They were sent to traders and big men, 'people with honour' [phu mi kiatt] and people to whom the bank wanted to 'give honour' [hai kiatt]. Honoured guests included the governor, high-ranking police and army officers, and the managers of the fifteen (plus) other branches of Bangkok Bank in the Northeast.

Publicity

Banners announcing the event displaying the lotus of the law were draped across the town's main intersections weeks before the ceremony. The branch manager was out of the office every day issuing invitations; the invitations displayed the garuda bird and invited the bank's customers to 'join hands' with the king and the bank in offering kathin phrarachathan.

Workers from the the publicity department in Bangkok arrived several days early to oversee final preparations. The senior vice president and his entourage 'descended' on Khon Kaen the day before in a black Mercedes-Benz (parked directly in front of the viharn during most of the festivities).

Somphot

The bank sponsored a temple fair and somphot the night before the kathin proper. The somphot is a pre-ritual merit-making ceremony attended by the highest-ranking monks and the inner circle of ritual sponsors (voluntary rather than official). The inner circle included bank officers from Bangkok, the managers of the sixteen Isan branches, the governor, and close friends of the manager of the Khon Kaen branch

office.⁴ The governor was the guest of honour at the kathin phrarachathan at Wat That as he was at all of the province's major kathin ceremonies. A university professor commented cynically of the event: "The bank is making the bureaucrats rich."

The bank's senior vice president led the somphot. The guests offered gifts at his behest, in order or seniority. The bank had issued fans commemorating the event. When the twelve or so monks pulled up their fans to chant blessings on the congregation--to hide their faces from the Buddhist laity and thus separate themselves from worldly affairs--"Bangkok Bank" appeared twelve times before the congregation, embroidered in gold thread against a bright blue background.

The soundtrack of "Saturday Night Fever" almost drowned out the chants. No one seemed to find it incongruous that homage to the Triple Gems was overpowered by the sounds of "Dancing Shoes," a popular rock tune by the "Bee Gees" and a current favourite in Bangkok discos. This was well within the tradition linking merit-making with revelry.

The Fair

The fair was one of the biggest social events in Khon Kaen that year, second only to Mr. Bo's funeral, which was attended by all the traditional elite⁵ of Khon Kaen. Clerks and bank officers wearing

⁴The manager's close friends included the governor, the Sino-Thai owner of a Toyota truck dealership, and the owner of a store selling air conditioners. They were all in the same circle of merit-makers. The month before the governor had organized a pha pa (the giving of 'forest cloth' to Buddhist monks) for a famous meditation monk in Nongkhai where he was governor before coming to Khon Kaen. The same circle of businessmen attended this event with their families as did the families of provincial officials and the jewel dealer of the governor's wife. The monk blessed amulets for the governor, who distributed them to members of the Border Patrol who formed an honour guard at the base of the monk's mountain retreat.

⁵Phimonlathm as ranking monk gave the sermon. Isan-born members of parliament were the guests of honour.

shirts displaying the lotus of the law were out in full force, greeting their customers. One clerk said that the idea for the shirts (as well as for the other publicity techniques used to promote the kathin) came from a trip to the Bank of America in San Francisco. (This was one of the prizes awarded to the bank's most creative workers.)

The most striking scene was the canopied donation pavilion set up in front of the temple meeting room; it was set up like the tellers' windows at the bank. Three bank clerks sat behind a table to receive kathin donations. In front of them were glass boxes, full of money and painted with the word boricak in red.

Throughout the night, a steady stream of poor villagers and wealthier townspeople lined up to drop their contributions in the box (the former making deep wai's before dropping in their meagre contributions, clearly impressed by the experience). After the donations were made, the clerks passed out amulets imprinted with the image of the temple's former abbot.

The fair lasted well into the night. The bank officers from Bangkok disappeared around ten P.M. A clerk said they were off "doing business."

The Abbot

The abbot received a steady stream of visitors at his kuti throughout the night. He was surrounded by close followers and a few men from the bank's head office. His porch contained a large picture of Mr. Bo wearing a pith helmet and an equally large government map showing the official educational districts of Khon Kaen.

After inquiring benevolently after my well-being, the abbot asked if everyone in America went to school. When I tentatively replied in the

affirmative, he asked why were there so many poor people there. (His point: secular knowledge, what Weber might refer to as a "broad" tradition of knowledge, did not produce true 'benefits of merit.')

Furthermore, if there were so many rich people in America, why weren't they concerned about the poor people in Thailand? This repartee amused his followers greatly; the rich in America were not virtuous.

I asked the abbot about meditation techniques, which was not so amusing. One of his followers, slightly inebriated, launched into a passionate defense of correct meditation methods. By 'correct' he meant those taught by Phra Phimonlatham which he felt were superior to those taught by Thammayut monks. 'Breathing through the nose. Ha!' he said of the Thammayut technique.

If I was so interested in the kathin, I should get a copy of the bank's booklet on the subject (Wicit 1974). One of the abbot's followers produced a copy: a complete "how to" book on performing kathin. The author was a former Mahanikai monk. Instead of disrobing and working for the government, a common practice after Mongkut ascended the throne, he had disrobed and gone to work for the bank's publicity department.

The Assistant Manager and his Friend

The assistant branch manager circulated among the guests and chatted with one of his close friends, a Chinese merchant who had studied business in London and owned a tapioca factory.

The factory owner had several of the amulets distributed by the clerks. He had contributed heavily to Wat That's kathin but he said he had contributed just as heavily to the kathin at Wat Srigan, the town's leading Thammayut temple because it was near his house. Monastic

sectarianism did not concern him as much as did his standing in the community.

The assistant manager was much more familiar with local history because his father was the former governor of Khon Kaen, appointed by Luang Phibun and ousted by Sarit. He said he was 'close to' Phra Phimonlatham, that he 'knew' (or knew of) Somdet Uan, and that he was choei choei or 'indifferent' (which usually indicates active dislike) toward Sarit. He named Wat Srinuan and Wat Srican as the oldest temples in town⁶ and was positive that Thai Farmers Bank (the bank directed by the Lord Chamberlain in the 1950s) was the first in Khon Kaen and that Bangkok Bank the second.

Of the bank's kathin ceremony, he said matter-of-factly, "For ten years now the bank has had a deliberate policy to develop religion. They offer kathin phrarachathan at a temple that the Department of Religious Affairs suggests." This was part of the bank's policy to "help society" by supporting [songsoem] sports, education, culture and religion--which he listed in that order, religion last. (Songsoem is the verb that is traditionally used to refer to 'support' of religion.) As for the amulets, the clerks gave them to the people who "offered the most money," donations in excess of 100 baht (\$5).

The Parade: The Line of Merit at the Head of the Nation

The next day the bank sponsored a gigantic parade down the main streets of Khon Kaen. It was a hae kathin in the form of a royal procession; its purpose was to 'announce merit' to the townspeople and villagers who lined the streets. A police car led the procession, lights flashing. The bank officers came next in their black Mercedes.

⁶Wat Srinuan was heavily supported by provincial elite during Phibun's time, when his father was governor.

They were followed by a float built in the shape of a mondop or reliquary and carrying the kathin robes, which came 'from the hands of the king.' The bulk of the parade consisted of dance troops sent by the managers of the bank's sixteen Isan branches plus a dance troop sent from the local Chinese temple.

A clerk on the parade committee said its purpose was to "pay respects to the king and to be in the 'line of merit at the head of the nation' [sai bun hua-chat]." He said the kathin was "part of Buddhism," and quoted a traditional aphorism: "Tham di, day di" (Do good, receive good).

He identified the parade participants as the king, represented in his absence by the senior vice president and the regional branch managers, government officials, villagers, Chinese, and dancers from each province in the Northeast. "The parade shows the togetherness [khvam phrom-cai or 'united hearts'] of Isan people," he stated. "It shows the unity of each side of Isan with people sent by the king." The dance troops "show the different customs of people in the Isan area."

He identified the floats and elements of the parade as the symbols of Buddhism [sanyalac sasanaphut], "things we praise or lift high." These included the krut, the lotus of the law, the mondop, and the wheels of the law [prathammacak]. "The kathin robes are placed on the mondop to make them high. This is like the wai (the salute from subordinate to superior)," he explained. Together the symbols represented king, nation, and religion--which he listed in that order, religion last. "This (order) is riap roy," he said--proper.

On the whole, it was not clear exactly whose parade it was, the king's or the bank's. The bank seemed to win out in terms of symbolic dominance. The real mid-center of power was revealed when the parade

reached the temple walls and the distinction between ritual participants and ritual observers became clear.

The Ceremony

As the parade passed through the temple gates, moving from the rajanca into the sasanacak, the dancers joined with local bank clerks (called the 'hosts' and 'hostesses'⁷ of the event) to form two reception lines leading to the temple. They stood at attention while an assistant carefully removed the robes from the mondop, set them on the jeweled sky tray, and handed them to the bank's vice president.

According to a clerk, the bank's chairman had the 'honour' of bringing the kathin robes and representing the king. Then came 'soldiers with rank, police,⁸ and branch managers'--the men who had the right to sit inside the temple. Followed by this group, the vice president circled the temple three times before disappearing inside.

The ceremony was performed like all kathin phrarachathan, according to the procedures established by the Department of Religious Affairs. The seating arrangements reinforced the fiction of distinterested gift giving by maintaining the separation of lay and monastic participants.

In the Theravada tradition, the idiom of sight and insight is the idiom of power; it is codified in the ritual by spatial positioning (what men can 'see'), by proximity to monks and sacred objects, and by what men can touch during the ceremony. The monks sat high on the platform in the samruam position; eyes downcast, totally non-reactive,

⁷Traditionally the hosts [cao phap] of kathin are also their owners. They are certainly included within the inner circle of merit makers.

⁸The local chief of police did not play as prominent a role in the ceremony as did the head of the local army unit. (In fact, although he was an official guest of honour, he was not among the group who actually performed the ceremony.) One clerk said that bank had made a 'donation' to the police to insure their cooperation.

not seeing or 'knowing' the Buddhist laity. (The abbot was seated nearest the Buddha statue, his followers further away in order of rank.) Only the leader of the kathin, the bank's vice president, sat facing the monks throughout the ceremony, 'seeing the Sangha.' The rest of the lay participants sat to his left, facing forwards, towards the altar. Such spatial distinctions (of 'seeing and knowing') are not made in village kathin, where the whole congregation sits on the floor facing the monks.

The kathin gift consisted of white cloth set on top of the yellow ciwon. The vice president set the robes in the 'middle space' between monks and laity (symbolic of the ownerless quality of the gift and of lay disinterest in monastic affairs) and began the ceremony.

The bank's ceremony was performed exactly like a royal kathin, minus the regalia. The vice president opened the ceremony by prostrating himself at the altar three times and lighting the candles and incense. He sat in a throne-like chair facing the monks, a 'table to welcome guests' with flowers and refreshments on his left. He sat in the north facing the monks in the south. He saw everything in the ceremony--the monks, altar, and the lay congregation--and handled the ciwon, the pivotal gift.

His followers and the guests of honour were seated behind him on chairs, in the east facing west (the most inauspicious direction) where the altar and Buddha statue were located. The only time they saw the monks was when they offered gifts, at the behest of the vice president.

The governor and high-ranking provincial officials, guests of honour, were seated nearest the altar. Branch managers were seated next, those slated for promotion towards the front and less active managers towards the rear.

Throughout the ceremony, the vice president constantly mediated between the monks and the Buddhist laity, maintaining the ritually-expressed 'lack of knowledge' between monks and laity (their 'not seeing' of each other).

He stood⁹ before the monastic congregation holding the ciwon and pronounced the offering words for the Mahanikai on behalf of the lay worshippers. When he returned to his chair, two monks, the 'chanting pair' [khu suat], announced (i.e. first noticed) that the robes had arrived (i.e., that they had 'fallen from the sky').

One monk suggested that the abbot was the 'best among them' by the standards set by the Buddha. Measuring the Buddha's description of an excellent monk against the visible characteristics of the abbot, he then 'suggested' (a form of address indicating non-coercion) that the government-appointed abbot receive the kathin robe. The second member of the 'chanting pair' seconded the nomination, and the entire congregation chanted sathu, agreement 'in a single voice' indicating perfect unity.

The monastic congregation then turned towards the abbot and dedicated the robe. The abbot sat facing the monastic congregation, with his back towards the Buddha statue [thaen or 'substituting' for the Buddha] to receive it. The monks saw only each other; this was sangha kan, Sangha action.

The abbot disappeared behind the altar with two assistants and the monks chanted blessings. The laity, facing forward, prayed with eyes closed, witnessing none of the transaction.

⁹The kathin phrarachathan were the only ceremonies I witnessed in which the leaders of the lay congregation stood, their heads higher than those of the monks, while dedicating the kathin robe.

A gong sounded and the abbot returned wearing the new ciwon. This is the moment when the congregation 'sees merit' [hen bun]. The changing of the robes occurs only in Mahanikai ceremonies, since Thammayut monks cut, sew, and dye the cloth themselves before performing the kran kathin.

The vice president then offered robes and athaborikan to the highest ranking monks and signalled to the guests of honour to follow suit. They were followed by the bank officers, in order of seniority. When all the gifts had been distributed, the vice president once again stood before the Sangha, made a long speech, and dedicated the 400,000 baht the bank had reportedly raised for the event. The bank's photographers recorded the ceremony with movie and flash cameras.

There were no poor villagers seated at the back of the temple. There were no Village Scout leaders assisting in the distribution of the gifts.

The ceremony ended when the monks chanted blessings, first for the king, then for the lay congregation. The laity sat with eyes closed and hands in a praying position while the vice president kruat nam, poured the water transferring the merit on their behalf. The vice president prostrated himself three times before the altar and led the congregation out.

Afterwards, the monks performed the private ceremony called the kran kathin in which the 'merit of kathin' [anisong kathin] is transferred to the monastic congregation. This is when formal post-Lenten privileges are conferred, and the kathin property distributed (according to the wishes of the abbot).

After the ceremony, the bank's officers gathered beneath the pavillion to have their pictures taken with the governor. After more

feasting, entertainment, and the paying of final respects to the abbot, the sponsors disappeared into the blue (back into the sky), heading back to Bangkok in the black Mercedes. The temple committee collected the gifts; the 400,00 baht was put into a savings account at Bangkok Bank.

The End of an Era: Phra Phimonlatham and the White Cloth

In many respects, Bangkok Bank's 1979 kathin phrarachathan marked the end of an era, insofar as it marked the limits and decline of Phra Phimonlatham's influence on local monastic affairs.

After the ceremony I chatted with the abbot. Were the monks planning to dye, cut, sew and dedicate the kathin cloth before sunrise of the next day, in the 'more pure' manner specified by Mongkut? (The monks at the rival Thammayut temple, Wat Srican, had done so the week before; their ceremony lasted well into the night.) "Yes," replied the abbot. Could I watch the ceremony? "No! It is for monks only." (Unbeknownst to me, the kran kathin had already taken place; the abbot was wearing the readymade kathin robe.)

Had they really performed the ceremony in the more pure way? "What do you think?" asked a former Thammayut monk. "Gohok," he said enigmatically. (The abbot had lied.)

Earlier in the month I asked Phra Phimonlatham the same question after the royal kathin at Wat Mahathat.¹⁰ "What is the purpose of doing it that way? he laughed. "Robes can be readymade in the present." The performance of the kran kathin was one test of Wat Mahathat's authority over the Mahanikai; would other temples follow suit? Like the monks at Wat Mahathat, the monks at Wat That accepted the white cloth,

¹⁰Phimonlatham was the announcer of the ceremony. When the king's daughter handed her father's robes over to the monastic congregation, her touching them indicating her 'willingness to give,' she passed them straight over to Phimonlatham.

and did nothing with it.

The controversy over Phra Phimonlatham raged well into the 1980s, and continued to make waves in Khon Kaen. The abbot of Wat Mahathat died soon after the 1979 kathin season. The monks there voted Phra Phimonlatham to succeed him, which traditionally would have established him as the head of the entire Mahanikai order. The Mahathera Sangkhom delayed approval of the appointment, and a weekly magazine picked up on the controversy: "Who is playing politics in the Sangha?" the headline asked.

A few months after the kathin at Wat That, the Supreme Patriarch came to Khon Kaen to perform a dedication ceremony at Wat Klang, distributing government patronage to yet another major Mahanikai temple in Khon Kaen (perhaps paving the way for Wat Klang's elevation to royal status) and bypassing Wat Srinuan. The antagonism between Phimonlatham and the patriarch was expressed in the ritual context. Phimonlatham constantly intruded into the ceremony as an unhumble 'server' or assistant to the patriarch but he managed to keep his head higher than that of the patriarch through most of the ceremony.

Speaking of the obvious tension that existed between Phra Phimonlatham and the patriarch's assistant, the governor laughed softly and said that it concerned a dispute that had happened "long ago." No one remembered except a few of the older monks.

Later in the day, when the Patriarch's entourage pulled up in front of a newly-built viharn at Khon Kaen University for a dedication ceremony, the Patriarch and other high ranking monks stepped out of Mercedes Benz driven by wealthy local merchants. Phra Phimonlatham stepped out of an ancient Volvo, driven by a school teacher from his natal village. This was the end result of the decision made many years

earlier by the Mahathera Sangkhom, when Phimonlatham was released from jail. Phimonlatham was allowed to retain his rank but he was to receive none of the perquisites--money, cars, and assistants. His title was to be discontinued after his death.

Tinkering with Isan Culture

Like the kathin luang, Bangkok Bank's kathin phrarachathan was part of an ongoing dialogue about the problems of capitalist development, in this case, as they concerned the sticky issues of Chinese bankers doing business in Khon Kaen. Like the kathin luang, the bank's kathin phrarachathan addressed these issues through mild distortions in its representation of the Isan social order, by highlighting particular themes and downplaying others, and by some conspicuously missing guests. As a representative of King Bhumibol (representing the absent king in the same way the king represents [thaen] the absent Buddha), Bangkok Bank had begun making the great territorial divisions and social classifications of Isan, doing so, furthermore, through the medium of the new concept of culture.

Like the kathin luang to Wat Arun, the bank's kathin phrarachathan was self-consciously designed as a tourist event. It was a live display of regional handicraft traditions (the products of which are sold in bus stations and shops on the main streets of Khon Kaen).

Sarit began promoting tourism in the early 1960s as part of his national integration plan. In the 1970s, the king, the government, and especially the Tourist Organization of Thailand promoted regional handicraft industries as part of the master plan for development--to prepare rural peoples for their new roles as commodity producers in the world market.

The bank deliberately constructed an image of the 'whole' of Isan culture in the its parade. The dancers wore cloth, carried baskets, and played musical instruments that were supposedly native to their provinces. The dances were traditional, those of courtship and harvest, fertility and prosperity. Isan culture and sub-cultures were identified with non-religious material expressions of Isan social life. They were further identified by province, i.e., by the territorial divisions imposed by the central government--the territorial divisions by which the bank conducts its business. The parade thus instantiated an ideology of regional difference similar to that voiced by Pote Sarasin: the most crucial distinctions among men were not those concerning their religious practices, but those arising from their new identities in the marketplace.

The Parade as Dialogue

Like the kathin luang, the kathin phrarachathan engaged in a silent dialogue about the problems and morality of capitalist development, with some regional variations, and with special emphasis on the problems that Sino-Thai bankers faced in doing business in Khon Kaen.

The kathin phrarachathan addressed the same general issues as did the kathin luang, concern over the loss of national autonomy--and the loss of regional autonomy which had attended the commercialization of the Isan economy. Capitalist expansion of the 1960s and 1970s entailed a new type of domination for Isan people--the invisible domination of the international marketplace. In the nineteenth century, the system of imperial capitalism had entailed the near demolition of the Buddhist monarchy. Recent capitalist expansion has entailed the introduction of disruptive new modes of production--heralded by such activities as the

building of dams, the displacement of whole villages, and the growth of a new war-support industry, including prostitution. This combination of changes represents a threat to traditional concepts of time and value. It entails the introduction of new concepts of time--as a commodity (or capital?) to be wisely "spent" or unwisely "wasted"--and new equations of time with wage labour in which men's worth is calculated in terms of hourly wages or "salary." In 1979, these ideas were just beginning to filter out to the villages at furthestmost edges of the province.

Finally, capitalist expansion threatens to obviate the traditional ritual cycle of which the kathin is an important part: to erase the linkages between agriculture cycles, rice-growing, and Buddhist piety, an entire symbolic nexus. It is difficult to imagine Buddhist ceremonies that articulate with the objects and temporal divisions of industry--of shoe factories or jute mills, for example--or ceremonies in which the ritual gifts to the gods are string beans, wheat, or corn.

The bank's response to the anxiety's brought about by these changes was to create a 'cultural' performance that functioned as a type of Isan wish fulfillment writ large. The parade was part of a larger-than-life enactment of an ancient Buddhist ritual. It was an act of conspicuous (some said "vulgar") homage to the Buddhist king.

Capitalist development entails a systematic loss of national autonomy, but the parade was constructed as a celebration of the supreme values of king, nation, and religion. (Neither Citibank of New York nor Chin Sophonphanit's business associates in Hong Kong had floats in the parade, nor did American or Japanese businesses.) The most recent economic developments have resulted in the loss of the last remnants of regional autonomy, but the parade was a celebration of regional customs. Courtship, rice harvest by ancient winnowing methods, the mainstays of

the ancient ritual order--these customs and themes were writ large as the parade passed through the main streets of Khon Kaen like a royal procession. Poor villagers crouched awestruck at the side of the road as the procession passed. Certainly the hae kathin in their villages contained nothing like a six-foot high mondop on wheels, carrying the king's kathin robes.

The parade also addressed the one great issue that affects all commercial bankers: how usury can be linked to a tradition of Buddhist piety. Judging by the size of its donation, the bank was not only pious, it was more pious than local officials and politicians, who could not afford to offer kathin on this scale.

The major issues that were addressed in the parade, however, concerned the definition of "ethnicity" and fears about the tremendous (and as yet only guessed at) degree of influence exercised by non-Buddhist, non-indigenous capitalists--Chinese bankers--over the town and region. Expressions of hostility towards Chinese businessmen were legion in Khon Kaen, although among some groups attitudes towards commercial banks were as yet unformed. Many members of the older generation of local politicians were openly antagonistic towards Chinese merchants. One former member of parliament said that the local party had supported Luang Phibun in the 1940s and 1950s in large part because of his anti-Chinese policies. The younger generation of politicians were antagonistic towards the bank; they had the contacts and the sophistication necessary to figure out the longterm impact of its ritual and economic policies,¹¹ but lacked the power (and merit) to criticize the bank publicly.

¹¹The antagonism was less apparent among the younger generation because Sino-Thai had become more Buddhist and more Thai-Buddhists had gone into business, e.g., the assistant branch manager and his friend.

The performance was perhaps most ingenious in its solution to the "ethnic-soteriological" problem. This problem was solved through the bank's utilization of the idea of the king's transcendent 'royal virtue' [phrarachabarami] through that most fundamental idea that the great Dhamma King protects all men and organizations in his kingdom; through the related and implicit assumption that the 'whole' of the social order gathers to witness a great Cakkavatti king's progress across the land. The "ethnic" issue was also addressed through an idea of markedness likewise related to the concept of the royal virtue and to ideas about the characteristics of the king's "super-virtue". As men ascend the scale of virtue they acquire transcendent moral qualities that are indexed by their acquisition of extraordinary physical qualities. This principle is expressed in the Trai Phum, in the story of the great Cakkavatti king's progress across the land. The body of the great Wheel-Rolling Monarch, the 'lord of the four continents,' merely glows; he is unmarked in terms of physical characteristics (or he has begun to resemble a buddha). When the inhabitants of the four continents come out to greet him, however, they are identified by their physical characteristics--by the distinctive shape of their faces, by their skin color, etc.

This marked/unmarked distinction was then assimilated to the idea of 'culture' and 'custom' in the parade. The dominant message of the parade was that the king's transcendent virtue united the whole of Isan society within the greater Thai nation. The bank and its owners were identified with the king, with the culturally and ethnically unmarked transcendent ritual participant, and with the idea of the transcendent royal virtue. Perhaps to reinforce this point, Chin Sophonphanit, the bank owner, was conspicuously absent from the celebrations (although he

signed all the authorizations for the kathin phrarachathan). He did not lead the parade, he sent the bank's senior vice-president, a native of Ubon and longtime supporter of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat, to do so. Having thus downplayed the 'Chinese' identity of the bank's owners and chief operators, the parade then directed the audience's attention to "Chineseness"--conspicuously identified with the dance troupe sent by the local Chinese temple. Thus the 'Chinese' in the parade were a reassuringly small minority (one-seventeenth of the putative 'whole' of Isan society).

Commercial bankers in Khon Kaen also faced two additional and related problems: how to silence the criticism of opposition politicians, and how to gain the trust of the rural peasantry. Both tasks were necessary prerequisites for setting the new financial structure in place. The bank's close identification with king, religion, and, in particular, with the abbot of Wat That, went a long way towards solving these problems. As the events of 1976 had demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt, the king and members of the royal were definitely 'above criticism'; criticism of the monarchy and of things related to the monarchy invited swift and violent retaliation. To criticize sponsors of the kathin phrarachathan (the king's new family members) was tantamount to criticism of the monarchy. It implied that the king and the abbot had been 'tricked' into advancing the schemes of evil men--or that the king lacked virtue. Few men were willing to believe this, given the conspicuous nature of the king's renunciatory activities in recent years. Furthermore, such criticisms automatically impugned the virtue of the speakers. (They were speaking 'evil words.')

In addition, the abbot of Wat That was one of Khon Kaen's leading citizens, with control over Mahanikai temples throughout the province, and his

constituency was that of local politicians, who, like the bank, wanted to identify themselves as supporters of prominent local temples. In either case, the critics rather than the bank would come off the worse for wear, as opposition politicians were very much aware. The abbot's constituency was their constituency.

The trust problem was likewise solved by the bank's playing on the ambiguities of its relationship with the king and the government. A Thai scholar said that villagers were confused by the bank's use of the krut. They thought Bangkok Bank was 'the king's bank' and the bank of the Thai government, and often acted accordingly.

Finally, the entire event addressed problems of capitalist development in an ironic way, through its status qua ritual. Like most rituals, the kathin and the khabuan represented ideals rather than actualities. They represented a distortion and inversion of the social order. Or, stated from another perspective, they represented the wishes of powerless natives: wishes for a past and future in which Isan people were dominant and central Thai officials and Chinese merchants subordinate; for change that was not disruptive and not destructive; and for a society that was governed by a splendid and trustworthy Buddhist king. Through the agency of the bank, local people might have the opportunity to hen khon prasaert or 'see noble people.' The monarch would hear of their suffering and take steps to correct it--through the agency of the bank, his substitute ritual 'body' [tua thaen].

Like the unity kathin of Thanom and Praphat, the parade had a forced or distorted quality to it, however. It temporarily glossed over the unspoken tensions that the government feared would lead to civil unrest, but in so doing it conveyed a diffuse sense of distortion, the consequences of which will be examined in the conclusion.

Kathin Phrarachathan: The Hidden Structure

There was much more to the bank's kathin performance than met the eye, however. In the weeks following the ceremony, I interviewed many bank employees about the organization of the kathin phrarachathan. The local branch manager and men at the head office downplayed the calculation and expense that went into the ritual. They denied that the head office had sent money to organize it. As for the local preparations, "Everyone is on the committee," said a high-ranking bank officer in Bangkok, "Everyone is a host," said the manager of the branch office.

These statements to the contrary, workers at the local branch saw themselves as acting at the direct behest of the head office in Bangkok. They were proud of the efficiency with which they had prepared for the event, especially those seeking promotion. They knew exactly how many workers were assigned to each committee, what the committee budgets were, and what each person's job or 'duty' was. The eighty-plus workers at the local branch were organized into four committees. The committee division itself was a commentary on the bank's perspective on this ancient ritual: There were donation [boricak], parade [khabuan], fair, and publicity [khosana] committees, and the parade committee had the biggest budget by far. Both the parade and publicity committees worked long hours on the khabuan. Twenty workers prepared the decorations. The temple committee, called 'villagers' [chao ban] by the bank clerks, prepared the food.

The Budget

One clerk said the bank had spent 100,000 baht (\$5,000) preparing the event and they donated 400,000 baht (\$20,000) to the temple (most or all

of which came back in the form of a deposit). This was a phenomenal amount of money by local standards, one which many people thought exorbitant. No one else had such an outrageous sum to donate to a temple, not in a single merit-making ceremony.

The bulk of the donations came from local merchants and the bank's Isan branches. According to the clerk, the major donors from Khon Kaen were close friends of the manager: a service station owner, the owner of a truck dealership, and 'traders'--the town's new ritual elite.

Social Responsibility: The Restructuring of Khon Kaen's Religious Network

In fact, the coming of commercial banks to Khon Kaen had almost totally restructured the town's ritual life by the end of the 1970s. Bangkok Bank may have offered kathin at one of the two royal temples in town, but the manager's closest friends offered at the second-best temples in town, or, more important, at the meditation retreats of the province's (and region's) most famous meditation monks.

For example, the Sino-Thai owner of the Toyota dealership, who had received several awards from the king for donations to the royal charities, was the head of the Village Scout movement.¹² In 1979, he led the Village Scouts in offering kathin at Wat Klang, one of the three oldest temples in town.¹³ The Scouts, like the bank, held an enormous parade that passed through the streets of Khon Kaen.

¹²His contacts in Bangkok included the abbot of Wat Suthat, Dr. Krasae, the Magsaysay Award winner, a member of the king's privy council, and the former head of the Bank of Thailand. Besides the Village Scouts, he was active in the Red Cross, in raising donations for a local hospital and for scholarships, and he was the chairman of the building committee for a temple in one of the districts of Khon Kaen (Memorial: Mr. Winya and Mrs. Nalin Khuwanan 1979).

¹³The scouts held their initiation ceremonies at the Thammayut Wat Srican.

By far the most popular kathin in Khon Kaen in 1979 was that at the meditation retreat of Luang Puu Phang in Mancakiri District, however, an event also organized by the owner of the Toyota dealership. The owner chartered several buses and led a miles-long procession to Grandfather Phang's wooded retreat from Khon Kaen. The governor and the branch manager of Bangkok Bank were the guests of honour.

The manager and his family arrived Luang Puu Phang's retreat in their yellow Mercedes. His sons ran around Grandfather Phang's park wearing yellow Bangkok Bank t-shirts.

After the ceremony, the inner ritual circle crowded around Grandfather Phang to have their picture taken. Grandfather Phang got impatient and kicked them out, which pleased them no end: it indicated his true detachment from worldly affairs (and demonstrated a markedly different attitude towards picture-taking than exhibited by Acaan Cuan in Nongkhai).

In attending such kathin, the branch manager was demonstrating what the bank called 'social responsibility.' His duty was to make sure that the bank was represented in the merit-making ceremonies at the temples of the province's most famous monks.

The Missing Guests

As with the royal kathin, there were a few missing guests from the ceremony, in addition to Chin Sophonphanit. The other missing guests were opposition politicians and members of parliament. A clerk confirmed the antagonism between the bank and local political leaders in an interview. "If representatives come they have the right to sit with police and soldiers," he said, but there were few, if any, M.P.s present. They were 'hard to find' (i.e., irresponsible). "If one does

good, one receives good. If one does bad, one receives bad," he said in explanation. In his (and the bank's) eyes, they were not fit to be among those in the 'line of merit at the head of the nation.'

The Bank's 'Big Policy'

There were even more facets to the bank's kathin policies than met the eye, however. I inadvertently stumbled onto another of the bank's kathin policies--its major policy--by attending the kathin ceremonies of the town's merchant elite in the most distant parts of the province. This meant following the governor on his ritual rounds.

A group of young people in Western dress always seemed to show up at those kathin where the governor was the guest of honour. They usually sat in the third row, behind the ritual sponsors (usually family members and their close friends from Khon Kaen) and in front of poor villagers, who clustered in the back and later served food to the visitors. A questionnaire revealed that they were clerks from the major commercial banks in Khon Kaen, sent to make merit with their most important customers.¹⁴ These patterns of kathin attendance represented a mini-radial pattern of merit-making and commercial development discussed in chapter fourteen: the network radiated outwards from Khon Kaen to the most remote parts of the province.

As noted earlier, many of the ritual sponsors at remote villages in Khon Kaen were Sino-Thai merchants. Like the bank, they were pushing out from the provincial capital in search of new business. Or, they sought out new business, and the banks sought them out. Some of these wealthy merchants co-sponsored their kathin samakhi with native-born provincial officials, a regional expression of the convergence of

¹⁴At one ceremony, an announcement was made over the loudspeaker; the kathin money was safe because it was being deposited in a local bank.

business and bureaucratic elite noted at the national level of Thak and Girling. A prominent Chinese store owner in Khon Kaen used the money that was donated at her kathin every year to build a complete bot in a village in which she appeared to exercise tremendous influence. (Most of the villagers remained in the background during the performance.)

Ambitious monks at the major temples in Khon Kaen often played the role of go-between in these ceremonies. They solicited wealthy ritual sponsors from Khon Kaen and Bangkok for temples in rural areas which were in their ordination lines. (One monk, the secretary of the abbot of one of Khon Kaen's largest Mahanikai temples, offered me his business card at one such rural kathin.) This was one manifestation of the race for virtue among local monks. They were building ordination lines and patronage networks linking the powerful Thammayut and Mahanikai temples in Khon Kaen with temples in remote areas. The bank had 'latched on' to this mini-structure in its pursuit of market share.

The Waves Beneath the Waves

A clerk at the Khon Kaen branch of Bangkok Bank confirmed that the attendance of clerks at rural kathin ceremonies was part of what he termed the bank's 'big policy,' nayobai yai yai. It was called 'Sending Workers to Temples' or 'Kathin for Rural Development' [pattana thurakit].

The bank's Economic Development Unit [Nuay Pattana Thurakit] organized workers to send to kathin at these rural temples. They were sent to those temples which had accounts with the bank and to ceremonies where the ritual sponsors were traders or preferred customers. Clerks were sent to every district in Khon Kaen to get deposits for the bank, an activity that was called 'making friends for the bank.' The

development section had a budget of 10,000 baht (\$500) for expenses which the clerk claimed came from the head office in Bangkok. "This year we received one million baht in deposits, in new accounts," he said proudly.

Were these weekend merit-making trips as business or religion? "When you go to the temple for the bank it is up to you whether it is merit. One who boricak goes everywhere," the clerk replied. The program involved most of the bank's eighty employees. Did they get paid? "These people receive 20 baht (one dollar) per diem for public relations work."

The Temple Account Book

The commercial development unit kept an elaborate accounting book on its kathin contributions. Weber would have been proud. Hundreds of temples were listed in the ledger. Every baht spent on the kathin was detailed, as were instances in which the bank had provided soft drinks for the temple fair or provided free services for the temple.

The clerk explained that the bank helped temples by giving soft drinks or making minor donations of 100 to 500 baht (\$5 to \$25) for its kathin ceremonies. Donations were made according to the importance of the wat or the sponsors. "It shows the samakhi (unity) of the bank."

When asked to relate the size of the contributions to the importance of the kathin, the clerk finally insisted that money was not the issue. 'We give little money,' he said. 'Finances are not good [thana may di]. We give donations if we are close with the customers.' He finally said, "The amount of money is not the issue. To show solidarity is!"

In a few cases the ledger listed donations in excess of 12,000 baht. None of the prominent temples in town received donations this size, nor

were they given to those temples with famous monks. The clerk became uncomfortable. "The bank gives large amounts according to the project," he said, and refused to elaborate on which project.

He finally got exasperated and explained the exact logic of the bank's provincial kathin policy. The temple is the meeting place for villagers. The bank's goal was to become the financial advisor to the temple and the villagers by first becoming close to the abbot.

"The bank advises the people after knowing the people through the abbot," he began.

The bank will print notices for the temple concerning the merit ceremony if the temple deposits money at the bank. The bank gives drinks or service or free publicity. We do this if we are close to the people. Then the chao ban will know the bank. This is good public relations.

The goal was to replace the abbot as the major advisor to villagers. "We have a big policy to help society," he explained. "People invest money in the bank. The bank gets profit and uses it to help society: religion, education, industry, agriculture., arts and culture" He then elaborated on the logic of this policy. "This is a Buddhist country," he stated.

In former times monks were teachers to villagers. There were no schools and people went to learn from the temple. The abbots were advisors [thi pruksa] and the temple was the meeting place. If you go to one temple you meet many persons like teachers. You will receive many benefits [ca mi phon mak] and the opportunity [okat] to meet people.

The Language of Religion and Commerce

Goodwill and clever public relations techniques are at the heart of successful commercial banking operations everywhere. As the Western-trained leaders of Bangkok Bank were well aware, the idiom of goodwill in Thailand is that of Buddhist piety: of pious fame, of the giving and receiving of honour. Honour is an affair of the pure heart,

and merit-making is the activity that demonstrates this otherwise hidden quality.

This fact is reflected in the language of commerce. To trust someone means literally 'to be able to put them into the heart' [wai-cai dai]. To believe in a person is to be able to 'believe his heart' [chu-cai dai]. To buy on credit is to 'buy on name' [su chu].

As the above data indicate, Bangkok Bank's head office orchestrated a regional ritual policy that enabled its workers to latch on to provincial merit-making networks extending from provincial capitals to remote sub-districts and undeveloped forests. These networks not only lead to the discovery of new monks--potential saints--and new customers, they also produce the purity of heart that is necessary to do business with them. These structures are based on the fiction of the disinterested gift; the kathin system "works" to promote capitalist development to the extent to which this fiction can be maintained.

Regional merit-making networks are similar in function to the kula ring studied by Munn (1976). The exchange of shells and other gifts in the kula ring enables men to extend their prestige through wider and wider areas. Like the value of the prestige of the kula transaction, the value of the prestige of the kathin gift far exceeds its apparent value. In fact, in some contexts, the low monetary value of the gift is what enables the fiction of disinterest to be maintained, as does the custom of 'circulating' from temple to temple, i.e., of not showing an improper interest in a particular district or village.

The fiction of disinterest is maintained in other ways as well: by the scrupulous observance of rules governing monetary transactions with Buddhist monks; by the observance of speech norms prohibiting discussion of monks' affairs; and by the maintenance of separate vocabularies for

financial transactions at the bank and at Buddhist temples, among laity and between monks and laity. Somewhat ironically, strict rules such as those developed by King Mongkut for the Thammayut order to separate monks and laity (e.g., the giving of the white cloth in kathin, rules forbidding Thammayut monks to handle their own monetary transactions) improve the efficacy of the ritual system from the perspective of capitalist development. I suggest this is one reason why the Thammayut has the edge in current races for virtue, in attracting powerful lay-business devotees.

For example, the above clerk described the vocabulary of money as it pertains to transactions with monks. "Giving to the wat is 'to offer necessities' [thawai patcai] to monks or 'to give (fresh) money to monks [hai ngoen sot phra],'" he explained. "Monks receive money according to the rules of the nikai. If money is an impurity [kilesa], everyone should offer the money on a cloth [prakhen pha phun] so the monk can avoid touching it." He then described the vocabulary of money as it applied to finance. This vocabulary (which reflects the viewpoint of the financier) is devoid of religious connotations.

To yum is to 'loan without interest.' Ku yum is to 'loan with interest.' Then there are 'profits,' kamlay, and 'tax,' phasi. Thun means 'dividends.'

In contrast, the expanding vocabulary of savings and investment evokes the imagery of the flowering of the lotus of the law. I suggest that the vocabulary of merit and the newly expanding vocabulary of savings and investment comprise adjacent lexical sets. They are similar but not identical, a relationship that preserves the ambiguity of the relationship between religion and economics, sasana and setakit. These lexical sets represent a system of cultural coherence in that they share the same underlying principle--that renunciation in the present leads to

benefits in the future. This is, after all, the most fundamental principle of capitalism (cf. Bourdieu 1977).

Things Which Grow and Flourish

The vocabulary of savings works on the principle of metonymy. Linguistic constructions concerning savings share a part of the vocabulary of merit; they evoke the whole image of the flowering of the lotus of the law.

The following are examples of linguistic constructs or lexical sets that apply to ordinary transactions at the wat. Offering cash [ngoen sot or 'fresh money'] to monks produces phon bun, the 'fruits of merit.' Leaving things (money and men) at the temple allows them to 'mature' or 'ripen.' Young men who ordain in the Sangha are called khon dip or 'raw men.' When they emerge from the Sangha, having learned self-control, they are called khon suk or 'ripe men.' Leaving a child to be raised by a monk at a temple (as occurred with Colonel Pin Muthukan and Acaan Un) or by a trusted relative is called fak luk or 'depositing' children at the temple. The offering of 'fresh money' (cash) to monks generates phon or 'benefits.' These benefits are diffuse in nature and generally are received at some indefinite point in the future. When monks circumambulate the kingdom teaching the dhamma they are said to be 'spreading' [phrae] dhamma. Circumambulation, symbolizing the perfection of virtue, is munwian.

The following are the "distorted parallels" and metonymic forms of the above linguistic usages insofar as they apply to transactions with commercial banks. To 'deposit' money at a bank is called fak ngoen. Capital is called ngoen sot or 'fresh money' and interest is phon, the same word that appears in the construct, the 'benefits' of merit [phon

bun]. (In this case, the full term is phon prayot, 'useful benefits,' but the full term is rarely used). Venture capital is ngoen munwian or 'circulating money.'

Bunchuu's policy of 'spreading' capital [ngoen phan] to the countryside in the form of loans to farmers was based on a phrae/munwian model. For example, in regard to an entry listing a donation of 12,7000 baht, the clerk said, "This is business." When asked to explain the discrepancy in the size of the bank's donations to various temples (there were few falling between the \$5 and \$600 range) he became impatient. "Kathin is to get market share, not profit," he said, "to keep money in circulation."¹⁵ Cash is circulated [munwian] through the village to promote capitalism. It is circulated through villages through the wat." As if to explain it all, he said "Bunchuu's policy is 10% redistribution."

The clerk seemed impatient with my inability to understand either the principles of Buddhism or capitalism. By the end of the interview, I was beginning to feel the same way.

The Publicity Department

The research odyssey ended where it began, in Bangkok, at the bank's Publicity Department on Suriwongse Road. Workers there had what they called "the whole packet," thirteen booklets on religion (Wicit 1977, 1979a, 1979b) and commodity production (1980:a-i) that are distributed to new customers at branches throughout the country. The fourteenth, the kathin booklet (Wicit 1974), was first printed in 1974--when the bank seriously entered the business of religion in rural areas.

¹⁵'Circulating money' is ngoen munwian. Cash is ngoen sot, literally, 'fresh money' or 'money immediately at hand.'

These texts illustrate the extent to which the bank has begun to assume the prerogatives of royalty. The production of religious texts engages the bank in a subtle race for virtue, against rival banks, against the Sangha, and perhaps, even, against the king. These races for virtue may presage major shifts in the Thai celestial order.

The publications display the same transferring properties found in elite temple complexes, although in this case the metaphorical transfers are effected through the parallel literary and visual styles used in religious and secular texts. The juxtaposition of themes, symbols, rhetorical styles and artwork furthers the bank's work of identifying capitalist development with the flowering of the lotus of the law.

Taken as a whole, the texts attempt to reverse traditional soteriological associations of usury from negative to positive. They attempt to transform the traditionally neutral or low soteriological valuation of commercial activities to positive. They suggest that worldly action, commodity production, may be sufficient, in and of itself, to create a resplendent world order.

Shifts in the Celestial Order

The bank establishes its likeness to a Buddhist king in several ways. First, it assembled its own monks' council to advise it on religious affairs. Its books on religion are arranged by its personal religious consultant, a former Mahanikai monk. He, in turn, is advised by at least two high-ranking ecclesiastical officials, Somdet Phra Mahawirawongse of Wat Rachaphatikaram (the holder of Somet Uan's former title), and Somet Phra Phutta Khosanacan of Wat Samphraya, the temple whose former abbot was a rival of Phra Phimonlatham (and whose present abbot is rumoured to be trying to oust Wat Mahathat as the head of the

Mahanikai order). These literary alliances hint at a new corporate dynamic in longstanding monastic rivalries. Like a great king, the bank offers advice to both monks and laity, concerning all aspects of social life, lay and religious.

In addition, there are several striking parallels between the bank's emerging relationship with the Sangha and the relationship that King Bhumibol has developed with the Sangha in the last decade of his reign. Both the king and the bank are protecting, defending, and subordinating the Sangha. Both are assuming some of the Sangha's duties towards the Buddhist laity.

For example, there were striking similarities between kathin scenes such as occurred at Wat Arun, in which the king distributed phra phutta rup bucha and amulets to temple supporters, and those at Wat That, where bank clerks distributed amulets to men who contributed to their kathin phrarachathan. Both the king and the bank were rewarding the Buddhist laity for their piety; both were intervening in the monk/laity relationship. The difference was that the king was creating a civic religion--transferring concepts of religious 'sacrifice' to activities performed on behalf of the nation, while the bank was creating a commercial religion--transferring concepts of religious sacrifice to commercial activities.

The Literary Prerogatives of Royalty: Encompassment

To offer such (mysterious and nonprovable) truths to all people indiscriminately would result in more harm than good The Buddha was the All-Enlightened One who realized those truths before all else, yet he was always not without tact and discernment. Time, circumstance and the maturity of the listeners were always taken into account. (Acaan Man, "To Make Known the Truth of Heaven and Hell")

I suggest that the munwian pattern of Buddhist kingship, the symbolism of perfect, encompassing knowledge and action, also functions as a literary device, one which has been recently appropriated by Bangkok Bank. The munwian pattern is expressed in the combination of texts that the bank publishes, and in the themes and literary styles that appear in these texts. Taken as a whole, these texts and their production indicates extraordinary knowledge, even omniscience, on the part of the bank in matters economic and religious.

For example, the three religious booklets featured in 1980 were entitled "Joining Hands in Pradaksina: Worship Words for Four Monthly Buddhist Holy Days" (Wicit 1977); "The Life of the Buddha, Volume Three" (Wicit 1979a); and "Five Precepts: Five Dhammas" (1979b). In arranging these religious texts in conjunction with a whole new set of books on commodity production, the bank took on subtle literary and revelatory prerogatives of kings and ganthathura or teaching monks. One of the signs of the Buddhist saint is that he masters all modes of communication. He communicates perfectly with all beasts and beings in the cosmos, in ways appropriate to their precise level of spiritual attainment. The bank's religious booklets translate Pali, the high language of truth, into formal Thai, and then into the vernacular. This indexes the bank's abilities to transform nama into rupa, the hidden essence of dhamma into its concrete textual forms, into prescriptions for multiple 'paths of action' or codes of conduct [naew thang] appropriate for the nation's citizens--for the inhabitants both of the sasanacak and the rajanacak, lay and religious domains of society. The books on commodity production look just like the books on religion. Instead of Pali words, however, they contain conspicuously placed English words along with their Thai translations. In addition, the

texts contain pictures and illustrations--one presumes for the benefit men who do not read, to 'teach by the senses.'

Taken as a whole, the booklets can be seen in terms of an historical, literary movement in which the bank moves towards a description of the 'whole' of proper religious action, of activities appropriate to both monks and laity. They have begun to prescribe proper procedures for rituals to be performed throughout the entire year (i.e., they are 'circling' through time and the seasons like the spatial-practical orbits of thudong monks.) Some booklets prescribe directives for the 'monks' side' [fay phra] of Buddhist rituals, while others contain directives on the 'lay side' of the rituals. This is, indeed, religious moxie in Theravada polity. In the following sections I will give further examples in support of these points, demonstrating how the bank is implicitly claiming knowledge of the totality of cosmic process, and prescribing multiple 'paths of action' or codes of conducts for the whole of the nation's citizenry, monks included, accordingly.

Kathin-Dana

In the 1974 book, Kathinthan, the bank takes on the king's prerogatives of ritual purification and scholar monks' prerogatives of interpretation. The introduction is full of literary allusions to the moral perfection of the author, a former monk of Pali Nine status, and of the bank. As is traditional in textual recensions, the author claims to examine the true meaning of the ritual by "going back to see its original purpose." He discusses variations of kathin "under different times and circumstances" before describing correct methods of performing it "in the present." The author covers the whole of the subject of kathin.

The booklet indicates a certain sensitivity to sectarian rivalries. Although it contains the words of offering for both Mahanikai and Thammyut monks, it omits mention of the custom of giving the white cloth. (The author is a former Mahanikai monk.) In the bank's version of the origins myth, the monks rushing to the Buddha's side (towards enlightenment) are ordinary monks, not thudong monks as Wat Bowoniwet's version makes a point of noting (cf. Phrarachamongkhon Muni [Thep] 1978:1).

Joining Hands in Circumambulation: Ritual for the Whole Nation

The booklet on the four monthly Buddhist holy days is entitled Khu Mu Pradaksina or "Joining Hands in Circumambulation." The bank's lotus of the law is printed prominently on the front and back covers. In his introductory words of blessing, Somdet Phraphutakhosanacan of Wat Samphraya states that the Pali words for offering bucha on the four holy days are printed "together with their Thai translations" so that "the company of Buddha-followers can be united and join hands in circumambulation," in circumambulating the temple and in "supporting temples everywhere." Instead of the traditional words for male and female worshippers, he uses phuttha-borisat, the "company" of Buddha followers, a term used elsewhere by bank officers.

Like the kathin text, the text on holy days establishes the correct meaning of the rituals by "going back to see their original purpose." It describes the correct time and occasion for each of the ceremonies--measured by the phases of the moon. It includes the correct words for each occasion, the "words pronounced by his Lord the Buddha."

In the introduction, the Somdet Khosanacan notes that he has scrutinized the book for accuracy and recommends that it be given as

"permanent property of the wat" and that the activities described in the booklet be "held to as the path of action henceforth." (Permanence is a symbol of things which are truly dhammic.)

The lay-Sangha relation is reversed, however, with respect to the composition of the text. The Somdet did not write the book with the assistance of the bank or the bank's religious expert, the bank's religious expert wrote the book with the help of the Somdet. The ambiguities of authorship reflect ambiguities about the bank's relation to the Sangha, and to the king.

For example, when Rama I called for a recension and purification of religious texts at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he began by assembling a council of scholar-monks and lay religious experts (former monks). He offered them material support while they scrutinized and purified existing texts, and then distributed the texts, enshrining them at Wat Mahathat. In the 1970s the bank assembled its own version of a monks' council. It commissioned the purification and religious texts, and then distributed [phrae] them to temples and bank branches throughout the country. The Sangha was not advising the bank on correct ways to observe religious holidays, the bank was advising the Sangha on the same.

What Are Precepts?

The booklet on the Buddhist precepts is the most visually provocative and probably the most significant of the religious publications: The Buddhist precepts are the rules that govern men's behavior in worldly domains.

The cover depicts golden lotuses of the law in various stages of bloom against a bright green background. A popular morality poem is

printed on the inside front cover: "Listen to these teaching words," it begins. (Like a great king)

Bangkok Bank, the bank of the Thai people, is the friend in thoughts and the neighbor of all people. The bank scrutinized the needs of religion to see what would support and advance the activities of the people and saw that the suttas are important in teaching and study. It is therefore appropriate for the bank to print and spread [phrae] the suttas to satisfy the needs of the people and to support the convenience of temples and the people.

"What are the precepts?" asks the author. Precepts are "ways of training the heart to be peaceful." His second chapter, on "Abstentions," features a description of correct methods for abstaining from wrong speech. One must not speak in ways that "conceal the truth." One must not speak "piercing words" that hurt others. One must not speak "risque" words, nor speak thoughtlessly, "without reflection."

By 1980, the bank had already printed a complete set of volumes on the life of the Buddha and on the performance of the kathin. It had prescribed correct methods [withi] for observing the five precepts and the four monthly holy days. Will it follow next in the footsteps of King Chulalongkorn and publish a revised version of The Ceremonies of the Twelve Months?

The Lotus of the Law and Other Commodities

The remainder of the booklets were on commodity production. They prescribe the correct 'methods' for producing cash crops and raising raising animals for sale in the marketplace and conclude with a description of the precise benefits men will receive if they follow these methods correctly (1980a-i).

Instead of the lotus of the law, the covers of these books are decorated with equally bright representations of flourishing plants--corn, string beans, wheat, and soybeans--as well as pigs,

chickens, and fish (1980a-i). Instead of a morality poem and the words "Listen to these teaching words," their inside front covers contain the words "Please know," followed by a listing of current interest rates on savings accounts. Money deposited at Bangkok Bank "grows" at the highest rate of interest, these covers state.

Since this is the first occasion of Your Excellency's depositing money in the bank, please note that Your Excellency will receive the following 'monetary interest' [dok bia, lit., 'flowers of money'] on principal [ngoen fak phum khun, lit., 'money left to increase'].

Is depositing money at a commercial bank like making merit--a situation in which renounces material benefits in the present in order to receive them back with interest (in a more resplendent form) in the future?

Not all the crops described in the booklets were appropriate to the growing conditions of the Northeast, which raises a crucial point. The most important message conveyed by these booklets does not concern the production of specific crops. Rather, the booklets introduce the idea of agricultural commodity production.

Lest one receive the impression that the bank is not truly interested in religion, or that the production of religious texts is but a temporary distraction from its main work, these booklets were fresh off the press in 1980, a 'new idea' of the bank's publicity staff. In the late 1970s the bank was just entering into production of religious texts on a systematic basis; such production was integral to its plans for expansion into the 1980s.

The bank could hardly be criticized for this unique juxtaposition of religious and commercial themes and interests, however, first because it was subtle and generally inexplicit, and second because the bank was merely following in the footsteps of the king. As Pote Sarasin said,

King Bhumibol had shown that "One doesn't have to be a monk to have barami in the present."

PART VII
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 21

CONCLUSION

Religion as Illusion

Such extreme tampering with and "sinocization" of the ritual system was bound to create a backlash among powerful and powerless alike. It was highly unlikely that Bangkok Bank's competitors would long allow themselves to be eclipsed in religious or business domains before co-opting or exposing the bank's ritual strategies. It was equally unlikely that the rural monks and politicians who had been displaced by the new power elite would long remain silent before creating counter-strategies to domination. These strategies would certainly not take the form of public "critical talk" about the king or religion. Rather, they would appear as new modes of religious practice and ideology that could function as metatexts, critical allusions to the virtue and religious practice of the power elite. Some critics might even go so far as to try to discredit the entire language of images associated with the elite temple system. In keeping with the century-long cultural and historical process described throughout this dissertation, it was highly likely that the new cycle of counter-strategies would both play on and create antinomy issues.

As I shall demonstrate presently, one response to the new religious system was in fact traditional. The elite's participation in new ritual forms was interpreted as 'overreliance on ritual' for salvation, a theme that dates back to the beginning of the Theravada canonical tradition,

to its dialogue with and rejection of Hinduism (Gokhale 1966:64-66; Maha Boowa 1976:31). Mental purity and the observance of the Buddhist precepts in everyday life are the true keys to salvation.

Other responses were more serious, however. Radical changes in the religious system gave rise to the widespread perception that virtually all 'material aspects of dhamma,' sacred language, ritual, kingship, and Sangha action, had become tools of deception: A fullscale inversion between rupa and nama, the form and essence of religion, had occurred. The argument is cosmological in nature. The cosmos is in serious disarray when religious institutions and practices are not merely ineffective but function instead to disguise an opposite reality, the evil intentions of ambitious men. The external face of religion then bespeaks not truth but illusion. As false fronts or instruments of deceit, religious practices and institutions thus become (along with Western political practices) signs of cosmic decline rather than signs of the flowering of the lotus of the law. In modern Thailand the inversion of the form and meaning of religious practice has become the sign par excellence of moral decline and thus modern capitalist practices may have generated a distinctly Thai variant and distortion of the Theravada cosmological tradition.

"Inverted interpretations" of the relation between nama and rupa have characterized the Thai cultural system since at least the 1960s, when the king first launched his attack against the Thanom-Praphat government. In many respects, such inversions are not new to the Theravada tradition. Associations of religion with trickery, with "false fronts," correspond to the character of Devadatta, the Buddha's rival who 'hides behind the yellow robes' to preach false doctrines; to the to the naga snake of popular mythology, who changes into human form

to ordain as a monk and is unmasked by the Buddha; and to traditional criticisms of the Sangha, of lazy monks who 'hide behind the yellow robe' to avoid work. They also correspond to Thai-Theravada notions about hierarchy, to the belief that Thai society consists of an apparent and a genuine religious hierarchy, that the apparent truth is rarely the genuine truth, and that truth is known to men only in accordance with their degree of religious purity. What is unusual about the Thai case is the extent of these inversions. For example, identifications of religion with trickery are present but not predominant in early Sinhalese texts such as the Mahavamsa and the Culavamsa.

I suggest that the perception that the relationship between rupa and nama has been inverted is becoming more prevalent among more Thai than ever before. In the modern Thai case, cosmic decline is not attributed to the traditional source, rule by an evil king, however, as this is generally not believed to be the case. Rather, it is attributed to the actions of the government and is the end result of the new capitalist elite's systematic attempts to transfer the symbolism of religious and economic practice, to create direct practical and ideological linkages between this-worldly and other-worldly pursuits. Widespread negative interpretations of religious practice are a response to state and corporate Buddhism, of which the monarchy is officially but 'one part.'¹

¹Compare, for example, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's (1977; as translated in Olson 1984:104) interpretation of the Pali phrase, rajano adhammika honti, when all kings do not act according to dhamma. "You may have some misunderstandings about the word 'raja'," explains Buddhadasa.

In the modern world he may already go by another name, what we are really talking about amounts to anyone who holds power, who controls the government on a large scale The word "raja" is already disappearing from the world Some organizations that we refer to as a government may hold all of the power over the country. However, there still remains something hidden beneath all of this, for instance, actually the capitalists or the laborers may hold the power of the

I thus argue that, as the 1970s drew to a close, the soteriological state of the Thai polity was the following: The nation was headed by an apparently virtuous king, religion was prospering, and the kathin in Isan were certainly more resplendent than ever. The very resplendence of religious practice, however, occurring as it did in a time of chaos--when local traditions and social relations were being disrupted, when the disparity between rich and poor was rapidly increasing (World Bank 1980)--was instead interpreted as its opposite, as the sign of cosmic decline. The following are informants' statements which support this argument and which characterize modern kingship and religious practice on a continuum from the merely inefficacious to the actively deceitful.

Ritual as 'Ceremonial Only'

A former member of parliament for the Democrat Party, a native of Khon Kaen, said that Chinese merchants liked to lead the kathin in his natal village and to other villages in the Northeast. "That's the only time people will wai (salute with hands to forehead) them," he laughed. A Khunying² of Chinese ancestry said there were three kinds of kathin, "kathin luang, kathin phrarachathan, and rich man's kathin," and she and her companions laughed uproariously. A young assistant vice president of Bangkok Bank said that kathin was pithikan thawnan (ceremonial only) meaning that it was devoid of religious significance.

country.

²A title bestowed by the queen for services to the nation or contributions to the royal charities.

Isan Mahanikai monks developed a line of doctrinal attack that was repeated to me by a young Isan lawyer, a member of the Socialist Party who had been ordained by a follower of Phra Phimonlatham. He, too, characterized Bangkok Bank's kathin phrarachathan at Wat That as pithikan thawan or 'ceremonial only' but then extended the argument. 'This is not true dhamma,' he explained. His preceptor had taught him that ritual, like waiing, was wathu tham. (the material aspect of dhamma). The building of the temple, the texts, they are wathu. Dhamma is with your mind.'

'True monks are hard to find,' he continued, a statement that implied that the highest-ranking monks in the Sangha were not true monks. "The Buddha was a true monk [phra thi thae cing]. Most modern monks are false monks [phra phlom]."

As a university professor, a former Thammayut monk, said of Bangkok Bank's kathin phrarachathan at Wat That, "We know this is khosana, publicity. It probably does no harm and some good." "Everyone knows that Wat That banks at Bangkok Bank," the former Democrat M.P. said cynically of the same event,

Genuinely pious bureaucrats were becoming alarmed at the effects of the religious changes that they themselves had helped bring about. For example, the official in charge of administering the kathin phrarachathan program insisted that "It is more meritorious to observe the five precepts in a single day than to perform the kathin five times." A former official in Phibun's Ministry of Culture, a devout Buddhist and a former Thammayut monk, characterized the "new kinds of merit-making" as lok kuson (worldly merit). In defense of government policies that allowed powerful but not necessarily pious entrepreneurs to dominate the ritual system he said, "To do good with greed is better

than doing nothing. If you are attached when you make merit it isn't right, but we need to control the people."

An alienated young bureaucrat, constantly pressured to make donations to the kathin ceremonies of his superiors, summed the situation up in the following aphorism: 'If the heart is unwilling, if the body is unwilling, if one has to go (make merit) as duty, then religion is a tool.'³

Religion As A Tool of Deception

The following remarks are more serious, however, as they likewise identify kingship and religious practice as "tools of deception" and/or "masks" for evil intentions. A Thai student said that Thanom had "used religion to hide evil intentions" when he ordained as a monk at Wat Bowoniwet in 1976. Wat Bowoniwet is the leading royal temple in the kingdom.

The twenty-year-old legitimization strategy begun by Sarit appeared to be breaking down along similar lines as evidenced by the following dialogues of the infamous "April Fool's Coup" of 1981. General Sant, the coup leader, began the coup in the traditional manner, by ordering tanks to the Grand Palace. He then accused Prime Minister Prem's government of being "weak, indecisive and lacking in cohesiveness." Sant explained that he had staged the coup because "democracy existed only in name. It had been used as a tool by the rulers to make personal gains . . . to benefit only their own cliques of friends . . . (and) to disguise the works of ill-intentioned parties." He alluded to hidden realities: Prem's government was "afraid to disclose major facts behind issues of national significance" (The Nation 2 April 1981). Sant

³Cai mai yak pai, tua mai yak pai, tha tham na thi tong pai, laeo sasana pen khruang mu.

claimed that his coup would restore "full democracy" because (like a Righteous Buddhist king) only a fully-elected government could "know the real needs and problems of the people" (Bangkok Post 3 April 1981).⁴

General Prem fled to Korat Rachasima, the northeastern 'City of the Royal Boundaries', taking the royal family with him, and a war of words over the nation's radio networks ensued. "Only those who are blind are with the opposition," declared Prem--blindness being a metaphor of religious impurity. "Almost all the army is in my hands, and the King is with us" (Time Magazine 13 April 1981). Sant then heatedly accused Prem of "abusing the country's most sacred institution by 'making His Majesty the King his shield'" and using "democracy as a facade" (The Nation 3 April 1981). "Prem is like a woman who stands under the umbrella of the royal family," Sant stated angrily. "Using the royal family as a negotiating tool is a dirty trick" (Time Magazine 13 April 1981). The coup failed shortly after newspapers published pictures of members of the royal family reviewing Prem's troops. Prem returned triumphant to Bangkok and Sant fled to Burma.

The evils of usury were alluded to in the coup attempt, and commercial banks began to take their place as prominent subjects of (or actors in) Thai political dramas. Soon after the takeover, Colonel Prachak, a "Young Turk" who was a follower of Sant's, declared that "influential blood-sucking merchants" would die (Bangkok Post 3 April 1985). After the coup, members of Prem's government charged that some banks had known of Sant's intentions beforehand as he had withdrawn

⁴General Sant played on antinomy issues when he professed himself 'worried' by the absence of democratic practice in the kingdom, which he identified with men's 'inability to know the truth', alluding, probably to secret business transactions of the Prem government. The 'absence of knowledge' is a traditional sign of moral decline, referring to religious, not secular, knowledge, however.

sixty-two million baht from "commercial banks" to finance it. The government tried to freeze those of Sant's accounts which remained intact after his retreat but the banks triumphed, successfully arguing that freezing bank accounts was illegal unless the money had been illegally earned (a subject that the government was probably anxious to avoid since Sant had been a prominent member.) (Bangkok Post 7, 9, 10 April 1981).

The damage had been done, however, the unspeakable said. Was the king being used as a tool, as a false front of righteousness to hide the intentions of evil men?

Although even fewer people dare criticize the monarchy in rural areas, there are also signs of disillusionment there. The above-quoted Isan lawyer described the monarchy as an 'impermanent' rather than a 'permanent' (i.e., a truly dhammic) phenomenon. "The king is a sommutithev (supposed angel)," he said. "This is a rank or position that people make up. It is not a part of life that is forever." As for the royal treasury, "The money belongs to former kings and it came from people, from taxes," he said. "It didn't go back to the people. Ninety percent goes to nai luang (the king) and to the royal treasury. The king owns property, government, and land." How did he know? "Four years ago when parliament was open, they (members of parliament) knew the amount of money that went to the king, fifteen or twenty million (baht)." He then said sarcastically, "The king's gift is something to be grateful for."

Were ordinary people aware of the king's business holdings? "Most villagers are ignorant. They are afraid. They think from their ancestors that the king is a cao fa (lord of the sky) or phra cao phaen din (lord of the earth)." "The sky is too big," he laughed. "We are

all men of the king." This was not to imply that he was not a devout Buddhist, however. To the contrary, he wore the amulet of a Mahanikai Isan meditation monk and could speak for hours on the virtues of rival meditation techniques (why Mahanikai was superior to Thammayut).

The most damning criticism of Bangkok Bank's ritual activities for profit came from one of its own employees, a young bank clerk. "We know what the bank is really doing in performing kathin phrarachathan," she said. "The bank is the bloodsucker of the people."

When asked about connections between religion and banking, the manager of a rival bank in Khon Kaen said "sure," his bank had temple accounts, but not as many as Bangkok Bank. He criticized of Bangkok Bank's use of religion for profit, but then abruptly terminated the conversation. "This is not public knowledge," he said. "These things should not be spoken of." It was unclear whether he was upset because his bank had failed to use the kathin as effectively as Bangkok Bank in competing for market share, or because he felt that it was improper to use religion (so blatantly) in the pursuit of profit.

According to Theravada Buddhist beliefs about hierarchy, to the opacity principle, powerless bank clerks and opposition politicians lack the purity of mind necessary to see past the bank's public facade and into its hidden intentions in making merit. They thus lack the 'right to speak' publicly and authoritatively on this issue or to predict longterm consequences of the bank's activities. Other commercial banks and powerful generals--the bank's cosmic equals--do, however, and by the 1980s there were signs that they were beginning to exercise these rights.

Other Tigers in the Jungle

Besides Bangkok Bank, Chin Sophonphanit owns one of the Thailand's largest grain export companies, called along with its four major competitors the 'five tigers' of the Thai business world. Other, less powerful, tigers inhabit this particular jungle, however, including rival commercial banks, backed by rival generals and political parties.

Allusions to the deceptively meritorious activities of Bangkok Bank began to surface in 1982, almost twenty years after Sarit first initiated his policy of latching on to the royal virtue to promote capitalist development. After a falling out with the commander-in-chief of the Thai Major-General Haan, the former commander of the Army of the South, allied with the Democrat Party,⁵ stated that he had "heard" from poor people and farmers "speaking in a single voice" (i.e., that it was unquestionably true), that they were "experiencing affliction because of the gouging and squeezing of commercial banks." Haan called commercial banks phi dip, "bloodsuckers" (lit., 'raw spirits', bloated, uncremated corpses), "drawing blood from poor people in the guise [khrap or 'outer skin'] of pious men [nak bun]." They were "banks of the Thai nation" and should refrain from such behavior.

A newspaper editorial commenting on the remarks of "Haan the Brave" declared that the country would develop only if all men "joined hands with pure hearts." The banks responded: They were lending money at the rate approved by the Bank of Thailand. If restrictions on interest rates were loosened (i.e., allowing them to shift with the market) they could be more benevolent (Sawini 25-31 August 1982).

⁵Rival to the Social Action Party, which was allied with Bangkok Bank.

Perhaps the revered Buddhathat Bhikkhu got the last and most definitive word on the subject when he remarked that the word "development" in its Pali or Sanskrit equivalent meant "disorderliness" or "confusion," to which Sulak adds: "Ivan Illich once told me that the Latin word progressio, which is the root idea of 'development,' can mean 'madness' also" (Sulak 1986:52).

The Simple Sight of Money

The simple sight of money is said to arouse greed, and people will theoretically be more eager to sell things if they see cash. (Sherry Ortner, Sherpas through Their Rituals)

The apparent loss of belief in the potency of some religious symbols and practices, of wathu-tham, does not imply an evolutionary progression from sacred to profane modes of social action (cf. Vernant 1982:55), however. Quite the contrary, it has created a new impetus for the sacralization of the polity. There is a further irony to the most recent developments in the Thai soteriological state in that the alienation that men experience as economy modernizes is itself becoming a dynamic of religious revitalization and this religious revitalization is becoming in turn an institutionalized feature of modern Thai capitalist development. The proliferation of greed, anger and deception that has accompanied the most recent spate of capitalist development, along with an increase in the sheer numbers of men who are dedicated solely to the pursuit of profit, is perceived as a loss of dhamma, of truth. Under such conditions, genuine world renunciators are more rare and thus more highly valued than ever before and men must work harder in search of truth.

As Girling (1981:142) notes, excessive materialism encourages excessive asceticism in Theravada polities. In contemporary Thai

society it is an asceticism bred also of alienation: of farmers from their land, of workers from their labor, of consumers from attractive yet unaffordable imported commodities, of Thai citizens from both traditional and contemporary values. I suggest that alienation of this sort accounts for the upsurge in new religious movements in the last twenty years, for the birth of the new crop of meditation masters in the Northeast, (Tambiah 1984), and the corresponding interest in meditation among all classes, managerial elite included. New lay religious organizations began to proliferate, both right-wing (Keyes 1978) and left-wing (Sombun 1977, 1982). This period also saw the proliferation of new hybrid religious philosophies that imply Western cosmological schemas, the teachings of Buddhathat Bhikkhu being the most prominent example (1977).⁶

The religious response to alienation is in turn becoming an institutionalized a feature of modern Thai capitalism. Buddhism thrives not merely because some men have greater wealth to offer to the Sangha, but because leading capitalists portray religion as as a corrective to the greed that has been aroused by the cash economy, by "the simple sight of money." This is a peculiarly Buddhist interpretation of the potential evils of of capitalism. As Dr. Snoh Unakul, the head of Thailand's Economic and Social Development Board, said in an interview with the New York Times (Crossette 7 April 1985), "Buddhism preaches the dropping of worldly things. It teaches how to give up excesses. It can be a countercurrent to consumerism." Thus Buddhism and capitalism are thriving in Thailand, but the dynamic between them is in large part negative.

⁶For more on this subject, see Heinze (1977), Swearer (1981), Asiaweek (12 March 1982), and Olson (1984).

Religion and the Epistemological Dimensions of Capitalism

Throughout the dissertation I have argued that change in the Thai economy occurs in part through the subtle mechanisms associated with Theravada Buddhist ritual and religious practice. Invisible to Western scholars, who are predisposed to see religion and economy as unrelated domains, these mechanisms are traditionally (and linguistically) invisible to the Thai because they concern both religious and royal phenomena. I demonstrated that a new class of merchant elite had deliberately changed the ritual system to advance capitalist interests and Western economic policies in the 1960s and that from the indigenous perspective the deliberateness or 'intention' with which this was done was what threatened the soteriological integrity of the state.

Buddhist ritual comprises the invisible dimension of capitalist development. Men change social relations and relations of production in part by reshaping religious practice, by perpetuating ancient hierarchical and linguistic traditions. In the Northeast in particular, change came first through force, through the barrel of a gun, and then through more subtle mechanisms, through control of discourse, the ritual included. If there ever were a "marketplace of language" (Bourdieu 1983) in Thailand, its canopy is the elite temple system.

I argue that, above all, the Theravada religious system is an epistemological tradition--a way of knowing. The Prince Patriarch Wachirayan reveals the fundamental premises of this tradition in the preface to his Thai translation of the Pali Vinaya. He composed some parts of the text "especially for bhikkhus, dealing with the subtle aspects of truth," and others for laymen "concerning the lower grade of truth suitable for their immediate needs and conditions" (1916).

This hierarchical epistemological tradition is based on three interrelated premises which are crucial for understanding the role of Buddhism in modern Thai capitalist development: (1) Truth is that which is properly revealed by superiors to subordinates; (2) Its expressions vary according to time and place; and (3) The ability to comprehend its subtleties is a function of men's degree of ritual and religious purity. These assumptions about knowledge shape men's actions in the marketplace and their perceptions of change. They determine what men can know, how they can know it, when they can know it, and how they can speak of it. This epistemological tradition thus regulates the cycles of silence and criticism, violence and intensive merit-making activity that attend economic change in Thailand and therefore comprises one of the most crucial religio-cultural dynamics in the development of modern Thai capitalism.

I have also suggested that, as a new generation of Sino-Thai bankers, merchants, and technocrats began to dominate the ritual system, the principle of pure action, for centuries at the heart of the Theravada ideology of salvation, became a dominant lineage principle in Thailand. A new capitalist elite has replaced the descendants of warrior-kings as 'men in the lineage at the head of the nation.' This emerging lineage ideology represents yet another Theravada twist on Hindu-derived biological metaphors for the state, an action-oriented sequel to the Purusha myth.

New variants of capitalist ideology--mythologies about the magical powers of work and the cosmic efficacy of "rational" economic planning--come and go as Thailand passes through an endless progression of coup and antinomy cycles. The soteriological cum power structure remains, however, transformed at each stage of the inevitable evolution:

After each phase of social upheaval in the last twenty years, the elite have tightened their control over the ritual system. The structure remains in place regardless of who controls it: warrior-kings, merchant princes, or pious bureaucrats.

The Transposition of Ethics

Two extranational forces have contributed to the creation of the modern Thai polity: world capitalism and Theravada Buddhism. How have these two forces interacted to integrate Sino-Thai and Thai populations? As a final point I suggest that sometime in the 1960s a transposition between Sino-Thai and Theravada Thai ethical systems occurred in response to the forces of modern capitalism whereby each group adopted part of the other's ethical system.

What was almost inconceivable in the 1880s (cf. Skinner 1967:95) had occurred by the 1980s: Work was represented in mainstream Thai Theravada ideology as religious virtue, as a form of world renunciation, dana or selfless giving. The government and the king portray work as an act of personal purification, but not, however, as it is for the Chinese, as an act of devotion to the ancestors.

For Sino-Thai merchants, permanently cut off from mainland China, something almost equally unthinkable has occurred. Resplendent acts of merit and the building of Theravada Buddhist temples are becoming accepted as major expressions of devotion to the immediate ancestors (parents and grandparents) and possibly to the lineage. Perhaps, too, devout Chinese merchants can assure their place in the (Theravada?) Buddhist heavens?

The king's interpretation of the Buddhist virtue of boricak as selfless material sacrifice and dedication to the advancement of the

nation has forged the link between the two ethical systems. At his behest Chinese businessmen now make large charitable donations to the state or to the royal charities. Traditionally made within the Chinese community, as a sign of leadership qualities within that community, such acts of merit now demonstrate their purity and leadership abilities nationwide, situating them in a new lineage, 'the lineage at the head of the nation.'

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