Development of Thai Buddhism and Challenges to it in 21st Century

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Buddhism originated in India but it flourished in Asia and other countries of the world. In Thailand, people are devoted to Buddha. Buddha is in the heart of Thai people. During my recent visit to Thailand, I noticed activities of various anti Buddhism forces and evil practices which induced me to write this paper. This is not a microlevel study but it can be considered a macrolevel study. In this paper I discuss the development of Buddhism during various dynastic rules and examine various aspects of Thai Buddhism. I have also tried to delve the problems which are challenges to Buddhism in the beginning of this millennium. A large number of papers have been published by the scholars related to Buddhism but no one has drawn their attention to the challenges of Buddhism.

Thai people are closely associated with Buddhism and is the national religion of Thailand. History of Thailand is the history of Buddhism. Since the foundation of Thai state, Buddhism played an important role in the social and economic life of Thai people. It is very difficult to say which form of Buddhism, Thais were adherent to during ancient period. No doubt, during the formation of independent Thai state, Davaravati kingdom, around 7th century A.D. in Central part of Thailand, Thai were adherent to Hinayana form of Buddhism as many Theravada Buddhist objects and monuments have been discovered. In later phase, Mahayana form of Buddhism was adopted by the Thais as several votive tablets and images of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and Maitreya have been discovered from this area. Some scholars believe that Mahayana form of Buddhism was practised in by a group of people in a particular locality in the central part of Thailand.

Buddhism during Various Thai Ruling Dynasties

Some scholars believe that the Thai people already knew the form of Buddhism even before they descended into Southeast Asia, when they still lived in what is now southern China. There is no doubt, at the time of the establishment of powerful Thai kingdom, Sukhothai, Thais were impregnated with Buddhism. The form of Buddhism which dominated in Sukhothai was Singhlese inspired Theravada school. This form of Buddhism was introduced by King Ramakhameng (1277–1317 A.D.). When King Ramakhameng conquered the town of Nakhonsithammarat in the Malay Peninsula, Theravada Buddhism got a strong impetus. The king invited some of the learned monks to his capital who were residing in Nakhonsithammarat as revealed from his famous inscription: “...To
the west of this city of Sukhodaya there is a monastery of the Forest Monks. King Ramakhameng founded and offered it to the Venerable Preceptor, learned in all the Three Baskets, in erudition excelling all other monks in the whole land. He hailed from Nakhon Sridhamraj...."

King Ramakhamheng gave the title of Sangharaja, or “Supreme Patriarch”, to the leader in the Sinhalese monks. These monks ordained many local men and have a lasting influence upon the religion of Sukhothai and the kingdom as a whole. The King himself took interest in the religious activities. Chou Ta-Kuan, a Chinese envoy, writes: “The King practised the religion of Buddha, and observed the precepts during the period of retreat. At the end of the retreat, the ceremonies of the Kathin (offering of robes to the monks) took place. This most important ceremony took place in west of the city, at the monastery of the Aranyika, from which the population returned forming a joyous and noisy procession. The end of the Kathin coincided with the feast of lights (like Dipawali: an Indian festival.)” It is believed that King Ramakhamheng utilised the Buddhist concept of Dhamma for regulating the social order and moral guide for government. King Ramakhamheng, for example, was said to have believed that: “If society is morally sound and the people have a high spirit by keeping steadfast to Buddhism and adhering to Dhamma, the kingdom will be tranquil and prosperous”.

King Ramakhamheng not only showed his own dedication to Buddhism but also taught Dhamma to the people. On each Upostha day (Buddhist ‘holy’ day) he invited a learned monk to teach Dhamma at his palace. Also, he gave donations to the monks who were proficient in Dhamma and propagating Buddhism. King Ramakhamheng’s successors also took a leading role in religious activities. They promoted, and protected Buddhism, and patronised Sangha. King Ramakhamheng’s son Loe Thai’s devotion to Buddhism and his religious works earned him the title of Dhammaraja or Dharmikaraja, ‘Pious king’ which his successor bore after him. It is said about him that he constructed many Buddhpadas (imprint of the foot of Buddha) made in imitation of the one worshipped in Ceylon on the summit of Sumanakuta or Adam’s peak. King Loe Thai’s son, Lithai (or Lidaiya), was also a devotee of lord Budhha. He studied thoroughly the three Pitakas. During his reign, Buddhism prospered much. He was recorded to be the first Thai king who donated land and slaves, probably prisoners of war, to the monasteries, a practice that was followed up to early Bangkok period.

Probably Lithai introduced the tradition of the origination of the king. He was the first Thai king who temporarily left his throne to enter the monkhood, an act of gaining the highest merit as per Thai belief. From this time onwards, the system of ordination is continuing till date. The King himself ordained at least for a short period for a week or so to acquaintain himself with Buddhist sangha. It is said about King Lithai that at his ordination the rulers of Lanna and Nan came to participate in merit-making. Keeping in view of the existence of the purity of Buddhism, the neighbouring countries including king of Lanna sent diplomatic missions to bring Singhlese Theravada Buddhism in their homelands. Lithai’s inclination towards Buddhism reveals from his book called Traiphum Phra Ruang or Traibhumikatha (the three worlds of Phra Ruang). The text describes the structure of the universe, the Traiphum, cosmography, category of beings and deities as determined by the kamma of each being. All beings were ranked, from demons to gods in a hierarchy of merit which accrued according to kamma. It describes the cyclic processes of birth, death and rebirth of

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deva, human beings and animals of various forms. The central emphasis of the Traiphum is on the effects of good and bad kamma. It stresses that the people who have good kamma are rewarded, in contrast with those who acquire bad kamma are punished after the death. Thus the entire Buddhist concept of kamma and rebirth reflects from his book.

After the death of King Lithai, which occurred sometime between 1370 and 1374, Sukhothai gradually declined and reduced to vassal kingdom in 1378 and finally incorporated in the kingdom of Ayuthiya six years later. Under Rama Thibodi and his successors the new kingdom expanded to control the whole of the Menam Chao Phaya basin and struggled to extend its influence over its neighbours at all four points of the compass. Ayuthiyan rulers were influenced by the inter-woven traditions of Khmer and Mon, of Hinduism and Buddhism working in combination. From Khmer-Hindu tradition, Ayuthiya inherited its concept of divine kingship (Devaraja). The king was considered as a receptacle of divine essence. He was Lord of Life and Lord of the Land. Hindu tradition manifested itself in the form of royal ceremonies such as rituals associated with the oath of allegiance and the coronation. The Buddhist influence is revealed from the concept of the righteous king as discussed in Pali Dhammasattha. However, Dhammasattha appears to be Hindu origin, but its Buddhist oriented myth is contained in the Aganna Sutta. Lingat opines that Buddhist Dhammasattha are quite different from Sanskrit Dharmasastra. Its codes were first used by the Buddhist people. Pince Dhani Nivat also supports this view.

The king was also thought of as a potential Bodhisattva, that is he was seen as one who temporarily had given up striving to achieve nirvana, so that he might serve his countrymen in their quest for religious and material satisfaction of this worldly life. Thus it is recorded that when King Ramadhipati and his successors died, they entered nirvana. This concept of Bodhisattva is of Mahayanist origin which reappeared after a span of several centuries with the advent of Ayuthiyan rulers who were deeply influenced with Khmer and Mon traditions. Further, Ayuthiyan fervent towards Buddhism appear from the allegiance administered to Thai rulers. At the oath of allegiance ritual which was of Hindu origin and performed by Brahmins, the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha were invoked to complete the ritual. From Ayuthiyan to the Bangkok periods this ritual was performed in Buddhist monasteries in which the monks took an equal part with the Brahmins for the completion of the ritual.

Another religious act which suggests that the king sought legitimacy from Buddhist tradition was manifested in his composition of a royal version of a Jataka, a story of the Buddha’s earlier lives. It is interesting to note that in Buddhist concept, Ayuthiyan rulers legitimise the usurpation of the throne. For example, when King Songtham of Ayuthiyan seized power from the rightful heir and established himself as king (1610–1628), he sought legitimacy through his religious acts. The Supreme Patriarch of the sixth reign describes it thus: “The king realised that he had illegitimately seized power, and he had to be conscious of his unpopularity among the masses. Although at that time there was no one who dared to challenge his power, he sought support from the masses. Being accomplished in Buddhism and knowing that it was held in esteem by the people, he sought popularity and legitimacy through the religion. He encouraged ecclesiastical education and devoted his efforts to promote Buddhism. The king revised the Jataka, and ordered the compilation of Tripitaka. He
encouraged the people in the court to adhere to Dhamma. He himself regularly attended the sermons...."\textsuperscript{14}"

Ayuthiya finally fell through the Burmese invasion of 1767. The capital was looted, burnt and many of its population, both monks and laymen, fled. Eventually General Taksin forced back the enemies and restored Thai freedom. He became king and moved his capital to Thonburi. The major task behind him was to tackle the rebel monks which was headed by Venerable Phra Fang. These rebel monks organised themselves in army style. They led their lives as if they were laymen, observed no Vinaya, and managed to seize power in the northern capital of Pitsanulok. King Tuksin attacked over the monk forces but Venerable Phra Fang escaped. Many of the Fang’s followers were executed.

King Tuksin’s major achievement was that he unified the country. In this effort he took the help of high ranking monks. The high ranking monks were sent to northern part of the country to assume the important supervisory positions of the Buddhist Sangha. King Tuksin also pacified the southern rebels. He invited the leading southern monks to receive gifts. The king also set out the purity of Sangha and unworthy monks were ruthlessly purged. He built new monasteries and restored ruined ones.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the king had turned his immediate attention towards Buddhist activities which helped him in unifying the kingdom.

King Tuksin devoted his efforts in restoring the prosperity of Buddhism. Following the King Luthai’s example, he ordered the revision of \textit{Traiphum} and commanded a new edition of \textit{Tripitaka} be compiled. The king also himself seriously took up the study of meditation and claimed to have acquired supernatural powers. Moreover, he saw himself as a sodaban (Pali-\textit{Sotapanna}) or stream-winner, a type of being, so elevated as to have embarked on one of the stages on the road to enlightenment.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, King Tuksin was also responsible, to some extent, for the decline of Buddhism during that period. Because of his illusion of attaining \textit{Sotapanna}, he claimed superiority over the monks and ordered them to bow to him. Those who refused to accept his claims were flogged and sentenced to menial labour. The supreme patriarch and two other senior monks who refused to accept his religious authority were demoted. Because of his unorthodox behaviour, he was seen as insane and as a potential threat to the unity of the Thai Nation.

No Doubt, his contribution to Thai Buddhism was far reaching. He gave impetus to Buddhist Sangha which had received a set back due to Burmese invasion. King Tuksin was dethroned and later sentenced to death by his successor, Rama I.\textsuperscript{17} King Rama I assumed the throne in 1782 and began the Chakri dynasty. He moved the capital of Thailand to Bangkok. During his reign Buddhism prospered. After accession to the throne, he turned his attention to the prosperity of Buddhism and the purity of the Sangha which had set back from the Burmese invasion and the unorthodox acts of King Tuksin.\textsuperscript{18} King Rama I ordered to revised the \textit{Tripitakas} in 1788. He appointed a council of 218 and 32 Buddhist scholars for this task. They took five months to complete this revision work.

In order to purify the Sangha and restore its prestige, the king issued a number of decrees on monastic conduct. The decrees specified the correct behaviour which the monks had to observe. They laid down the relationship between the monastic community and lay society, and between the

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monks and civil authority. Punishments for disobedience were also prescribed. Moreover, Brahmanical faith, which enjoyed equal status to Buddhism, declined during his rule. Buddhist rituals were superimposed on Brahmanical religion. By the time of king’s death, the condition of Buddhism was stable and Sangha was in healthy state.

After the death of King Rama I in 1809, his successors’ main religious tasks were to maintain the prosperity and purity of Buddhism and the Sangha, and to secure the people’s adherence to the Dhamma. King Mongkut (Rama IV) who ruled from 1851 to 1868 brought drastic changes in Buddhism. Before assuming the throne, he had been in monkhood for 27 years. As a monk he had gained a reputation for being a reformer influenced by the Mon tradition. Dissatisfied with the old practices of Buddhism the princemonk had launched a reform programme to make Thai Buddhism as close as possible to the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism. This involved the reform of monastic discipline, changes in details of rituals and the redefinition of the canon. One of the most important consequences was the establishment of the new Dhammayutikat order within the Thai Sangha.

The new order has been highly regarded ever since for its disciplinary strictness and its close association with the royal family. King Mongkut questioned the belief in the concept of divine kingship. That do not mean that he completely discarded the concept of divine kingship. He also rejected everything in religion that claimed supernatural origin. He was also very sceptical about the notion of heaven and hell which was prominent in Traiphum. To replace the Brahmanical rituals, he introduced Buddhist rituals.

After the death of King Mongkut, Rama V or King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) succeeded to the throne. He gave priority to the modernisation of the country. But did not neglected the traditional legitimising functions of a Buddhist king, namely promotion and purification of Buddhism and its Sangha. During his long reign, he built many monasteries and restored the old ones. He had a replica made of the Buddha Jinnasi, the image of the Buddha which was once pride of the Sukhothai period. The replica was housed in a new royal monastery, Wat Benjamaborpit. The king ordered for the revision of Tripitakas. The revised edition of it was a later translated from Pali into Thai. The king also received the relic of Buddha, found at Kapilvastu, from the viceroy of India. All these activities show his great zeal towards the devotion and propagation of Buddhism. He also curtailed the concept of divination of king. For example, King Chulalongkorn abolished the practice of prostration in front of the monarch. The King’s traditional duty of adhering to Dhammasattha was extended.

After the death of King Chulalongkorn, his son King Wachirawut (Rama VI; 1910–1925) accessioned to the throne. The new king perpetuated the traditional legitimising function of a Buddhist. The killing in war is not against the teaching of Buddha i.e. ahimsa. He encouraged the people to adhere to Dhamma. By adhering to Dhamma, peace and prosperity in the state can be brought. In order to strengthen people’s adherence to Dhamma and Buddhism, the king introduced Buddhist daily prayers in schools, police stations, army garrisons, government departments and even in prisons and mental hospitals.

King Wachirawut died in 1925. He was succeeded by King Prachathiphok (Rama VII; 1925-1932), the last absolute monarch of Thailand. The 1932 Revolution brought an end to absolute
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monarchy and it was replaced by constitutional monarchy. However, the present Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej still play important role in patronising and protecting the Buddhist Sangha.

Present form of Thai Buddhism

Thai rulers have patronised Buddhism by building and maintaining the monasteries and directly controlling the Sangha as it revealed from the above mentioned facts. Buddhism received severe jolt during Burmese invasion. But it improved its dignity and concretise its Sangha afterwards. Still Theravada form of Buddhism is practised by the Thais but it has undergone changes in the concept and practise in order to suit their people. Scholars generally believe that Theravada Buddhism adhere to more than one religious tradition and Southeast Asian peoples practise other strands of religion, generally classed under rubrics such as ‘non-Buddhist beliefs’, ‘folk religion’, ‘animism’, or ‘supernaturalism’. During course of centuries Buddhist and non-Buddhist practices and belief intermingled in such a way that at present it is impossible to draw a distinction between them. 22 The ruling dynasties tried to eliminate all the non-Buddhist practices in the Sangha but it became a part of Thai Buddhism.

Thais’ basic concept of Buddhism lies on Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, the three gems of Buddhism. The basic characteristics of Thai Buddhism is that it has a large body of monks—called Sangha and it is controlled by a “king of the monastic order” known as ‘Sangharaja’. Thai’s Sangha is well organised and spread throughout the country which is patronised by the ruler. The ‘Sangharaja’ advises the king, guides him in the Dhamma, and supports him in his administration of the state. The Sangha community, in fact, provides the environment in which awakened consciousness becomes possible as a result of the denial of the idea of absolute and permanent individuality. The monks stay in the monastery complex called arama (Hindu call it ashrama). Some members of the Sangha wander about without fixed abode, but most have their normal dwelling in the arama. Till the nineteenth century, the arama was not only a spiritual centre, it was also the social, cultural, educational and artistic centre of every town and village of Thailand. Till date Sangha has great impact on the Thai people. But in the villages it is too strong. In cosmopolitan cities like Bangkok, its impact has lessened to a great extent. In fact decline of Buddhist influence began with the British conquest of Sri Lanka and Burma.

Thais believe that suffering exists because of craving, and to eliminate this, one has to go through the Eight-fold path, i.e. Right View, Thought, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration.23 These practices can be summed up in the three Fundamental Principles namely not to do any evil, cultivate good and purify the mind. These noble paths are called Middle Way and are strictly followed by the monks. Monks are generally novices who stay in monastery. Some make their career in monkhood. The study in higher religious schools in order get good position in the society. For a rural youth from an average background, the monastery is a way to a better life, and if he is not committed to his religious position, he can leave the monkhood at any time.

To come out of suffering, Thais abandon their occupations and enter into the monkhood. This is expressed in Pali by the phrase agarasma anagariyam pabbajati, to leave (pabbajati) one’s home (agara), the basis of one’s livelihood, and enter a state of homelessness (anagariya).24 Monks follow

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a tough code of regulations. They depend totally on the community for support, making the rounds early each morning with their bowls begging for food. They attend morning and evening chanting sessions, readings and other rites, study the ancient texts, retire and wake up early to start the day again. Monks are, in the monasteries, involved in all aspects of life, even for building construction where they give blessings.

Challenges to Thai Buddhism

Thais practice the form of Buddhism which is based on Sangha and rulers were always concerned with organizing the Sangha. The present Thai Buddhist Sangha is well organized and it plays multifaceted role for the welfare of the Thais. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Thai Buddhism has various challenges to face. They are uses of drugs, rampant of Christianity, impact of westernization, sectarians upsurge, influx of communism, and evil practices.

Uses of drugs: It is a major challenge to Thai Buddhism in the present century. The trade of narcotics in South and South East Asia was started by the British in order to check the drain of gold from the west. South-East Asian countries were the most important countries which exported spices to Middle east and European countries and in turn earned gold. In the first half of the 19th century, the British evolved a novel technique to check it. In these efforts, they initiated measures to reverse the process. Among other measures, they started export of opium to China under official patronage. This opium was produced in India and was procured from Indian land revenue. The Chinese Opium was between 1839-42 totally legalised this trade in favour of Britain and this could be termed as first clear evidence of trade in narcotics.

Thailand has also a long history of opium use. Successive kings tried to curb the drugs use with penalties both for Opium traders and smokers. In the mid 19th century, however, the kings lifted the bans under the pressure from British entrepreneurs who were engaged to profit from the sale of Opium to China. As recently as 1930, the British were promoting the Opium trade in Thailand and helped establish an area of controlled Opium cultivation in the highlands, where several hundred members of the Hmong tribe were licensed to grow opium poppies. In the early 1960, the opium smoking was banned in Thailand and today there is not legal production of the drug. However, according to an estimate, Thailand has produced between 20 and 45 metric tones of Opium annually since 1983-84 season.

Despite the Thai Government’s vigorous eradication campaign, Thailand is also the region’s biggest marijuana producer and exporter. It is also the main source of South East Asian marijuana in the United States, where users pay a premium for the Thai variety. Prized for its high potency, Thai marijuana contains an average 9 per cent THC, about three times the average potency of marijuana available elsewhere. Most of the marijuana traffickers in Thailand are American, West European, and Canadian nationals who provide seeds, equipment, and chemical fertilizers to the growers. Americans often control the traffic of Thai marijuana and opium derivatives all the way to the wholesale market in networks that involve worldwide transaction.

The problem of drugs is now very complex in Thailand. Its trafficking is very highly organized and concentrated at the “Golden Triangle” region. It is very difficult for Thai government to curb it.
At present, there are in the northern part of the country 258 opium growing villages with 15,000 acres of opium poppy fields.\textsuperscript{27} The drug addicted people are not only the lower strata people but also monks of the rural area. Thus it is not only challenge to government but also the Thai Buddhist Sangha. His Majesty King Bhumibol Aduldyadej has launched a project on crop replacement with a view to eradicating Opium growing among the hill tribe farmers. Besides, curbing this crime more effectively, a Thai delegation led by Mr. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Deputy Foreign Minister visited China during 27-30 August 2000.\textsuperscript{28} During his visit, the Deputy Foreign Minister held talks with Senior Chinese officials, Deputy Ministers, Governors of Yunnan province in charge of narcotics suppression.

During the discussion, both sides agreed that narcotics was a threat to humanity and was a major cause for international organised crime, thus undermining the social and economic development of countries in the region. They felt urgent need to deal with it. Both sides saw the need for closer and more comprehensive cooperation. As this is major challenge to Thai Buddhism in this century, Thai Sangha should also come forward to tackle this situation. The Sangha should begin a consciousness drive and more educative programmes in the drug producing area.

\textit{Rampant of Christianity:} The conversion of Buddhist into Christianity is rampant in Thailand. The Christian missionaries financing the poor Thais for conversion to Christianity. It is a big challenge to Thai Buddhism. A certain hardcore section of the Christian missionary assert that Buddhism was a false religion or a religion of demons, and that only by following Jesus Christ one could only be saved or attain the blissful state of eternal life.\textsuperscript{29} This kind of thinking is widespread in the Christian circles. King Mongkut was not so aversed to Christianity. He felt that Christianity, as presented to him by the missionaries, was fictious and it was presented to him as arrogance as if Buddhism was a false one. Moreover he employed English teachers to teach his children for Western scientific knowledge and technical know-how but he made it clear that no Christian teaching would be allowed in the Grand Palace.

Later the tendency of showing inferior to other religion was improved by so many Thai Christians. When Chulalongkorn succeeded his father as Rama V, he opened the palace school to the public and welcomed missionaries to establish educational institutions for his subjects, provided that they did not use education as a means of converting Thais to Christianity. To some extent, the missionaries respected the wish of the king but their mission of conversion was continued through formal educational institutions. Now a days, a large number of Thai, prophesing Christianity, are present in both rural and urban part of Thailand. This has great challenge to Thai Sangha as they have negative attitude towards Buddhism. It can be checked only through passing legislation against the conversion.

\textit{Impact of Westernisation:} Westernisation is another challenge to Thai Buddhism. After the end of Second World War, people from every parts of the world have shown their interest in Buddhism. In Thai Buddhism, the Doctrine of the Awakened One has been traditionally accepted for generations. But with the revival of interest in Buddhism, people seem to be increasingly eager to know more about the Dhamma. People question on Dhamma. Strange as it may seem, this is partly due to the interest the Occidental World has taken in Buddhism. In times past religion has been more or less regarded in Thailand as ‘solace of the old’.\textsuperscript{30} But with the impact of the west in most matters and

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with the general interest shown towards Buddhism by Western intelligentsia, the Buddhists of Thailand, especially the younger generations who came into contact with the West, began to evince an inquisitive attitude towards their religion—a heritage which they have all along accepted as their own but which they have cared little to know about its true value. There is no doubt that Thai Buddhism has attracted many appendages to its fold, some of which are not quite in conformity with the teachings of the Buddha as discussed in the Buddhist Canon (*Tripitaka*). Thai rulers and many leaders of Buddhist thoughts have, therefore, come forward to purify the Dhamma of the many impurities that have crept into it. This challenge can be encountered through the Sangha. The Sangha should check the vices and immoral practices.

**Upsurge of Sectarians:** In Thai Buddhism, some Buddhist reformers came up and disregarded the rules of Thai Buddhist Sangha and started their own sects. Although, their doctrines have similarities with the Theravada Buddhism. Moreover, they did not work in conformity with Thais religious practices and rebelled against the present established Sangha. It has posed challenges to this century in maintaining the unity and development of Thai Buddhist Sangha.

The first sectarian cult Kru Ba, founded by Kru Ba Srivijaya (1873-1937), established and flourished in north Thailand. Its founder refused to acknowledge the spiritual and temporal authorities of established Thai Sangha. Regarded as holy man with deep spiritual insight, he led the multitudes to rebuild many important Buddhist monuments that were then in ruin. Under his leadership, his followers built a road up Doi Suthep mountain to the most holy Buddhist shrine in Chiangmai without government assistance. He ordained monks, ignoring the requirements laid down by the Thai Buddhist Sangha. There are still a few meditation masters who claim to be follower of Kru Ba sect. They are all known as healers of the sick through the use of traditional herbs, or as religious psychiatrists using holy water or various spiritual mediums to help their patients. They were also known as astrologers, but none have acquired reputations as social reformers or learned monk. They have never rebelled against Thai Sangha. The followers of this sects are even regarded by the royal court, military and civilians as they have played the role of healers of the sick.

The second sect was founded by Phra Bodhiraksha (b. 1934) also known by the religious name Santiasoka. He was ordained in both the Dhammayutika and Mahanikaya orders. But both these orders could not satisfied him. Seeing many discrepancies in the practices of Buddhism, he gave up the ordination disregarding the Ecclesiastical Law of 1962 and founded a new sect in 1975 with its headquarters at Bangkok. He openly rebelled against the present established Sangha and criticised the practices and teachings of all the leading monks. He had also a number of followers. Santiasoka followed the principle of purity and objected to follow the rules laid down in Ecclesiastical Law. He was against the taking meat (which is not normally the custom of Theravada tradition), soft drinks, tea or coffee, and excluding from all kinds of ceremonies. Claiming to be enlightened spiritually, he combines scholarship and meditation and stressed social reform rather than upholding the *status quo*. Still, he lacks deep insight into Buddhist studies. He has not mastered the Pali language nor the realities of Thai society. In spite of that he attracted support from some very important people. This has led the government and the Supreme Council of the Sangha to ignore its challenge rather than to challenge it legally.

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Another sect founded by Venerable Luang Pho Sod (1884-1959), abbot of a small temple of Thonburi, was contemporary to Santiasoka. He claimed to have rediscovered a Dhammakaya lost to the Sangha for hundreds of years, presumably since the Thai converted to Singhala Buddhism. He was influenced by the Buddhism as practised by Tibetan and Japanese. He had good meditation practices based on Vajrayana form of Buddhism. Through meditation, he attracted mostly foreigners. In 1957, he ordained the first batch of British monks, one of whom is still in the northeast where he has been reordained in the Dhammayutika order and is a close disciple of the Venerable Acharya Maha Boowa. One of the follower of this sect was hardcore Buddhist namely Kittivuddho Bhikku (b. 1936). He was against the communists. Once he said, to preserve the religion, monarchy and the nation, one should uproot the communist. That can not be a sin. He worked closely with the elite and embraces the materialism of the modern world.

In order to see much discrepancies in the religious practices in Mahaniyikaya (the most popular sect in Thai Buddhism), another sect (Nikaya), i.e. Dhammayuttika sect was established. Mahaniyikaya has now numerous followers than the Dhammayuttika and the ratio in the number of monks of the two sects being 35:1. The Dhammayuttika Nikaya was founded in 1833 A.D. by King Mongkut. After having spent considerable time as the monk, the king was well versed in the Dhamma, besides many other branches of knowledge, including Pali, the canonical language of Theravada Buddhism. The reason behind the foundation of the Dhammayuttika Nikaya was to enable the monks to lead a more disciplined and scholarly life in accordance with the pristine teachings of Buddha. The differences between the Mahaniyikaya and Dhammayuttika Nikayas are, however, not great; at most they concern only matters of discipline, and never the Doctrine. Monks of both sects follow the same 227 Vinaya rules as laid down in the Patimokkha of the Vinaya Pitaka, and both receive the same respect from the public. In their general appearance and daily routine of life too, except for the slight difference in manners of putting on the yellow robes, monks of the two Nikayas differ very little from one another.

Influx of Communism: The hardcore Marxist intellectuals found Buddhism, rather than the teachings of the Buddha, an obstacle to social liberation. Some comrades argue that Buddhism is the way lead to personal growth and compromise with power. The influx of communism does not only pose problem to the popular Thai monarchal system assisted by democracy but also to Thais devotion in well established Thai Buddhism and its Sangha.

It is very difficult to say when communism began penetrating its root in the lands of yellow robes. The history of Communist party in Thailand perhaps begins with the foundation of Far East Bureau of Shanghai. This Bureau, after one year (probably in 1927), despatched six members of the Chinese Communist Party to Thailand with general instructions to lay the basis for the party among the Chinese in Thailand. We know very little about the activities of these six Chinese but in 1927 the Thai arrested one Chinese who was accused of being a communist agent and trying to organise a Communist Party. In 1925, it was reported that Ho Chih Minh sent a group of Vietnamese from his Vietnamese Revolutionary League, headquartered in Canton, to work among the Vietnamese living in North-eastern Thailand.

The immediate result is not known but no doubt the Vietnamese were favourable towards the communist approach for socio-economic upliftment. It is also well known that Ho Chih Minh has April, 2001
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lived in Thailand during the 1928-1930 period and he would have strengthened his hold on the Vietnamese living there. Obviously, from the days of their efforts in Thailand, the communist concept attract the Thai national Chinese and to a lesser extent, the Vietnamese minorities. In 1930, Malayan Communist Party was formed and was given the responsibility of Siamese. Immediately after one year, the Chinese Communist Party of Siam was formed with the Youth League of Siam. Based in Thailand, this organisation took over the charge from the Communist Party of Malaysia and began its activities. Thus formally, the Chinese Communist Party was formed in Thailand in 1931 and emphasis was laid upon the ethnic community. The communist began their revolution in support of their demands.

Keeping in view of the excessive demand of the communists (mostly were the Thai national Chinese and Vietnamese), the Royal Thai Government passed, for the first time in 1933, the anti-communist law but was not strictly enforced. During the World War II, some Thai formed anti Japanese movement called Free Thai Movement supported by the Thai Minister in Washington. In 1942, the first Congress of the Communist Party of Thailand was held. The party was open to all Thai citizens, but the Thais did not show much interest in joining the members were mainly Chinese and few Vietnamese. However, very little was done by the Free Thais during the war, and there was no real communist led nationalist movement as there was in Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

After the World War II, the activities of the Communist Party of Thailand expanded. In 1946, anti-communist law was lifted because of Soviet agreement. A communist member of Parliament, Prasert Sapsunthon, then Secretary General of the party, claimed that the membership at time was increased to 50,000. The coup of the Field Marshal Phibulsongram in 1947 put an abrupt end to the freedom of the Communist Party. In 1948, many communists were arrested, though many also escaped, including Prasert Sapsunthon, who reportedly went to China. Moreover, keeping in view of the support of Soviet Union, the activities of the communists were not declared illegal. In spite of that, comrades continued their activities of increasing their supporters. In between 1949 and 1952, few communist cells were formed in the Northeast Thailand and their meetings were held. An anti-communist cycle occurred again in Thailand with the act of Communists of 1952, which made communism unlawful, and a few left-wingers were arrested late in the year. The party somehow managed to struggle along, although congratulatory messages to the Chinese in 1956 and 1958, plus attendance at occasional communist meetings abroad, were the only overt signs of its continued existence.

Sometime in 1963 or 1964, the communists decided to launch an overt Thai insurgency in 1965. It seems likely that it emanated from the Chinese Communists in Peking since a Western ambassador in Peking made it known in January, 1965, that armed insurgency in Thailand could be expected before the end of the year.

The communist insurgency broke out in almost every part of Thailand except Central plain but not in unified way. Their characteristics varies from one region to others but it continued for eight years. With this overt insurgency, the strength of Thai Communism developed a lot. Their armed elements have grown from a few hundred guerrillas to about 5,000 or over 6,000. The number of
their committed village supporters were around 50,000. Through their development work, they made
great impact in Thai social life.

**Evil Practices:** In Thai Buddhism, evil practices have entered which have changed the whole
concept of pure Theravadin Buddhism. The rules of the Buddhist monk explicitly forbid to gamble
or even to touch money. The practices of buying lottery ticket is very much in practice among the
Wadsaancaw monks. The monks of this monastery are closely associated with wealth, with monetary
gain and especially with luck in hazardous situation.

The *Patimokkha* refers to prevent gossip about the sexual behaviour of the monks. Though in
rural monasteries young monks may be observed speaking freely to females in public, sometimes
including women who may regard them as potential partners, they may not place themselves in
physical proximity to them. But the majority of the monks observed strictly the *Patimokkha*.
Besides the monks uses magical objects which are against the rules of the monastic order.

In this twenty-first century, Thai Buddhism has taken up a long journey. Various rulers were
trying hard to purify the Sangha. They were to some extent successfully removed the imperious. But,
with the passage of time, Thais have adopted and added within it various elements. Now Thai
Buddhism is facing various challenges in this century. Sangha has to face in order to maintain the
purity of the Theravadin form of Buddhism.

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