

COSMOLOGY, FOREST MONKS AND SANGHA RECONSTRUCTION IN THE EARLY BANGKOK PERIOD

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This paper outlines the forest monastic tradition in pre-reform Chakri Siam, and the declining status and relative position of forest monks in the hierarchy and structure of the early Chakri Sangha. However, it should be noted that historical information on forest monasticism in Thailand from the beginning of the First until the Fifth Reign is scarce and somewhat patchy at best. We know that from the Fourth Reign onwards, many of the "reformist" and doctrinal aspects of forest-dwelling (embodied in the thirteen special ascetic practices—*dhutangas*, and techniques of concentration meditation) transmitted by orthodox pupillary lines sourced in medieval Ceylon became incorporated into the practices of the new *Thammayut Khana*.¹ In a paradigmatic sense this reaffirmation with doctrinal sources ensured on-going normative imagery embedded in conceptions of the primitive *arahana* ideal; importantly, as Keyes (1987) says, it was also a response to particular historical process during the late nineteenth century.

Wales (1965 [1934]) mentioned that the development of a national religious structure and hierarchy related to the political authority of the king and his administration only really commences from the First Reign (1782-1809) onwards. However, the basic framework for administrative regulation of the sangha was set as early as Lu Thai's reign in the Sukhothai Period and further elaborated during the time of King Trailok (the eighth king of Ayutthayaa, 1448-1488). Ishii (1986:82) points out that it was this latter-mentioned king who ranked monks according to their knowledge of the Pali Canon as detailed in the 1466 "Laws of the Military and Provincial Hierarchies," *Phra ayakaan tamnaeng naa thahaan huameuang*.

In the first few years of his reign, Rama I instituted extensive reforms of the sangha (Dhani Nivat 1955, 1958). After the aberrant period of King Taaksin (1768-1782), Rama I attempted to raise the "moral level" of the sangha and "restore its prestige and authority," and thus, in stressing the scriptural tradition, issued seven decrees followed by a new

decree each year during 1789, 1794 and 1801 (Wenk 1968:39). One of these decrees required each monk to identify with a specific monastery and Preceptor (*Upatchaa*, Pali: *Upajjha/Upajjhaya*). He was also required to obtain an identifying certificate and carry it with him if travelling outside the monastery during the *phansaa* (Pali: *vassa*—rains retreat period). No monk arriving at a monastery from another district was to be permitted to stay until his documents had been examined (Ishii 1986:65), and all abbots had to forward a register of monks under their supervision for mobilisation and control of manpower (C. Reynolds 1972:42-3). This, as Tambiah (1976:185) notes, drastically restricted the mobility of wandering forest monks.

The first Chakri king felt the need to "instruct" and purify (*chamra*) the sangha, especially to regulate the behaviour of monks throughout the country in line with the newly interpreted *Winai* (Pali: *Vinaya*). This reflected the immense political power of the king in the religious sphere and served as a basis for legitimating his own authority and right to rule. The tight regulation of the sangha by the first Chakri king was a feature noted by Crawford (1967:368), who also mentioned that there were no "sectaries" as the "religion was completely identified with the government." The king regulated the day-to-day affairs of the sangha; in turn monks depended on a benign king for "subsistence and promotion." The king did not hesitate to criticise the wrong-doing of monks on textual grounds, and bemoaned that "monks nowadays completely abandoned the *Vinaya*;" they did not study and wandered about in the market places, visited musical and dramatic performances, gambled and played draughts (Wyatt 1982:21-22).

Aye Kyaw (1984:186-7), comparing Rama I with his Burmese counterpart King Bodawpaya (1782-1819), said that the latter stressed that monks should observe the *dhutangas*; they should practice in the forest away from the laity, wear robes made from discarded cloth (*bangsukunjiwon*, Pali:

pamsukulika) and go on alms-round every day. This contrasts with the objectives of Rama I, who was more concerned, after the unstable previous period and military threat from the Burmese, to tightly regulate the sangha from the centre through organisational coherence, hierarchy and an educational program based on Pali studies. Perhaps the king's most important achievement in the religious realm was the sponsorship of the Ninth Buddhist Council in 1788 and rewriting of the canon (Ishii 1986:64); thus, added Wyatt (1982:27), showing his confidence "in the ability of human minds to meet the delicate challenge of ascertaining and interpreting holy writ."

Although Rama I consciously reaffirmed Ayutthayaa traditions, he nevertheless "in a subtle way" broke with the past such that "the changes he introduced hardly seemed significant at the time" (Wyatt 1982:40). As an example, the king wanted the sangha hierarchical ranking system (*samanasak*) and structure to follow along Ayutthayaa lines, except the title *Phra Thammakhodom* which he changed to *Phra Thamma-udom* for the deputy head (*Jao Khana Rong*) of the town-dwelling monks (*khaamawaasii*) on the "right" side (*faai khwaa*). Rama I also changed the title *Phra Ubaalii* to *Phra Winai-rakkhit*. The reason for dropping these two titles was their canonical associations, in the former case with the Buddha, and in the latter to the Buddha's *arahana* disciples (Damrong 1970:42). The king was obviously very conscious of doctrinal bases in his attempts to restructure the Siamese Sangha.

History and Early Sangha Administration

Perhaps because of the importance to Rama I of the Ayutthayaa model, it may be worth discussing briefly the administrative system from the mid-fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. As mentioned above, the system of conferring titles on monks had been introduced since Lu Thai (r. 1347-1368/74)—a high cultural period during Sukhothai, the sangha structure seemingly paralleling the top-down civil administration. The basic early monastic form influenced by the infusion of Sinhalese Buddhism was basically a division of the sangha into two sections (*phanaek*), the head of each appointed by the king (Sobhana 1967:4). From these, the Supreme Patriarch of the Sangha (*Sangkharaat*) was appointed, with each section no doubt competing for the king's favour. These sections were the *Khaamawaasii*, (right side or section, *faai khwaa*) and *Aranyawaasii* (left side or section, *faai saai*) each with its own ranking system (Yen 1962:55). Seemingly, during Sukhothai, monks ordained in the Sinhalese lineage were simply classified as "forest-dwellers" in accordance with their lineage tradition and its locale preference. The head of the Sinhalese monks was known under the title of "Phra Wannarat" (Ibid.:58),² at least up until early Ayutthayaa.

Theoretically, each formal section in the Siamese sangha could in turn be sub-divided according to the appli-

cation of special ascetic rules (*dhutangas*), or simply locale preference and pupillage. Also, because there is a fluidity within and between monastic groupings (as in town monks spawning ascetic reformers and reclusive forest-dwelling communities becoming domesticated), certain generalities pertaining to religious classifications may, *ipso facto*, be misleading.

At the beginning of Boromaraachaa's reign (1424), Sinhalese Buddhism makes a second historic impact in Northern Siam to establish a new ordination tradition. These "new monasteries" or monastic groupings (*khana*) were known as *Paa Kaew* (*Wannarat*) (Yen 1962:56), a term broadly extended to include all forest monks affiliated to the Sinhalese Order (*Sihala Nikaya*) (Damrong 1970:13). This also distinguished them from the earlier indigenised grouping of Sinhalese forest monks, *Khana Aranyawaasii*, traced back to the famous Sumana's sangha in the previous century.

By this time the organisation of the sangha was divided into three distinctive groupings and, perhaps reflecting the need for purification within the mainstream sangha, the Sinhalese newcomers were integrated into the *Khaamawaasii* (town-dwelling, or "House Order" as in Sobhana 1967:4). This in turn, as we shall see below, sub-divided into left and right sections with the *Khana Paa Kaew* now constituting the important right section or "side" of the *Khaamawaasii* (Damrong 1970:13).

Riggs (1967:75) suggested it was during the time of Trailok (Boromtrailokanaat, the eighth king of Ayutthayaa, 1448-1488) that Khmer concepts and cosmological design—itsself rooted in Indic cosmology—had an important influence in Siam where the bilateral division of left and right side "came to play an important part" (see discussion below). The state displayed features of a "functionally differentiated administrative system" (Tambiah 1976:181) with a new department (*krom*) of religious administration set up, responsible for overall control of the increasingly complex sangha (Wales 1965 [1934] : 93).

Trailok's long reign of forty years marked the beginning of centralisation and consolidation of monarchical power with a firm religio-political base (Charnvit 1976:135). Trailok's political integration program in the far north was facilitated largely through his display of support for the Buddhist religion (as in helping to restore and build monasteries), then ordaining—followed by other members of royalty and elite (Ibid.: 138).

Having divided the *Khaamawaasii* into right and left sections, the title of *Wannarat* or *Paa Kaew* as head of the forest-dwellers (under the previous simple dual classification of "town" and "forest" dwellers) becomes replaced by the title *Jao Khana Yai* of the southern section or right "hand" of the *Khaamawaasii* (Wichitwong and Phitthathibodi 1914; Damrong 1923:13-14). Perhaps because there were many Sinhalese monks in the southern principality of Nakhorn Siithammaraat the title *Phra Wannarat* (or *Paa Kaew*, as mentioned in the *Chronicle of Nagara Sri Dharmaraja* [Nakhorn Siithammaraat], trans. Wyatt 1975, covering the fourteenth to the sixteenth

centuries) denoted head of all monks, whether town or forest-dwelling (C. Reynolds 1972:14-15). By the turn of the twentieth century regional connotations were still associated with the above monastic title which carried with it the function of *Jao Khana Yai Faai Tai* ("Sangha General Governor, Southern Section").

Eventually a new title was given to the head of the forest-dwellers called in Pali *Buddhachariya* [Phra Phutthaajaan] (Yen 1962:59), a designatory rank which persisted up until the First Reign (Wichian and Sunthorn 1985:33). There thus became a head of the *Khaamawaasii* left "hand," northern section (Somdet Phra Ariyawongsaa); a head of the *Khaamawaa sii* right "hand," southern section (Somdet Phra Wannarat); and a head of the *Aranyawaasii* (Phra Phutthaajaan). The head of the forest-dwelling community (*Jao Khana Klaang Faai Aranyawaasii*), "Head of the central division composed of the community of forest-dwellers," was based at Wat Bot-Raatchadecha in the capital and was responsible for all forest monks including meditation (*samatha-wipatsanaa*) monks of *Phra Khruu* rank inside the city. Interestingly, as well as this he was in charge of the head monks of both the Raaman (Mon) and Lao divisions (*khana*) in the Greater Thai Sangha (Wichian and Sunthorn 1985:25).

A few words are needed to explain the cosmological significance of the early Siamese ecclesiastical administrative structure outlined above. Heine-Geldern (1942:21) had pointed out the relevance of the mandala (or "compass") arrangement in the Indic polities of Southeast Asia which had direct implications for sangha administration:

The system based on the compass was largely supplemented and modified by the division into offices of the right and left hand...referring to the place on the side of the king... As the king, when sitting on the throne, always faced the East, right corresponded to the South and left to the North...

The whole Siamese civil and corresponding religious hierarchies reflected this basic mandala structure of the kingdom, influenced by Indic-Buddhist conceptions filtered through Angkor. The canonical basis for this cosmological design may be compared to the way the Buddha seemingly organised his principal disciples around him: Sariputta (regarded as the most important pupil) sat on the Buddha's right side, whilst Maha Moggallana was positioned on his left side. This is the reason given by Wichian and Sunthorn (1985:37) for the symbolic superiority of the "right side" in the early Siamese Sangha as well as the fact that the largest grouping of monks is always to be found on this side. "Right" (south) and "Left" (north) dualities may be found in many other cultural contexts (see for instance Cunningham in Needham 1973:216-9). There is also a spatial and conceptual configuration in the association of "Right" as "outer" and "Left" as "inner." Forest monks by nature of their lifestyle were on the outside—to the "south," a positive attribute as Hertz (1973 [1909]) noted in general for its correspondence to the "right

side" (though forest monks were not always favoured). Despite being on the outside, they were kept close to the centre of secular power with kings attempting to bring them within easy reach, to the city walls (or at least close to the palace). There is also an ambiguity in being situated on the outside of established forms and possessing certain much needed charismatic attributes.

Tambiah (1976) described the Ayutthayaa administrative layout as functioning along the lines of a "dual classification with its asymmetrical or parallel evaluations" in relation to a central point, itself an element of a larger universal system. Right and left hand categories are arranged according to this central position as well as "vertical dimensions of above and below and to the cardinal points..." (Ibid.: 139).

In terms of actual sangha structure and organisation, Thompson (1941:625) commented that its division into northern and southern sections (which persisted until Mongkut's reforms) appeared to be fairly ineffectual and that by the seventeenth century La Loubère (1986:113-119) noted a distinct lack of religious hierarchy in Siam. Van Vliet's account (trans. Van Ravenswaay 1910) during the same century, despite his superficial understanding of Buddhism (though showing some knowledge of the ecclesiastical structure), indicates on the contrary that there was an effective sangha organisation. We learn that there were many monks, divided under influential "priors and other ecclesiastical officers" who in turn were under the "highest regents, namely the four bishops [Somdet?] of the principal temples...", the supreme authority being vested in the "bishop of the Nappetat..." (Ibid.: 76). Apparently the sangha was well regulated during this period and we are told that in general there were "no disputes, quarrels, ruptures or sects" (Ibid.: 80).

The division of the sangha into the above-mentioned administrative geopolitical categories becomes firmly institutionalised in Mahaathamaraachaa's reign (1569-1590) (Tambiah 1970:77), a complexifying feature of sangha affairs (Dhani Nivat 1965:16-17); indeed Indic-Khmer cosmology had broad significance in the administration of a formative polity with intrinsically complex organisational features.

Shortly after the beginning of Naresuan's reign (1590-1605) there was a separate *Sangkharat Somdet* for the north and one for the south. Up to this time it was not certain if there had been a single Sangha Patriarch, given the sangha's shifting and unstable base (Ferguson and Ramitanondh 1976: 107), and in effect as Siam generally was faction ridden, so also was the sangha; within the totality of state and its religious institutions, the condition of one was dependent on the other (Tambiah 1976:189). It was Naresuan who was eventually responsible for restoring "national independence" and providing Siam with much needed symbols of order and stability (Rong 1981:61).

The well-known poem *Lilit-talengphaai* "Defeat of the Taleng (Mon)," written by Somdet Phra Mahaa Samanajao Krommaphra Paramaanuchit-chinorot (the seventh *Sangkharat* in the Ratanakosin period [1851-3] and Mongkut's Preceptor [*Upatchaa*]), tells of the defeat of the Burmese by

Naresuan and his younger brother. During a fight with the Burmese *Uparaat*, the rutting elephants of the two Thai leaders rushed forward ahead of the main Thai contingent and engaged in heated battle with the Burmese leader. Naresuan won the fight and afterwards issued orders to execute his senior military officers who could not keep up with him in the fight. However a Somdet Wannarat from Wat Paa Kaew, the Sinhalese forest-dwelling order, along with twenty-five other monks of *Phra Raachaakhana* rank, interceded successfully on behalf of the condemned men. These monks, so the poem goes, came from both "sections" (*phanaek*) of the Thai Sangha.

Due to the development of ranks and titles (*samanasak*) the heads of the various sections were responsible for the administration, discipline and ritual defined by the king at the political centre and as ultimate authority through the new council of the Supreme Patriarch (*Somdet Phra Sangkharaat*). Henceforth the forest tradition lost its formal significance because it had no internal administrative structure (Yen 1962: 61), and the kings turned more to the Hindu conception of divine rule with its geopolitical ordering of the kingdom (Dutt 1966:81). Forest monks had only the status of "assistant or deputy to the Supreme Patriarch" and were unable to field their own senior monks to the top ecclesiastical position, contrasting significantly with earlier Sukhothai.³

During the First Reign, even though (as mentioned earlier) the *aranyawaasii* had formally disappeared in the sangha organisation, the title *Phra Phutthaajaan* from the time of Ayutthayaa was retained, as the incumbent of this position had to continue to accompany (*taamsadet*) the king on state ceremonial occasions (Damrong 1970:43). Apparently Rama I had been impressed with at least one *wipatsanaa* (meditation) ascetic monk called Phra Ajaan Suk (Wat Thaahoikrungekao) and promoted him to be "deputy head of the forest-dwellers" (*Jao Khana Rong Faai Aranyawaasii*) with the title *Phra Yaansangwon* (previously *Phra Yaantrailok* during Ayutthayaa), simultaneously inviting him to reside at the important Wat Raatchasittaaraam in the capital.

The position of "head of the southern section" (*Jao Khana Yai Faai Tai*) in the Greater Siamese Sangha was eventually shared among three monks with the title *Phra Phannarat* (otherwise known as "Wannarat"). One monk was *Sangkharaat* Cheun, who had earlier been demoted by Rama I for supporting King Taaksin and no longer had the eminent rank of *Somdet* (a term derivative from the Khmer language); another monk was Phra Phannarat Suk (probably the same as the above but listed as resident at Wat Mahaathaat, Bangkok); and the third monk was Somdet Phra Phannarat (Wat Phra Chettuphon) (Damrong 1970:44). As already noted, the basic outline of the sangha structure had been set in Trailok's time when new Sinhalese-ordained forest monks became integrated administratively into the Right Side of the *Khaamawaasii*, southern section (*faai tai*). During the Second Reign there was little change except in the structure of the Pali ecclesiastical examinations (*Phra Pariyat-tham*) from three grades to the present nine grades (Ibid.: 45).

Wandering Monks, Peri-Urban Monasteries and Meditation

From Richard O'Connor's informative account (1978) of the historical developments of selected Bangkok monasteries we are told that "wandering meditation monks" on occasion temporarily resided in the northern Bangkokhuphrom-Thewet area where several local monasteries taught meditation. Many of these forest monks became the founders of urban satellite monasteries during the early nineteenth century.

At one particular monastery a meditation tradition was established during the First Reign when a "Lao Prince and patron of the wat invited a meditation master *Chaokhun* [*Jao Khun*] Aranyik to serve as Abbot." O'Connor (1980:34) notes that ironically the Pali term *aranyik*, meaning "forest's edge," implies a ritual separation of forest from the *meuang* (urban centre) and yet significantly this monk was part of an urban-centered sangha hierarchy that regulated forest monks. But monks' personal names and ecclesiastical titles have little meaning insofar as actual vocational or locale interests are concerned (for example, the title "head of the forest-dwellers" for high-ranking urban monks).

At the beginning of the Rattanakosin or Bangkok Period there were supposedly three main urban meditation monasteries specialising in the teaching of meditation, namely Wat Thewakhunchorn, Wat Raachaathiwaat and Wat Phlap. It is not known what direct connections, if any, these had with forest monks.

During the Second Reign (1809-1824) a forest teacher named Ajaan Duang had received a royal appointment as meditation master at a Bangkok monastery. In the Fourth (1851-1868) and Fifth Reigns (1868-1910) one of the above-mentioned teacher's disciples, the highly respected forest monk Somdet To, "rose to the upper echelons of the Thai sangha..." (O'Connor 1978:146). This suggests to Tambiah (1984:221) evidence of positive relations between elements of the ecclesia and political powers at the centre. It appeared that Somdet To and his pupil Luang Puu Phuu (abbot of Wat Intharawihan, or Wat In, from 1892 until 1923) used to "leave Bangkok together and wander [*doen thudong*] in the forest" (O'Connor 1978:146). Both were highly revered monks and both had reputations for their supranormal powers. Somdet To had been patronised by King Chulalongkorn, who unswervingly believed in his mystical prowess (Tambiah 1984: 219; see also Chalieu n.d. in O'Connor 1980:34).

Somdet To's pupil Luang Puu Phuu was born during the Third Reign in 1830 at Taak (in Northern Siam, not far from Burma) and was encouraged to ordain early by his parents who were fearful of the neighbouring Burmese. Phuu eventually trekked to the capital where he initially set up his *klot* (large hanging meditator's umbrella with mosquito net used as a temporary shelter which can be folded and carried over the shoulder during wandering in the forest) in the *thudong* (Pali: *dhutanga*) tradition along the river in

Bangkhunphrom (Chalio n.d. in O'Connor 1980:35), never again to return to his home town. He died at Wat Intharawihan in 1933 at the age of 103 after long before having a *nimit* (Pali: *nimitta*, a "visionary sign" which appears to the meditator) indicating that he would live through three Chakri reigns; the third, fourth and fifth (*Lokthip*, vol. 2, n.d., pp 188-9).

Even a younger brother of Chulalongkorn became a forest monk by the name of Phra Ong Manewt who apparently preferred a life of austerities and refused all offers of "wealth and honors [rank?]" from the king. Cort (1886) reported a meeting with the "small and emaciated" wanderer, then a monk with only five annual rains retreat periods (*phansaa*; the normal way of calculating monastic seniority). He ate only once a day, went about barefoot without "pomp and ceremony" from "temple to shrine, from cave to sacred mountain" and in this "expects [or it is assumed as a result of his practice] to accumulate the more merit" (Ibid.: 158).

O'Connor (1978; 1980) reported that at one particular Bangkok monastery (Wat Sangwet) up until 1916, all the abbots had been meditation teachers. By late in the Fifth Reign a meditation tradition seems to have become less important and a Grade Five Pali scholar was then appointed as abbot. This monk came from within the monastery (unlike the two short-lived predecessors), stressing a new emphasis on formal Pali studies. By this time the new *Thammayut* grouping of monks, now formally a *nikaai* (Pali: *nikaya*, sect or order), were the principal purifying force among forest monks. Simultaneously, the acclaimed spiritual prowess of forest monks was largely discredited unless perceived to conform strictly to doctrinal themes. In the eyes of leading *Thammayut* reformers, meditation and austere practices had a useful function only in terms of orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Thus with the emphasis on canonical studies, the Fifth Reign reforms effectively redefined sanctity at many monasteries and the functions of religiosity, as O'Connor (1980) notes in his study of Wat Noranaat. This *Thammayut* monastery, consisting largely of monks from the northeastern provinces, was to become an important centre for Pali studies. In fact there were many *Thammayut* monasteries of importance emerging in the first decade of the twentieth century in metropolitan Bangkok, including Wat Raachaathiwaat, Raatchapradit, Bupphaaraam, Phichaiyaat (Thonburi), Senaasanaaraam, Somkhang, Pathumwanaaraam and Samphanthawong (see N.A. Fifth Reign, *Seuksaathikaan*, 8/19, 1-19).

Among these monasteries the first one built specifically for the reform monks was Wat Raatchapradit, completed in 1864. Throughout early Thai history it has been a tradition to have three important monasteries in the capital with the names Wat Mahaathaat, Wat Raatchabuurana and Wat Raatchapradit. Since the First Reign, however, there had been only the first two in Bangkok. After Mongkut became king his followers advised him to construct a new monastery, this time built specifically for *Thammayut* monks. They argued that it was in any case too far to go each day from the palace to another principal royal monastery, Wat Bowornniwet, for merit-making, and that if a new monastery were built the

king could control discipline more easily, since it would be situated next to the palace. Less than half a hectare (the smallest area of any monastery in Bangkok) of coffee gardens were used for the construction site of Wat Raatchapradit. Mongkut then arranged for twenty selected scholar monks from Wat Bowornniwet to occupy his new monastery (Damnoen 1964:55-7).

When wandering monks came to the capital they would often reside outside the walls on open land under their *klot*, the first phase in the establishment of permanent monasteries. At another monastery in O'Connor's study (1980), a Fifth Reign abbot would occasionally wander in traditional *thudong* style into the forests outside the capital. Here there were also white-robed "nuns" (*mae chii*) practicing meditation. Further it is claimed that Wat Chimppli (later Wat Noranaat) became established by a wandering forest monk, who had set up his *klot* in an orchard at the present site. The owner of the land, inspired by the austerities and meditation practice of the monk, offered him the land in which to establish a monastery. During the 1930s onwards this was a common practice among later reform forest monks in the northeastern lineage of the famous Ajaan Man Phuurithatto (1870-1949). As an example, after encamping for some time in an orchard in the Phrakhanong District (in those days on the outskirts of Bangkok), one of Man's pupils was invited to settle and establish a permanent monastery on the disused land. The donation of land either by villagers or local elite to wandering forest monks also took place in parts of the countryside, and especially in the Northeast Region among some of Man's many pupils. This was largely how the *Thammayut* became established throughout the countryside, linked to a pervasive patronage system with royalty in the capital.

Reynolds (1972) said that since the Third Reign the Thai Sangha was formally divided into four primary divisions (*khana*), embedded in a cosmology not unlike that of late Ayutthayaa. Seemingly the king had decided to group together a Bangkok royal wat (*Phra Aaraam Luang*) and a commoner's wat (*Wat Raat*) to form one division which he called *Khana Klaang*, the Central Division (Damrong 1970 and Lingat 1933). The aforementioned royal monk Paramaanuchitchinorot (then *Athibodii Song* "Monastic Director-General" at Wat Phrachettuphon) was made head of this *khana*. The four formal divisions were *Neua* (North or "left"), *Tai* (South or "right"), *klaang* (Central), and, in name only with a *Jao Khana* head, *Khana Aranyawaasii* (Damrong 1970:47). The Northern and Southern Divisions apparently consisted of the town-dwelling monks (*khaamawaasii*).

The new *Thammayut-tikaa* movement, originally in the Central Division, did not become dissociated until 1881 when Wachirayaan was appointed by King Chulalongkorn as its deputy head (*Jao Khana Rong Khana Thammayut-tikaa*). Ten years later Prince Pawaret was appointed by the king as *Jao Khana Yai Thammayut-tikaa*, head of the *Thammayut* (Damrong 1970:50-51). He was then replaced by Wachirayaan after his death in 1893. With some variation, Lingat (1933:94, 97) said that in 1894, two years after Wachirayaan became abbot of Wat Bowornniwet and head of the *Thammayut*, the reform

movement with the blessing of the king formally separated from the Central Division of the Greater Thai Sangha as a separate *nikaai*. This was the time when forest monks lacked separate administrative recognition in either *nikaai* (Damrong 1970:51), though it was some eight years later during the Sangha Act of 1902 that this was formally ratified (Tambiah 1984:71).

Thus it was that the far-reaching administrative reforms around the turn of the century (germinated earlier in the Third Reign) with the aim of restructuring the Greater Thai Sangha in line with the new civil administration, sounded the death-knell for the forest monks as a formal division of the national sangha (Tambiah 1984:70). The Sangha Act of 1902, which changed the status of the Central Division (consisting of a category of forest monks) into a geographic-division of the *Mahaanikaai* (Tambiah 1976:235), seems to have avoided any administrative recognition of forest monks (Tambiah 1976:233-241). The act was above all concerned with maintaining a tightened and more uniform control over the newly regrouped national sangha (Reynolds 1972:253 ff.).

However, forest monks (*aranyawaasii*) had started to disappear in the formal sangha structure at least since the First Reign, as during this time there were too few forest monks to constitute a separate *khana* (Damrong 1970:43). Damrong also remarked that for this reason new administrative geopolitical terms, *khana neua* (north) and *khana tai* (south), became used from about this time onwards (though in fact this design had been implemented during fifteenth century Khmer-influenced Ayutthayaa). Therefore it would appear that the old simplistic division of the greater sangha into dwelling or vocational preferences was no longer so relevant. Perhaps also forest monks had started to disperse further afield from being situated near the capital in a mutual interdependence with rulers as the foci of politicoreligious power. Yet aside from the institutionalised forest monks which records, such as they are, bespeak, there were many ascetic practitioners who preferred to wander about in seclusion to live and die in isolated forests. These monks of course we know little about in records, but a great deal from studying pupillages in an oral tradition.

There is no mention of forest monks in the history of the *Thammayut-tikaa*, nor is there any reference of the persistence at least up until 1836 of a *Raaman (Mon) Nikaai* (that is from the "Ramanna Country" in southern Burma). Yet it is from some senior monks in the *Raaman* order that Mongkut drew much of his early inspiration (M.R. Thanyawaat 1964:40). The Mon monks seem to have been a pervasive influence in the central provinces and spawned a number of exemplary individuals. One such monk, a *dhutanga* practitioner named Ajaan Thaa (Wat Phaniangtaek, Nakhorn Pathom), gained a wide reputation as an ascetic meditation teacher from 1857 to 1907, developing an extensive line of pupils. Thaa was born in 1836, was ordained and brought up with Mon teachers in his home province of Raatchaburii, and was taught many of the strict practices espoused by the *Raaman Winai*.

The biography of one of Ajaan Thaa's well-known pupils (Ajaan Chaem, Wat Taakong, Nakhorn Pathom) de-

tails his application of the *dhutangas* in the forest, his extra-disciplinary rules such as staying with one's teacher for at least three rains retreat periods, daily routine at the monastery (including, interestingly, tree planting) and consistent "insight" contemplation on the traditional thirty-two parts of the body (*kaaya-khataasati*), and so on.⁴ Around this time there were still many forests around metropolitan Bangkok and surrounding provinces and ascetic monks had plenty of opportunity for secluded practice. As related in Chaem's biography there were also many wild animals not far from the capital, although these have long since disappeared.

During the Sixth Reign the *Thammayut* continued the tradition of using the title and position "deputy head of the forest-dwellers" (*Jao Khana Rong Faai Aranyawaasii*) as evidenced by the promotion to this position in 1923 of the third abbot of the *Thammayut* Bangkok monastery, Wat Raatchapradit, Phra Phrommunii "Yaem" (Mahaa Thonglor 1964:31). Then, two years later, the northeastern friend and senior of Ajaan Man, Phra Ubaalii (fourth abbot of Wat Boromniwaat in Bangkok) took over this position (Ubaalii 1983 [1947] : 39).

Throughout the nineteenth century the development and spread of the metropole saw the establishment of new urban monasteries and, just outside the city walls, monasteries occupied largely by wandering monks. Even by the Fifth Reign, the Bangkhunphrom and Thewet areas still had some forest, which the laity would avoid as much as possible, leaving its potential dangers to the forest monks; yet in time these monasteries eventually became absorbed into the sprawling metropolis and the residences of an establishment clergy. The monasteries situated on the purlieu and interstices of social order outside the city walls were centres for cremations and associated mortuary rites. Only cremations of royalty were permitted inside the city walls. Most urban crematoria were situated in the commoner's areas outside the walls. To the north of the city where most of the new monasteries were established were the growing Siamese settlements, and by royal proclamation the Chinese were concentrated to the outside of the southeast wall, and foreigners further to the south along the river.⁵

Wat Saket (to the northeast of the old walled city) is one example of a large charnel-ground and crematorium (see Bock's [1986:54-60] description during the Fifth Reign) where forest monks used to reside temporarily. The destitute who were unable to afford a proper cremation simply left the dead to the elements and vultures (executed criminals were apparently forbidden a cremation by social custom and were similarly left to the elements), providing a classic environment for "insight" meditation.⁶ During the First Reign, Wat Saket (now in the heart of the metropolis) was surrounded by forest and regarded as the "entrance" to the capital (Phra Phromkhunaaphon 1976). It was here that the king ritually washed his hair before entering the capital, hence the name (*saket*, "washing royal hair" from the Pali *srakesa*). During Chulalongkorn's reign the monastery was a centre for disposing of the dead; bodies "were cut up and thrown to the dogs and birds" and the bones were heaped together and burned



Photographs courtesy of the author.

with the ashes spread over the monastery's gardens (Cort 1886:150).

Wall-paintings in the *bot* (Pali: *uposathagara*, a sanctified convocation hall) at Wat Somanat (see photographs) show reform monks during the Fourth Reign meditating over decomposing bodies, a meditation subject with the theme of "foulness" (*asupha*, Pali: *asubha*). As enumerated in the *Visuddhimagga* (VI, 1 ff.), there are ten traditional types of foulness upon which the meditator focuses attention; in the photographs from Wat Somanat, one pertains to a bloated corpse, the other to a heap of bones.

The paintings were probably done at the instigation of Somdet Wannarat "Thap Phutthasiri," a grade-nine Pali scholar and meditator who became abbot of Wat Somanat in 1856. Thap had been at Wat Samoraai around the time of King Mongkut's residence and was highly respected as an exemplary, somewhat charismatic, austere monk. Thap was born at the end of the First Reign (three years before the first Chakri king died) and lived until the Fifth Reign. His kinsfolk had fled Ayutthayaa after the Burmese invasion, settling in Bangkok. The Third Reign monarch reputedly supported him and had been impressed with the young Thap since his early childhood. Thap was initially ordained at Wat Thewaraatkunchorn in 1823; his Preceptor was Phra Thammawirod. He then moved to stay at Wat Samoraai, following his teacher, and spent much of his time at both meditation and formal religious studies. In fact during his life Thap was ordained seven times, indicating the extent of confusion at the time over the fragmented ordination tradition, which had so concerned Mongkut early in his monastic career. Thap was a prime example of a pioneering reform

monk capable of combining both theoretical knowledge of the scriptures with intensive urban-centred meditation practice (in the latter regard, charnel grounds around the outskirts of the city providing ample opportunity). In contrast many individualistic forest-dwelling monks largely resisted integration into the new sangha structure, especially the orientation towards formal scriptural studies at the new reform monasteries. They were thus frowned upon by the establishment seeking conformity and orthodoxy confirmed in the doctrinal texts themselves.

However, during the nineteenth century there were a number of forest-dwelling monks who established themselves on the outskirts of Bangkok, particularly to the north where there were predominantly Siamese residents (e.g. in the areas of Wat Sangwet, Wat In, Wat Mai Bangkhunphrom). They "were recognised by and incorporated into the overall sangha hierarchy, but at the same time kept their distance from the capital" (Tambiah 1984:72, 379n. 33). It would seem, supporting O'Connor (1978; 1980), that it was largely cremations which linked these northern monasteries (including also the important Wat Saket and Wat Somanat) to a meditation tradition. However, although they were ascetic monks intent on maintaining correct practices in line with scriptural interpretations, these monks were not necessarily "forest dwellers" but rather urban-dwelling meditators and Pali scholars (such as Wannarat "Thap" mentioned above), undertaking one or two of the thirteen *dhutangas* and perhaps affirming links up-country during periods of dry-season "wandering" (*doen thudong*). But perhaps some of these monks may have been forest-dwellers early in their lives, eventually becoming "domesticated" along with their monasteries which they had

founded. then again, although many newer monasteries had a reputation for accommodating forest monks, they may have been only temporarily resident during the three-month rains retreat, or at certain ceremonial times of the year.

Significantly, the established royal *Thammayut* monasteries became important centres for the dissemination of national ideology and hegemony through a network of rami-

fied branch monasteries to selected up-country centres (specialising in Thai and Pali studies). This nascent religiopolitical scenario in the capital and the extension of far-reaching reforms around the turn of the century led to the inevitable embroilment of forest monks moving on the rim of social order, embedded in the dialectical tensions and aspirations of Chulalongkorn's national program of unification.

NOTES

1 These influences in fact came largely from Southern Burma, a former way-station for forest monks ordained in the *Sihala Nikaya*.

2 Wannarat (Pali: *vanaratana*) is the same as the term *Paa Kaew*, literally "jewel of the forest."

3 The number of administrative sangha officials appointed to royal monasteries throughout the country affiliated to the *Aranyawaasii*, which consisted also of Mon and Lao monks, was reputed to be one head

or *Jao Khana Yai* (JKY) and seven *Phra Raachaakhana Rong* (PRR) or deputies (Yen 1962:61). The *Khaamawaasii* (Left Division) consisted of one JKY, seventeen PRR and forty-six *Phra Khruu* in some twenty-six provinces. In each of the two groups there were also an additional twenty non-titled, or monks of lesser status than *Phra Khruu* rank, in twenty provinces.

4 See Thep, n.d., and Thornthiew 1985.

5 See La Loubère's (1969:7) map of Ayut-

thaya showing a similar cosmographical layout.

6 Personal communication (1986) with Maneephan Jaarudun, Buddhologist, Pali scholar and Director of the Bhumibalo Bhikkhu Foundation (concerned with translating and preserving ancient palm-leaf manuscripts) situated inside Wat Saket.

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