

**BUDDHISM AS UNIVERSAL RELIGION
AND AS CIVIC RELIGION :
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON A TOUR OF BUDDHIST
CENTERS IN CENTRAL THAILAND***

by

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Each of the great world religions has involved universal and more particularistic elements. More specifically, each of these great religions has maintained a significant universalistic emphasis while, at the same time, it has become oriented to the more particularistic concerns of a number of different ethnic groups and nations. In the case of Buddhism, including the Theravāda tradition, these two emphases have coexisted from a very early period. From the time of the Buddha himself, Buddhism has presented itself as a universal message directed to all men quite apart from their ethnic or national identities. It is also true that since the time of King Asoka (3rd century of the Buddhist era, 3rd century B.C.), when Buddhism began to spread outside the confines of its original homeland in northeastern India, it has quite self-consciously taken on the role of a civic religion directed to the peoples of the particular lands where it has become established and prospered.

In the Theravāda context (as in other Buddhist traditions) the universalistic emphasis has remained pre-eminent in the strictly doctrinal strand of the tradition. The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are clearly universal in their intention and relevance. And the same is true of the central emphases on the co-dependent origination of all

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phenomena, the impermanence of all things, and the *anatta* or selfless character of all reality. Despite the slightly different interpretations which have been developed in various contexts, the universal thrust of the Dhammic and Abhidhammic teaching has remained basically intact.

However, the theoretical expressions of Theravāda Buddhism are not limited to the strictly doctrinal or Abhidhammic modes. Quite to the contrary, from the time of the Buddha himself until the present, this universally oriented strand of the tradition has been closely correlated with a strong emphasis on Buddhology and cosmology.¹ Moreover in these Buddhological and cosmological strands of the tradition in which various kinds of mythology and symbolism have played a prominent role, both a universal and a more particularistic style of expression have been prominent. In this paper I propose to focus attention on the Theravāda tradition in Thailand, and to highlight some of the ways in which the mythology and the symbolism of the Buddhological and cosmological traditions have expressed and nurtured Theravāda universalism on the one hand, and Thai Buddhist particularism on the other. At the outset I will deal with the historical tradition, and will utilize primarily textual and pre-modern materials. And then, with this background in mind, I will report on a recent tour of four contemporary Buddhist centers in central Thailand.

At the level of Buddhology the emphasis on the universal and more particularistic thrusts of the historical Theravāda tradition in Thailand are nicely illustrated by the two most important Buddhological texts which have been produced by Thai Buddhists. The first of these two texts is the Pathamasambodhikathā which was written in Bangkok in the first half of the nineteenth century by Prince Paramanuchitchinorot who, a few years after completing the text became the Sangharājā or highest

1) For a discussion of the roots and development of the Buddhological tradition in Theravāda Buddhism, see my paper on "The Many Lives of Buddha" which will appear in Reynolds and Capps, eds. *The Biographical Process* to be published by Mouton : The Hague, in Vol. 11 of their *Religion and Reason* series in late 1974. For a similar discussion of the roots and development of the cosmological tradition see my "Introduction" to the translation of the Trai Phum Phra Ruang which will be published under the title *The Three Worlds of King Ruang* in late 1974 or early 1975.

ecclesiastical officer in the land.² The second is the biographically structured chronicle called the *Jinakālamālipakaranam* or *Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror* which was written in Chiang Mai in the early 16th century by Ratanapañña Thera.³

The Pathamasambodikathā is a classical type of sacred biography which continues and culminates the tradition of universally oriented biographies which began, insofar as the Theravāda tradition is concerned, with the Niddānakathā which was included as the Introduction to the *Jātaka Commentary* in Sri Lanka in the 5th century A.D.⁴ From one perspective the Pathamasambodhikathā is of great interest because it represents the most comprehensive, the richest, and the most literarily successful of the Theravāda biographies of the classical type. Thus it brings together in one well-integrated and vividly written literary unit stories of the Buddha's previous lives and royal genealogy, an extended account of his life as Gotama from the time of his descent from the Tusita heaven (his birth) to his Parinibbāna (his death), and a comparatively short, but fascinating account of the fate of his relics. However, from the point of view of our present interest the primary importance of the Pathamasambodhikathā lies in the fact that it provides a prime example of the universalistic emphasis within the Thai Buddhological tradition. Thus the Prince's account of Gotama's life includes no specifically national references beyond India itself. And his account of the fate of the relics is similarly devoid of materials which relate Buddhism to any specific ethnic group or nation; rather it describes the distribution of the Buddha's relics which took place immediately after his cremation; it describes the re-distribution of the relics during the reign of King Asoka; and it then moves directly into an account of the decline of the religion and the final events which will take place at the end of the present age when the Buddha's relics will come together, when his last sermon will be preached, and when his final *dhatu* or relic Nibbāna will be attained.

2) Bangkok : Ministry of Education, 1962.

3) Translated by Jayawickrama of the Pali Text Society and published as No. 36 in the *Translation Series*. London : Luzac & Co., 1969.

4) T.W. Rhys-Davids, tr., *Buddhist Birth Stories*. Boston : Houghton and Mifflin, 1880.

The other major Buddhological work produced in the Thai tradition—namely the *Jinakālamāli* of Ratanapañña Thera—continues and culminates a rather different tradition of more particularistically oriented biographical chronicles which first came to the fore through the writing of the *Mahāvamsa* in Sri Lanka in the 5th century A.D.⁵ Like the *Pathamasambodhikathā*, the *Jinakālamāli* includes stories of the Buddha's previous lives, an account of his life as Gotama, and a series of accounts which deal with the fate of his relics. However, the *Jinakālamāli* differs from the *Pathamasambodhikathā* in at least two important respects. In Ratanapañña Thera's work less emphasis is placed on the account of Gotama's life, and much more attention is devoted to the accounts of the relics and other symbols of the Buddha's continuing power. And, what is more significant, both the account of Gotama's life and the stories of the relics are structured in a way which highlights the relationship between Theravāda Buddhism and the history of particular national communities. The Thera's way of recounting the Buddha's life as Gotama puts into the foreground the stories of journeys and predictions which prefigure the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. And the chronicle-style accounts which relate the later "epochs of the Conqueror" describe the process through which Buddhist symbols and the Buddhist community became established in the island Kingdom. And they then go on to describe the way in which these holy objects and traditions were subsequently transmitted from Sri Lanka to the kingdom of Lannathai where, according to the text, they were enthusiastically received and supported by the reigning dynasty. Thus the *Jinakālamāli* reaches its climax not in the universalistic mode of the *Pathamasambodhikathā*, but rather in the establishment of the Theravāda tradition as a basic element in the civic religion of northern Thailand.

In the sphere of cosmological thought and symbolism the same kind of polarity between universal and more particularistic elements in the Thai Buddhist tradition can be discerned, though in this case the polarity is manifested in a rather different way. In the cosmological context the

5) Geiger, Wilhelm, tr. *Mahāvamsa* (Pali Text Society *Translation Series* No. 3: London, 1912).

contrast can be seen between the major textual forms of expression in which the universalistic element is pre-eminent, and the architectural, socio-religious forms of expression through which each particular Thai Kingdom sought to portray itself as a complete, localized embodiment of the classical cosmological structure.

The two most important and interesting Thai Buddhist texts which are essentially cosmological in character are, first of all, the *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* or *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, and, secondly, the *Phra Malai Sutta*.⁶ The *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, which was written in the middle of the 14th century by Phya Lithai, who was then the heir-apparent to the throne of the great Thai kingdom of Sukothai, is a highly significant work because it achieves, for the first time in the history of the Theravāda tradition (so far as we are able to determine from presently available sources), a truly comprehensive synthesis of the major Buddhist cosmological motifs. The *Trai Phum* quite systematically describes the conditions of beings in the eleven realms of the world of desire (*kāma-bhūmi*), the sixteen celestial realms of the world with only a remnant of material qualities (*rūpabhūmi*), and the four highest celestial realms which make up the world without material qualities (*arūpabhūmi*). It then goes on to describe the traditional Buddhist cosmography which is organized around the central axis provided by Mt. Meru, as well as the periodic creation and destruction of the lower cosmic realms including all of those within the realm of desire. And it then concludes its thoroughly universalistic account of the three worlds with a description of the Path which all beings must follow if they are to free themselves from the ultimately unsatisfying cycle of death and rebirth, and to attain the highest goal of *Nibbāna* or Final Release. The *Phra Malai Sutta*, on the other hand, was written in Chiang Mai in the 16th century, and culminates quite a different tradition of Theravāda cosmological and visionary literature.⁷ The *Sutta* begins by recounting the visit of a famous Sinhalese

6) *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* (Bangkok : National Teacher's Association, 1962). *Dika Malai Deva Sut* (Bangkok : Thambanakhan Press, 1971). At present my wife and I are working on an English translation of the *Trai Phum* which should be reaching the publication stage in late 1974 or early 1975.

7) For a discussion of this tradition see Eugene Denis, "L'Origine Cingalaise du *Prāh Malāy*", *Felicitation Volume of Southeast Asian Studies Presented to H.H. Prince Dhaninivat*, Vol. II (Bangkok : Siam Society, 1965), pp. 329-338.

monk named Phra Malai to the sub-human realms of woe. It then recounts his visit to the heaven of the thirty-three gods where he meets the great god Indra and the Future Buddha Sri Ariya Metteyya, and where he questions the latter concerning the time of his coming into the world. And it reaches its climax with the great Bodhisatta's admonition that those who wish to be reborn at the time of his coming should gain the necessary merit by listening to the chanting of the Mahavessantara Jātaka. Thus the Phra Malai Sutta obviously differs from the Trai Phum Phra Ruang in terms of its comprehensiveness and its soteriological emphasis; however, what is of more importance to us is the fact that both texts present their cosmological descriptions and their soteriological messages in a thoroughly universalistic mode.

But in spite of the universalism of the major Thai cosmological texts, the more particularistic pole of the cosmological tradition also played a crucial role in the history of classical Thai Buddhism. As we have already suggested, this role can be most clearly discerned in the sphere of architecture and socio-religious patterns. Thus the capitals of the various pre-modern Thai kingdoms were laid out around a central representation of Mt. Meru, often in the form of a stupa known as a Golden Mount. And in each kingdom the reigning monarch was symbolically and ritually associated with the various divine rulers in the heavenly realms, the court with the lesser devāta or heavenly beings, and the common people with ordinary human beings. In other words, important aspects of the universal cosmic symbolism were appropriated so as to provide a basic element in the civic religious orientation which undergirded the specific political and social structure in each particular Theravāda kingdom.⁸

During the modern period of Thai Buddhist history new modes of thinking and new types of experience have brought about many changes

8) For an excellent discussion of the ways in which the cosmological homologies were operative in various traditional kingdoms in Southeast Asia (including those with a Theravāda orientation) see Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia* (Data Paper No. 18 of the Southeast Asia Program; Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell, 1956).

in the Thai Buddhist tradition. And in the process both the Buddhological and the cosmological styles of expression have been adapted to changing conditions. But in spite of the changes which have taken place, both strands of the tradition continue to exert a powerful influence in Buddhist life, and both continue to be expressed in a universal and in a more particularistic mode. What is more, this continuing influence of the Buddhological and cosmological types of Buddhist mythology and symbolism, and the persisting polarity between the universalistic and the more particularistic orientations, are evident in many areas of contemporary Buddhist life.

The fact that these emphases continue to be expressed in the symbolic and ritual patterns which reach various segments of the population could be demonstrated in a number of different ways. However, I would like to illustrate the point by briefly describing four commonly visited Buddhist centers which I observed during a recent tour of central Thailand. In fact these centers were not originally chosen because they fit the interpretative framework which I had previously developed through my more historically oriented studies of the Thai tradition. On the contrary, they were originally chosen as appropriate sites for family sightseeing, without any special scholarly purpose in mind. However, when the trip was completed, and I began to reflect on what we had observed in the context of our sightseeing, it became clear that these centers, taken together, vividly illustrated the continuing vitality of the Buddhological and cosmological themes on the one hand, and the continuing influence of the universal and more particularistic modes of expression on the other.

The first two centers—namely, Wat Phairongwua in Suphanburi province, and the Phra Pathom Chedi at Nakorn Pathom—are basically Buddhological in their structure. The former is a new center, still under construction, which is being built up very rapidly through the influence of a charismatic monk named Luang Paw Khom.⁹ The second is the very large, very ancient, and very famous *chedi* which some traditions identify

9) According to a report in the daily newspaper (Thai Rath, Sept. 23, 1973, p. 16) more than \$1,000,000 has already been spent in the construction of this center and present plans call for the expenditure of another \$1,000,000 during the next several years.

as the center of the fabled kingdom of Suvannabhūmi where the Buddhist presence in Southeast Asia was first established, perhaps as early as the 3rd century B.C.

Though the center at Wat Phairongwua has gained considerable notoriety because of some very vivid three-dimensional depictions of the grotesque and often obscene conditions into which those who commit evil deeds are said to be reborn, the basic structure of the very extensive exhibition which is presented in the *wat* compound is Buddhological in character.¹⁰ In the eastern segment of the main exhibition area there is a very extensive display in which scenes from the Buddha's life associated with his birthplace at Kapilavastu are depicted. Towards the back is a "palace" which contains, on the top floor, a room in which there is a representation of the Future Buddha in the Tusita heaven prior to his birth as Gotama, and below that a room in which there is a representation of a scene associated with the Buddha's birth. (Significantly this room also contains a plaque on which is inscribed the original vow taken by Luang Paw Khom in which he committed himself to following the Path throughout his entire life, to ridding himself of any desire for personal riches, and to constructing images of the Buddha.) In front of the palace there are three-dimensional representations of scenes from the Buddha's youth, and in the foreground there is a very large display which portrays the Buddha's Great Departure from Kapilavastu on the back of his fabulous horse Kanthaka. The central section of the main exhibit (and actually the area as a whole) is dominated by a gigantic black image of the Buddha at the point of his Enlightenment; and in front of this great image is a fascinating representation of the Wheel of the Dhamma being pulled and guided by monastic figures as it is pushed from behind by figures who clearly represent ordinary working-class laymen. Finally, the section of the compound directly to the west of the central image contains a variety of different buildings and displays which, at first glance, seem to be a kind of random collection.

10) The depictions of the various pleasurable heavens and the realms of woe are located in a second, quite distinct area which is behind the main segment of the *wat* compound which concerns us here.

Through closer observation, however, a definite pattern can be discerned. The rear portion of this western segment of the exhibition area is dominated by a sala where Luang Paw Khom sits as he speaks with his devotees and visitors, where he distributes amulets, and where he receives offerings from the faithful. Near the sala, in full view, is a large poster which proclaims that the monk, whose original vow to practice the Path and to construct images had already been correlated with the birth of the Buddha, has attained a spiritual level which qualifies him as a man who is, at the same time "truly Thai". ("Thai thæ") "truly Chinese". ("Chin thæ") "truly European", ("farang thæ") and so forth. Moreover, a similar emphasis is reflected in the character and contents of the various buildings and other symbols which are situated in this western section of the compound. Those which have already been completed include buildings and a variety of other symbolic expressions which are representative of Thai Buddhism, of Chinese Buddhism, and of Buddhism in Japan. Quite clearly then, what is being expressed and communicated in this area, both in the interpretation of Luang Paw Khom's presence, and in the various exhibits, is the extension of the Buddha's life through a tradition which makes universal men of those who practice it, and a tradition which is well on the way to universality at the level of its actual communal life.¹¹

Unlike Wat Phairongwua, which only recently became a significant Buddhist center, the Phra Pathom Chedi at Nakorn Pathom has a long and illustrious tradition behind it. Both in the pre-Thai period and in the course of the history of the later Thai kingdoms, this famous *chedi* has been rebuilt and enlarged on a number of different occasions. It received basically its present form through the repair and reconstruction efforts encouraged by King Mongkut in the latter half of the 19th century; and from that time forward it has been one of the most sacred and visited shrines in all of Thailand.

11) In this connection it is interesting to note that in our conversation with Luang Paw Khom we were very quickly confronted with a strong Buddhist missionary message. His approach left no doubt in our minds that he understood his own vocation as a builder and teacher as an effort to further the spread of Buddhism and, by so doing, to further actualize the universality of the historical Buddhist community.

As Paul Mus has long since demonstrated, a *chedi*, even in the Theravāda context, is conceived not only as a form of cosmological architecture, but also as a symbol both of the Buddha's career which culminates in his Parinibbāna, and of the continuing efficacy of his power and message in the life of the Buddhist community.¹² Thus it is not surprising that this *chedi*, like many other similar Buddhist monuments, incorporates representations which evoke the stories of important events in the Founder's life and ministry. Typically, the eastern chapel of this great monument contains an image which represents the crucial moment of the Buddha's Great Awakening under the Bo tree at Bodh Gaya. The story is continued, as one proceeds in a clockwise direction around the monument, by the image in the southern chapel which portrays the Buddha as he preaches his first sermon in the Deer Park at Benares, and thereby "sets in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma". The third image which one confronts as he continues his clockwise circumambulation—that is to say the one which is located in the western chapel—is, not unexpectedly, a great reclining Buddha which represents the Founder at the moment at which he attained his Parinibbāna. But what of the fourth and final image which one finds ensconced in the northern chapel? It is a standing Buddha figure which is important, and receives special veneration, but its significance in relation to the preceding three images is not immediately obvious.

The significance of this final image becomes clear, however, when three facts which are known to those who frequent the *chedi* are taken into account. The first of these facts is that this standing image which is located in the northern chapel bears the name of Phra Ruang Rochanarit, Phra Ruang being a popular designation for the famous line of monarchs of the Sukothai kingdom to whom the Thai have traditionally looked as national founders and pre-eminent supporters of Buddhism.¹³ The second fact is that the head which was used in the casting of the present image was originally attached to an image of the Sukothai period

12) See especially his *Barabadur : Esquisse d'une histoire du Bouddhisme fondée sur la critique des textes* (Hanoi, Imp. d'Extrême Orient, 1935).

13) Rochanarit is a descriptive term, which refers to the glory and magic power which has traditionally been associated with the monarchs of this dynasty.

which was quite possibly a portrait statue commissioned by one of the latter members of the Ruang dynasty in order to represent himself and the Buddha in a single image.¹⁴ And the third important fact is that the statue now contains, in its base, the ashes of the king who commissioned it and had it placed in its present position—namely King Vajirawut (reigned, 1910-25) who is well-known as the pre-eminent formulator and exponent of modern Thai nationalism, and the place of Buddhism within it. When these various bits of information are taken together it becomes evident that this image, which extends the Buddhological imagery beyond the Parinibbāna of the Founder, represents the continuation of the Buddha's life and work in the life and work of the Thai kings, and the establishment and the maintenance of the Buddhist faith as a basic element in the civic religion of the Thai nation.¹⁵

The other two contemporary Buddhist centers which I observed in the course of our tour of central Thailand—namely Wat Phutudom in Pathumthani province, and the complex of buildings in the royal palace area in Bangkok—utilize symbolic patterns which are basically cosmological in character. The former, which expresses the cosmological tradition in an essentially universalistic mode, is being built through the efforts of Phrakhru Udomphawanaphirat who was formerly a resident at Wat Mahathat in Bangkok. The center is still in the early stages of development; but in spite of the fact that much work obviously remains

14) The fact that some of the later Sukothai images were of the portrait statue type has only recently been recognized. For some background and discussion see, Barbara Andaya, "Statecraft in the Reign of Lu Thai of Sukhodaya," *Cornell Journal of Social Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Special Issue on Southeast Asia), Spring, 1971, pp. 61-83.

15) Interesting variations on this same pattern are apparent in the symbolism which is utilized in other Buddhist *wats* and *chedi* in various sections of the country. For example, at the very famous Wat Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai, the image which completes the Buddhological symbolism which dominates the most sacred portion of the *wat* compound has standing before it, as if to mediate its power and message to those who visit the site, two life-sized pictures. The one on the right side is a picture of King Phumipol, the reigning Thai monarch, while the one on the left is the great monk-hero of the Lannathai area who was responsible for building the road to the temple, Khruba Sriwichai.

to be done before the building in the compound is completed, the basic structure of the main exhibition can be clearly discerned, and the *wat* has for several years been receiving a steady stream of visitors from Bangkok and from other sections of the country as well.¹⁶ The area around the royal palace, where cosmological themes are expressed in a more particularistic mode, is, of course, very rich in traditional associations and what is more, it is probably the most famous and visited site in Thailand, Buddhist or otherwise.

When the visitor reaches Wat Phutudom (like Wat Phairongwua, this *wat* is most accessible by boat), he finds that the main exhibit is in the northern half of the compound, the other half being occupied by an ordinary *vihan* and a gigantic metal elephant which serves as a kind of added attraction for visitors and especially for their children. In the important northern half of the temple area the foreground is taken up with a large artificial and revolving mango tree, and a similarly large and revolving "wheel of the Dhammas". These exhibits are designed to evoke the famous story of the Buddha's ascent into the heaven of the thirty-three gods which originated from a sacred mango tree in the city of Sāvatti; they are designed to suggest the purpose of his ascent which was to preach the Dhamma to his mother; and they are especially designed to remind those viewing them of the related story of the great miracle of "opening the world"—that is to say, the miracle of making visible the conditions of the beings in every cosmic realm—which the Buddha is said to have performed at the time of his return to the earth. After the visitor passes by these exhibits, he proceeds into the main temple building where the great cosmic vision is portrayed for all to see. His tour begins in the dark recesses of the temple basement where he observes depictions of the various hells (*narok*), the realm of the suffering ghosts (*peta*), and the realm of the sub-human giants or *asura*, and where he is informed concerning the various kinds of sins which have caused beings to be reborn in these terrible places. On the main floor, where a great Buddha image is seated, he passes through and observes the realms

16) In fact our attention was originally drawn to this *wat* by an account of a journey there which was written up in a professional teachers' magazine. See Snguan Raktham, "Namtieo Wat Phutudom : Chom Prachao Poed Lok", *Suphasa*, October, 1971, pp. 49-55.

of the animals and of men. And then, as he climbs through a series of upper rooms which are constructed one above the other and reach all the way to the temple roof, he passes through and observes the six heavenly realms of the devāta (divine beings who enjoy conditions of great sensual pleasure because of the merit which they have gained in their previous lives), the sixteen higher heavenly realms which can be attained through the practice of certain forms of jhanic meditation, and the four highest heavenly realms of meditation which are associated with other forms of jhanic attainment. Moreover, a fascinating twist is given to the visitor's tour of the thirty-one cosmic realms by the fact that the heavenly realms are depicted in nine sets (one set being depicted in each of the nine upper rooms), each of which is associated with a particular planet and with a particular segment of the week. Therefore, as the visitor climbs upward through the twenty-six realms which extend above of the realm of men, he passes through the major astronomical segments of the celestial regions and, in addition, he passes through a full temporal cycle as represented by a calendric week.¹⁷ Thus, by the time his journey is completed, the visitor has been provided with a visual and symbolic image of the structure of the cosmos in terms of both space and time; and, in addition, he has been vividly apprised of the opportunity which he shares with all men to improve, through the practice of proper morality and meditation, the status which he presently occupies in the universal cosmic hierarchy.

Whereas the symbolic patterns and imagery which have been utilized at Wat Phutudom emphasize aspects of the traditional Buddhist cosmology which concern each of the thirty-one realms and are basically universal in character, the symbolic patterns which are expressed in and around the royal palace in Bangkok focus more specifically on the Meru cosmography, and are more particularistic in their intention. Thus the Phukaothong or Golden Mount, which is situated nearby in the compound of Wat Saket, serves as a permanent representation of Mt. Meru in its role as the central axis of the present Thai Kingdom. The buildings in the main royal palace compound are architecturally constructed so as to

17) These various associations were pointed out to me by Phrakhrū Udomphawana-phirat in a conversation at Wat Phutudom on Nov. 23, 1973.

voke the impression of the devāta realms associated with the Meru cosmography, and the compound itself is dotted with sites which bear the names of specific devāta heavens. And, to cite only one more specific example, the various gates which guard the entrance to the nearby Chitrlada palace, where the present king resides when he is in Bangkok, are explicitly associated with the abodes of the four guardian deities whose heavenly realm is situated on the four mountain peaks which surround the peak of Mt. Meru where the palace of the great royal deity is located.¹⁸ In the modern era it is certainly true that these and similar symbolic patterns have lost much of the force which they had up until 1932 when a coup d'état brought an end to the so-called "absolute" monarchy. But at the same time, they have persisted down to the present day; and what is more, they continue to enhance the aura of sacrality which surrounds the present Thai king, and to re-enforce the conception that the Thai nation continues to be structured as a microcosmic order organized in accordance with Buddhist principles.¹⁹

In the course of this present paper I have utilized categories and methods which have been developed within the discipline of the history of religions (Religionswissenschaft) in order to relate and to interpret a variety of expressions of Thai Buddhism, some classical and some contemporary. By way of summarizing and concluding the discussion, I would like to suggest some implications for further research which can be drawn from the approach which I have taken, and from the materials which I have chosen to light.

In the first and more textually-oriented segment of this paper I have focused attention on the fact that there are four specifically Thai Buddhist texts which extend and culminate two of the three major strands of theoretical expression within the Theravāda tradition. At the level of Buddhology the Thai tradition has produced the Pathamasambodhikathā, which extends and culminates the classical tradition of Buddha bio-

18) For a detailed discussion of this whole topic see Prince Dhani Niwat, "The Royal Palaces" (Thai Culture Series, No. 23; Bangkok Fine Arts Dept., 1957).

19) For a study which clearly describes this conception and portrays its actual sociopolitical operation see Lucien Hanks "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order", *American Anthropologist*, 54 (Dec, 1962), 1247-61.

ographies, as well as the *Jinakālamāli* which extends and culminates the equally important tradition of biographical chronicles. And at the level of cosmology the Thai tradition has produced the *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, which is the most comprehensive and systematic of the Theravāda treatises on the subject, as well as the *Phra Malai Sutta* which represents the highpoint of a significant genre of Theravāda literature which deals with cosmic visions and journeys. The existence of these important and fascinating texts, quite apart from the very specific and limited use which I have made of them for the purposes of this particular study, strongly suggests that Theravāda scholars must begin to give the same sort of careful attention to the later expressions of the Theravāda literary and textual tradition which they have previously given to the canonical and commentarial texts which were produced in the earlier periods of Theravāda history.²⁰

In the process of interpreting these texts and related historical materials I have highlighted the fact that the classical expressions of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand reveal a dual focus. On the one hand very important mythic and symbolic patterns, both at the Buddhological and cosmological levels, express a Theravāda orientation which is explicitly and consistently universal in character. And on the other side equally important mythic and symbolic patterns which appear at both of these levels of the tradition express an orientation in which Theravāda Buddhism is presented primarily as an element in the civic religious ethos of a particular Thai kingdom. The existence of this polarity in materials of this kind suggests that a further exploration of the more universal and more civic orientations, and of the actual dynamics of their interaction

20) The need for this kind of study is clearly demonstrated by the fact that, in contrast to the large number of canonical texts and the significant number of early commentaries which have been translated into western languages only one of the four texts mentioned (the *Jinakālamāli*) is available in translation, and it is clearly evident from the introduction that even in this case the translator was not primarily interested in presenting the text from the point of view of its significance as an expression of Theravāda religion. (See *Jinakālamāli*, *op. cit.*)

in the course of Thai history, would provide a fruitful subject for further historical research,²¹

Finally, the observations which I have made concerning contemporary Buddhist centers in central Thailand suggest that the persistence of traditional mythic and symbolic patterns, and the continuing interaction of the universal and more particularistic Buddhist perspectives, are interesting and important phenomena which deserve a great deal more attention from students of contemporary Thai religion and society.

21) I have treated a few limited aspects of this interaction in "Sasana khong phon-lamuang nai prawatsat Thai" which appeared in the *Social Science Review* (Bangkok) in the fall, 1971 issue.