

## LIVING IN PEACE : THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

### อยู่อย่างสันติ : สังคมแห่งความสมานฉันท์

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### Abstract

Generally speaking, the Thai people cannot live without Buddhism regarded as the religion of wisdom playing a great role in the Thai society. It is a great characteristic of the Thai Buddhists that they always know to adjust themselves in living together with nature surrounding them. As the spiritual center Buddhism also provides the harmony, stability and happiness for the whole Thai Nation in forms of traditional cultures and several festivities helping to bind people of different groups together harmoniously. Accordingly, naturally, the monk's life style is unique with easiness that can be attached as a model of life style for householder or the lay people. Monk does not need to follow globalization or modernization; only the eight necessary articles (Parikharas) would be enough for living. Then the lay people expecting really peaceful life should attach monk's life style. Anyhow, here does not mean life style of monks in current Thailand.

**Key Words:** Living in peace, Harmonious Society, Monk's Life Style

### บทคัดย่อ

โดยทั่วไปแล้ว ประชาชนชาวไทยไม่สามารถอยู่ได้หากปราศจากพระพุทธศาสนา ซึ่งถือว่าเป็นศาสนาแห่งปัญญาและมีบทบาทอย่างมากในสังคมไทย ลักษณะเฉพาะของชาวพุทธไทยที่นำที่นั่นคือการรู้จักปรับตัวให้เข้ากับสิ่งแวดล้อม ในฐานะที่เป็นศูนย์รวมจิตใจ พระพุทธศาสนาช่วยให้เกิดความสามัคคี ความมั่นคงและความสงบสุขของคนในชาติ ในรูปแบบของขนบธรรมเนียม ประเพณีและเทศกาลต่างๆ ซึ่งช่วยให้กลุ่มต่างๆ สามารถอยู่กันได้อย่างสมัคคีสามัคคี ดังนั้น โดยธรรมชาติแล้ว ชีวิตความเป็นอยู่ของพระสงฆ์ จึงสามารถกล่าวได้ว่า เป็นแบบอย่างของการใช้ชีวิตแบบพอดีพอเพียง ไม่ต้องเป็นไปตามกระแสโลก มีเพียงแค่บริขาร 8 ก็เพียงพอแล้ว

สำหรับพระสงฆ์ และชาวบ้านผู้ที่หวังจะมีชีวิตที่มีความสุขอย่างแท้จริง ก็ต้องยึดแบบอย่างการใช้ชีวิตแบบพระสงฆ์ แต่ก็มีใช้การดำเนินตามแบบอย่างการใช้ชีวิตของพระสงฆ์ไทยในปัจจุบัน

**คำสำคัญ :** อยู่อย่างสันติ, สังคมสมานฉันท์, ชีวิตพระสงฆ์

## Introduction

The 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was an era of excitement in the history of Indian religious thought because of the rise of Buddhism (Raj Kumar Pathak, 1989: 2). As well-known that Buddhism reached the area of present Thailand where, in ancient time, was called “Suwannabhumi” since the 3<sup>rd</sup> Buddhist Century when one of the Nine Buddhist Missionaries sent by the Great Indian King, Asoka, had arrived this area and preached the Buddha’s Teachings to the ordinary people. And accordingly the Buddhism flourished throughout this region.

A small society has been shoulder and shoulder to the Thai Kingdom for long time since the beginning of the Kingdom, is called “Sangha Society.” The Sangha stands for a community of Buddhist monks, which is regarded as a highest institution in the Thai Society. Bhikkhu Poonsak Machareon (Bhikkhu Poonsak Machareon, 1976: 7) explained the term Sangha that “the Sangha has two-fold meaning – ‘an entire monk-fraternity’ or ‘the bond of association among monk,’ referring in the former to a body of persons and in the letter of the ‘confederation which makes them one body.’”

The **Sangha** means a group of **Bhikkhus** who assembled to carry out communal business, much like a quorum of the member of a society assembled with the power to make decisions in the society’s name (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 2). However, the number of **Bhikkhu** comprising as a group of **Bhikkhus (Sangha)** is determined by their functions in society in which they are living. However, whatever the **Sangha** would be meant, but in Thailand the **Sangha**, one of the most important institution, is regarded as a pure community because monks who have a very different life from ordinary people (lay-people) actually have followed the 227 precepts. Meanwhile, basically the ordinary people follow the five precepts. The life of monks, according to the **Vinaya** and **Buddhist** tradition, involves constant abstention from secular activities and associations with the secular world. These rules of conduct and behaviour differentiate the monk’s way of life from that of the lay man physically and spiritually (Somboon Suksamran, 1977: 2). Hence, through these precepts

and the way of life monks are regarded as holy people. However, the monks also have played the great roles in having hand for community development with regard to both spiritual and non-spiritual aspects.

The **Sanghas** in **Thailand** are generally recognized to tie the secular society for their living, and that the wellbeing of society facilitates the attainment of their goals. So the monks have not only religious function, but also secular or social functions to perform for the benefit of society (Somboon Suksamran, 1977: 6). They have functioned for the sake of social benefits without any demand from the society for earning sum of money. Meanwhile, they with the heart being full of sacrifice their interests for the public benefits have performed every item.

Primarily the monk acquires respect and prestige by reason of his being a model of behaviour. He is highly respected as a mediator, and as a vehicle for other people's merit-making activities (Somboon Suksamran, 1977: 5). The monk's life has depended upon the lay-people providing to support material facilities. The monk himself cannot be engaged in any economic transaction or in agricultural cultivation. At the same time, the **Thai Buddhists** have a thought that monk or **Sangha** is a unique and noble person in upholding the cause of religion and preservation of the **Dhamma** through studying, teaching, and dissemination. The monk should practice in the same trend with the Lord Buddha, that is to study and practice Dhamma; then, teach ordinary people in return for their supporting; for the sake of applying in their daily lives.

The laity stands for the **Buddhist** lay people who provide the monk with the four necessities of life, viz., food, cloth (robe), shelter, and medicine. At the same time, the monk has virtually responsibilities and duties for the benefit of the laity. The monk shows their affection for the lay people in order to restrain them from evil courses of actions. For example, to exhort them to do only the useful and honourable things, to entertain feelings of kindness towards them, to impart knowledge to them, to deal with their difficulties and doubts including sufferings, and to reveal them the ways leading to heaven.

The Buddhist monks have played an indispensable role in performing the monastic services for the benefits of lay people in their life-circle events. They are the inevitable people for the successful completion of the ceremonies, whether are ceremony of marriage, housewarming, etc. They give ordinary people a religious blessing through auspicious chanting in accordance with their beliefs. In regard to popular Buddhism the said ceremonial attendance is considered as

one of the great principal duties of the monks. Traditionally, to sprinkle holy water and to chant religious blessing are thought of as integral spokes in the religious wheel turned by the monks in their ceremonial performances. Whether it is a village festival or a family ceremony, a protective aura of the monks' attendance is really needed by villagers.

### The Entrance to Monkhood

Since the ancient time until the present, there have been a number of persons having found the fulfillment in teaching people and in the practice of **Dhamma**. Out of those ideas such teaching would be of great use for the public in a large number and would not be a waste of their lives. Those hold firmly to abandon willingly their wealth, honour and personal happiness and spend sometimes for the chaste life (Brahmacariya) in order to study the Buddha's teachings, practice Dhamma, and persuade people for the sake of relieve their difficulties and miseries.

Having a large gathering of disciples, such people are called teacher (Saththa) (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, 1995: 1). The teachings, which have received the approval and respect of many people in succeeding generations, are classed as creeds or religions (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 1). Our teacher, the Buddha is one of these people, who has done so, but after making his own search, he discovered that purity is the root of all that is good (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 1). At first striving with energy and perseverance he attained that purity and then he taught that same way to the people (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, 1995: 2).

At first the **Buddha** taught those who have gone forth and when any of them became convinced of his teaching and asked to join with him. The **Buddha** then would have accepted them to be **Bhikkhu** by saying "Come **Bhikkhu**, well-expounded is the **Dhamma**, live the Brahmacariya for the complete ending of Dhukkha." Being admitted in this way, those aspirants were already accepted and joined the **Sangha** is called **Ehi-bhikkhu-upasampada** (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, 1995: 2) which means the Acceptance by saying 'Come **Bhikkhu**', or Etha bhikkhavo according to the number of aspirants was singular or plural (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 1-2).

The applicant or applicants thus addressed immediately became a Bhikkhu or Bhikkhus and did not go for many families, which were introduced to the **Buddhist Sangha** afterwards (Kanai Lal Hazra, 1988: 83).

The **Buddha** gave permission for his followers to admit new members on their own way, at the same time making the procedure more explicit than ever before (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 1). So that it was no longer done by beckoning and gesture on his part but later aspirants had first to shave their head and beards. And then they clad themselves in **Kasaya** robes as a mark of their condition (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, 1995: 2) and after covered one shoulder only by the yellow robe, sit on his leg, salute the **Bhikkhu** (Kanai Lal Hazra, 1988: 86). And then he had to utter the solemn words of going for Refuge to the **Triple Gem** while showing the proper gestures of respect (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 2). This was all that was needed for him to be admitted into the community as a **Bhikkhu** (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, 1955: 2). This form of ordination is called **Tisanaganamanupasampada**, meaning the “Acceptance by going for Refuge to the **Triple Gem**” (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 2-3). In early times of Buddhism after the Buddha’s Awakening the admittance of a person who has to become a **Bhikkhu** was accomplished, that is to say either by the **Exalted Buddha**, or by one of his **Savakas** (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, n.p.: 3).

When sometimes passed, it was very hard for **Sangha** to take a man who wished to be a monk in an area where was very far away. It had taken more time for **Sangha** and ordained—needy to get the place where the **Buddha** was staying. Then, the Buddha had allowed the **Sanghas** give a new kind of ordination called “**Natti-catutthakamma Upasampada.**” It is meant the process that the **Bhikkhus** assemble according to the number of members required for the function in the place called **Sima**, first announcing the motion regarding the acceptance of an aspirant to join the community and then attaining the approval of all participating **Bhikkhus**. And this type is still practiced in the present time. However, there are many conditions in the process of ordination to be in the Order of **Sangha**. Those are as follows:

- 1) The person who wishes for **Upasampada** must be man.
- 2) He must have attained the prescribed age of 20 years calculated from

conception (this is fired by carefully counting the time spent in the mother's womb as six lunar months).

3) He must not be defective as a man that is eunuch (or defective in other ways lacking limb's organs or being deformed).

4) He must never have committed very serious crimes including capital offences.

5) He must never have committed any serious offence according to **Bud-dhasasana**, such as committing a **Parajika** offence when previously ordained as a **Bhikkhu**, or although he had been a **Bhikkhu** in the past yet he had wrong view and entered some other religion (Somdetch Phramaha Samanachao Kromphraya Vajirananavarorasa, 1995: 2).

Furthermore, many persons suffering from any of the five diseases, viz., leprosy (Kuttham), boils (Gando), dry leprosy (Kilesa), consumption (Soso), and fits (Apamaro) were debarred from admission into the **Sangha**. And the one was a man in royal service, declared thieves, jail breaker, proclaiming robber, scourged offender, branded thief, debtor, slave, a matricide, a patricide and **Arhanticide**. The **Arhanticide** is meant one who has violated a nun, one who has caused a schism, one who has shed Buddha's blood, eunuch, a hermaphrodite, an animal in human form, one whose hand or feet or both have severed, and one who has furtively joined the **Sangha** (Kanai Lal Hazra, 1988: 88). The mentioned one is an unsuitable one to be allowed to entry to the monkhood.

However, to be a monk is quite difficult because there are 227 rules to be strictly followed. Those can be grouped into the main four groups as follows:

1. *Parajika*: There are four Parajika offences, which call for extreme punishment of expulsion from the order. The first two are crimes against the society, such as theft, homicide and accessory to a suicide. They are secular in nature, which any government would punish. The other two crimes relate to sexual offences, such as intercourse with a person or female animal, which goes against the entire philosophy of monkhood, and falsely claiming superior state of a Noble One's, Arhat's, knowledge and extraordinary qualities. This is a crime against the Buddhist doctrine.

2. *Sanghadisesa*: Thirteen offences which would warrant meeting of the community of monks, and call for suspension, penance and reinstatement by an assembly of at least twenty-five monks.

3. *Aniyata*: Two undefined offences which would warrant expulsion,

suspension, or expiation as determined by the circumstances.

4. *Nissaggiya Pacittiya*: Thirty offences which entail expiation and forfeiture of articles which a monk may have taken or used improperly.

5. *Pacittiya dhamma*: Ninety-two offences which call for expiation only.

6. *Patidesaniya dhamma*: Four offences which must be confessed.

7. *Sekhiya*: Seventy-five offences concerning (with) observations and proprieties that must be recited.

8. *Adhikaranasamatha*: Seven offences pertaining to settlement of litigation. In other words, the rules to be followed in conducting judicial inquiry concerning conduct of monks (Gordon Fairclough, 1994: 82-83).

### The Monk's Roles

In the **Thai** society, the Buddhist monk's roles, in so far as its ritual religious functions are related, for example, preaching, funeral ceremonies, communal rituals, and housewarming, etc., tend to create a sense of community. Only monk can properly perform the religious ceremonies and ritual. It should be said that without monk all religious ceremonies and ritual cannot be practiced in a proper way. Hence, the monks living in the monastery have played a most important role in the Thai society.

Like religious institution of other societies, the Thai monk is supposed to perform all religious ceremonies and ritual, and also to teach people **Dhamma** and traditional cultures. Ordinary people have been related to the Buddhist monks from birth to death through many ceremonies and ritual like birthday, marriage, and so forth. Even in their daily life, the Thai people really like to make merit through offering food for monk including novice before going for their work on every morning as you can easily see in countrywide.

In the rural areas, monks still hold social leadership among the underprivileged, with whom they maintain a comparatively close relation and cooperation. Village monasteries fulfill people's social needs and monks still fill their traditional roles of helping the villagers in their spiritual and temporal concerns (Sunthorn Plamintr, 1994: 195).

The monk's roles can be summarized into two main categories: roles dealing with oneself and the others.

*Roles dealing with oneself:*

It is the role in studying both Buddhist and worldly subjects. It is to study all **Buddha's** teachings, i.e., **Dhamma** and **Vinaya** (all disciplines) including Buddhist history and also life of the **Buddha**. The worldly subjects, like Sociology, Philosophy, Education, etc., are the suitable subjects for monks. In fact that in the Thai society there are lots of limits for monks in studying these worldly subjects like Laws, Economics, Commerce, Science, and so on. Monks should have a fully right to study all subjects in order to improve their skills in teaching people. And also they can apply with the Buddhist teachings and it would be easier to make people understand the Buddhist teachings. However, many monks could study lots of subjects through reading the concerned books, then, they could do the best on teaching **Dhamma**.

*Roles dealing with others:*

It is the role in performing every kind of religious ceremonies and ritual including a social welfare. The monks, in so far as Buddhist reached and flourished in the area of present Thailand, have played a great role in preaching the Buddhist Teachings to the ordinary people on every group of age. They have preached the **Dhamma** in monastery and also out of the monastery. Not only the duties in teaching and religious performances, but also the Buddhist monk as spiritual leader has counseled ordinary people in order to resolve different kinds of their problems and relieve miseries. Furthermore, in rural areas Buddhist monk has worked as a great communal leader providing both helps: physical and mental in community development. He, sometimes, takes duties on different Ministers like Minister of Public Health, Minister of Education, etc., especially in the community. But after the government brought about the new educational system almost all schools are under the responsibility of government. Monks do not spend much time for teaching Dhamma in school like previous time; then they start to do building instead of producing a moral and skillful people for society. So nowadays you can see monasteries throughout the countrywide are full of a large number of magnificent buildings. Meanwhile, religious men whose opinion has changed are out of skills to teach people for their Dhamma—understanding. They just only try to create the beautiful building in monastery. At the same time, they do not properly develop themselves so that the early Thai Buddhism is in the age of materialism and lack of the skillfulness.



On the other hand, under the leadership of communal monk different kinds of Banks are established in village, and monk is manager of those. The said Banks are the Bank of village, the Bank of rice, the Bank of cow, the Bank of buffalo, and so on. It depends upon the agreement between villagers, and the managerial system is similar to the general Bank.

A monk, especially the abbot or a respected monk, as spiritual leader and one who is regarded as impartial and wise, is always asked for advice (S. Sunthornphesuth, 1968: 38). The monks are sometimes consulted on political issues particularly at such times as elections. Though they are not supposed to partake or take side in politics (Kaufmon, K.K., 1960: 16). So monk has influenced to encourage and to create social activity and cause to social change (Inendell Blanchard, "et. al.", 1988: 9). Although the monk is not able to directly appear in any kind of politic elections, but he can give a good advice to the candidate through teaching Dhammas concerning with politics, for example, the virtues for a great ruler, etc. Actually, he will not enable to be a candidate of any politic election, and also have right to elect any politician; because the monk has been regarded as a noble person who is worthy for paying respects of ordinary people. Like the King he cannot be connected with politic aspects, but any way, if there was any conflict happened in politics the King (sometimes monk) will solve the said conflict. Hence, it is necessary to appear in solving different political problems and conflicts in order to provide happiness and peacefulness for people; it is suitable for monk (and also King) to do.

On the other hand, Somboon Suksamran (1977: 65) cited that the role of the Sangha in relation to political modernization in Thailand since 1965 can be divided into three main categories:

- 1) The role of the Sangha in Community Development Programmes;
- 2) Phra Dhammatuta Programme, i.e., the Sangha's role in promoting national integration through strengthening of people's attachment to Buddhism; and
- 3) Phra Dhammajarik Programme, i.e., the Sangha's role in bringing the hill-people into the national fold of Thailand through conversion to Buddhism.

In the current year there are several uneducated but skillful monks having played a great role in communal development. They, as the real leader of villagers, are to be regarded as the professional in the agricultural matter mixing the Buddhist techniques of living. Through this the community has become stronger

than before; they can keep a living on without any help from the government. At the same way, many communities are looking forwards to such communal leader to improve their standard of living. Meanwhile, a number of educated monks target to work as a missionary in oversea like the United States of America and other European countries. At the same time, the researcher expects nothing from such useless idea because they just only go for the Thai Buddhists in oversea; but they never work for non-Buddhist. Although lots of foreigners want to know more about Buddhism, especially how to practice meditation, but unfortunately few numbers of the Thai Buddhist missionary can properly do this duty. It would be better for the Thai Buddhist missionary to study harder and harder and get particularly trained before going for the oversea job. While monks joined the Phra Dhammajarik Programme are doing a fine job somehow, but they still need to get more technical trains.

Thus, it can be said that the roles of Thai **Sangha** cover all aspects of the Thai life style. As Tawee Sutraromlugsh (1994: 17) has summarized the roles of monks and monasteries that monastery is everything of the Thai society and also the spiritual centre of ordinary people. Meanwhile, monks as on behalf of monastery are the spiritual leaders of people and also the centre of respects and cooperation between people in society. In regard to this, it should be said that monastery has been the security of national solidarity.

### **The Sangha's Administrative System**

The Administrative system of the **Thai Sangha Society**, which is divided into two main sects, i.e., Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika, is well known as the **Ecclesiastical Honorific System** referring to a similar system to feudal system in the state administration of the former **Thai Kingdom**. In regard to this, it has been influenced since the **Ayutthaya** period and still inherited from generation to generation for many decades.

The **Sangha** society consists of the administrative structure similarly to the governmental one chaired by **His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch**, as the ex-officio president, serves as the consultative council to the **Supreme Patriarch**. The said council is the administrative body of all **Thai Buddhist Monk**, consisting of all **Somdej Phra Rajagana, Phra Rajagana, Chaoganachangwat, Chaogana amphur, Chaogana tumbon, and Chao awasa** respectively. The Thai **Sangha** Council called **Mahathera Samakom** comprises of **His Holiness the Supreme**

**Patriarch** as a chairman, **5 Somdej Phra Rajaganas** (Chaokana Yai or Sangha General Governors) and their deputies as members. There are 26 Chaogana-parks (Sangha Regional Supervisors consisting of 18 Mahanikayas and 8 Dhammayutikas), 126 Chaogana-changwats (Sangha Provincial Governors; M=76, D=50), 912 Chaogana-amphurs (District Head Monks; M=749, D=163), 5,875 Chaogana-tumbons (Commune Head Monks; M=5,400, D=475), 30,678 (approx.) Chao-awas (Abbots), and 415,333 ordinary monks. In regard to this, the number of monks including novices will be more and more during the **Pansa** (Buddhist Lent = three months in rainy season)

*Jane Bunnag* also lists the following structure of the Buddhist ecclesiastical hierarchy as determined by the Act Concerning the Administration of the **Buddhist Order of Sangha**, enacted in 1962:

- (1) Somdet Phrasangharaja (Supreme Patriarch);
- (2) Mahatherasamakhom (the Council of Elders, the supreme governing body of the Sangha);
- (3) Chaogana Phak (Ecclesiastical Regional Head);
- (4) Chaogana Changwat (Ecclesiastical Provincial Head);
- (5) Chaogana Amphoe (Ecclesiastical District Head);
- (6) Chaogana Tambon (Ecclesiastical Sub-District Head);
- (7) Chao Awas (Abbot of a Wat);
- (8) Bhikkhus and Samaneras (Monks and Novices) (*Jane Bunnag*, 1973: 24).

At the top level of **Sangha's** hierarchy the whole Sangha affairs are closely supervised and controlled through the ex-officio Secretary General by the government (*Somboon Suksamran*, 1977: 43).

The complete Buddhist hierarchy in Thailand has the following ranks:

- 1) The title of the non-royal Sangharaja is Somdet Phra Sangharaja.
- 2) There are six titles of Somdet rank, also known as the gold plate rank.
- 3) There are twelve titles of Rong Somdet (Deputy Somdet) or the silver plate rank.
- 4) Phra Rachagana title of Tham (Dhamma) rank.
- 5) Phra Rachagana title of Thep (Deva) rank.
- 6) Phra Rachagana title of Raat or Ratch (Raja) rank.
- 7) Phra Rachagana title of Saaman rank (*Alexandra R. Kapur-Fic*, 1998: 183).

Since the promulgation of the **1902 Act** when the Sangha was unified into

a national institution, the State used it to legitimize its authority, and monks of appropriate ranks were invited to perform rituals at formal State functions (Charles F. Keyes, 1987: 41). During the period of social and cultural change in Thailand in the early twentieth century, in 1932 the civil government of Thailand was changed from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. This led to a change of the ecclesiastical laws. Under the **Order Act of B.E. 2484** (1941) the organization of the Thai Order of Buddhist monks had its pattern in accordance with the parliamentary government adapted by the state. The power of the Supreme Patriarch was limited to exercise his power through the three organs of the Order, namely, the Ecclesiastical Assembly as the Legislature, the Council of Ecclesiastical Cabinet as the Executive and the Ecclesiastical Judicature as the Judiciary. The Council of Ecclesiastical Cabinet consisted of ten members headed by the Ecclesiastical Prime Ministers. Under him there were four Ecclesiastical Ministers who directed all affairs of the order through the four Boards which were the Board of Educational Administration, the Board of Propagation and the Board of Public Works.

The **Order Act of B.E. 2484** remained in force for 21 years. Then, the Military Government under the premiership of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat found that the Ecclesiastical Administration should be based on the process of centralization. As a result, a change in the organization of the **Order Act B.E. 2505** (1962) which came into force in one year later (on January 1, 1963). By this Act the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council was reintroduced and the administration of the order was to be carried out at two levels: the central administration and the local administration.

Under the **Order Act B.E. 2505**, at the central administrative level, the Supreme Patriarch who is appointed by the King, as the head of Buddhist Order is responsible for all affairs of the **Sangha**. He has supreme power to govern the whole monk community and to direct all ecclesiastical affairs. There is the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council under him, serving as the Consultative Council. It consists of the Supreme Patriarch as its president; all six Highest Ecclesiastical Dignitaries as standing ex-officio members, and other eight Ecclesiastical Dignitaries appointed by the Supreme Patriarch to hold office as nominated members for a two years-term.

In the local administrative level, the monk community is divided into local units of multi-regions, regions, provinces, districts and sub-districts, similar to the division of the country by the state for administrative purposes. There are

Ecclesiastical Provincial Governors, Ecclesiastical District Officers and Ecclesiastical Sub-district chiefs take full responsibility for their administrative divisions in the 76 provinces. The 76 provinces are grouped into 18 Ecclesiastical Regions under the control of the Ecclesiastical Regional Governors. And the 18 Regions are again grouped into five multi-regions supervised by the Ecclesiastical Multi-regional Supervisors namely; the Central, the Northern, the Southern, the Eastern and the Dhammayuttika Ecclesiastics respectively.

The Department of Religious Affairs serves as a communicative officer to achieve harmonious co-operation between the Order and the State. It is responsible for taking care of monks and monasteries and the promotion of all religious projects, whether education, propagation and so on. It keeps record of the monastic property, oversees the Ecclesiastical Budget and assists the Ecclesiastical Affairs with their administrative duties. Seeking to achieve the welfare and prosperity of the Order and the State, it has the main task to protect the religion, maintain the religious properties and provide the growth of Buddhist culture in Thailand through all suitable ways.

### The Sangha's Education

As Theravada tradition, the education for monks had been based on the Teachings of the **Buddha** preserved in the Pali Scriptures. There was no any source mentioned about the **Sangha's** school systems in **Sukhothai** and **Ayutthaya Periods** because many records got lost when **Ayutthaya** was seized and completely destroyed by the Burmese aggressor in 1767. During the early **Rattanakosin Period**, in the reign of King Rama II (1809-1954), Pali was taught in the traditional way with emphasis on grammar. The teaching system is divided into Nine Grades, grouped into three classes. Those are Pali I-II and III as the Third Class (Parian Tri) mainly based on commentaries of Sutta Pitaka. The Pali IV-V and VI as the Second Class (Parian Tho), utilize commentaries on the Sutta and the Vinaya, while the Pali VII-VIII and IX as the First Class (Parian Ek) base on the entire-set of important commentaries of the Three Pitakas. The students both monk and novice had to master the language before joining this traditional Pali Course taught by learned Elders; meanwhile, an examination would be conducted by a board of examiners once a year; and there was no any re-examination held in the same year for the failed one. At the same time, the students had to pass the vocal translation test to the satisfaction of the board, grade by grade and year by year. In addition, this

traditional examination had been practiced continuously until the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910).

Historically, in the year 1911, through the initiative of the Prince Monk named Vajirananavarorasa, who later became the Supreme Patriarch, Courses of Dhamma Studies were first introduced. Those were extra from the old Pali Courses and were with the help of textbooks in Thai written on the basis of the Pali Scriptures. The Dhamma Studies are of three levels: Primary, Secondary and Advanced. Each level consists of four subjects: Essay on Dhamma, Rules and Norms of Vinaya, Topics in Dhamma and History of Buddhism. Under the Royal Patronage and support from the government and people, it had been spread throughout the country as a modern course of study at that time. On the other hand, in 1916 the Pali Examination was conducted throughout the country.

There are two Buddhist Universities: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya with 10 campuses and Mahamakut Buddhist University with 7 campuses, affiliated to the monks and novices including lay people now a day. Both were established under the command of King Rama V, with a plan to provide monks and novices with advanced Buddhist Studies along with modern higher education in 1947. At the present time, Mahachulalongkorn University has four Faculties: Buddhist Study, Education, Humanities and Social Sciences; meanwhile, Mahamakut Buddhist University also has four Faculties: Philosophy and Religion, Arts, Social Sciences and Education.

## Conclusion

Thus, it can be said that the roles of Thai **Sangha** cover all aspects of the Thai life style, which can be concluded that monastery is everything of the Thai society: the spiritual centre of the Thai people countrywide. Meanwhile, monks on behalf of religious institution have been regarded as the spiritual leaders of people and also the centre of respects and cooperation between people in society. Accordingly, here it should be said that although the Buddhist monk society will be a small one but it provides the stability and solidarity of the national socio-cultural integration so far.

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