

The Study of Buddhism in Thai School Curricula^{*}

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This paper analyzes the study of Buddhism in Thai School curricula between 1892 - 2001 in three aspects: (1) the proportion of time allocated to the subject; (2) the subject's contents and purposes; and (3) related factors. In the following, all three aspects are simultaneously discussed in the contexts of the study of Buddhism in school curricula from different periods.

1. Thai School Curricula between 1892 - 1909

In the Thai educational system between 1892 - 1909, which was during in the reign of King Rama V, purposes of each individual subject in the school curricula were indicated, but not the objectives or the purposes of the curricula themselves. They can, however, be summarized as follows. In 1892, King Rama V wished that the people benefit from education in occupational terms. In 1895, his goal was to promote the learning of academic subjects. In 1905, it was to advance students' knowledge, and, in 1909, to promote access to education with a focus on occupational opportunities for the people¹. According to historical facts, one of the most

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¹ Pornpen Pathoomsiri. Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

significant factors during this period was the threat of colonization from Western superpowers, France and Britain. Thailand lost parts of its territory six times altogether. In 1888, the towns of Sibsong Chuthai and Huapan Tangha Tanghok were lost to France; in 1892, the Shan States were lost to Britain; in the crisis of 1893, the territory on the left bank of the Mekong was lost to France, and that on the right was later lost to the superpower in 1903. In 1906, the territories of Siamrat, Phra Tabong and Srisophon were lost to France; and in 1908, the four Malay Sultanates were lost to Britain². It can be said, then, that the main goal of education during this period, apart from equipping people with occupational knowledge, was to create security for the country to fight against the threats posed by the superpowers. According to Wuttichai Mulasilp:

“The opinion among the royalties and civil servants was that, to protect the country, civil servants must have knowledge in mathematics and written language as their basics, and also have good behavior.”

However, from 1892 onward, even though the main goal of education was to protect the country from colonization, emphasis on the subject of Buddhism - known as the subject of ‘Dhammacari’ (Dhamma follower) - was found to have increased. The subject occupied 7.27% of the curricular contents in 1892, 3.7% in 1895, 15.04% in 1905, and a rather high percentage of 15.04% in 1909. Between 1892 - 1905, the contents and purposes of Dhammacari clearly showed the influence of traditional Buddhism. This includes teachings about Buddhakhuna (Buddha’s virtues), Dhamma (Buddhist teachings) for laity, Kusalakammapha (the Tenfold Ways of Good Action), Pancasila (the Five Precepts), Pancadhamma (the Five Ennobling Virtues), and conduct. In 1909, the Buddhist subject curriculum was changed. Although in the earlier period the curriculum contained the teaching of traditional doctrines, they were of basic ones such as Sadha (faith) and Sila (precepts). The reason for this was because the main actor in Thai education of that period was the Venerable

² Thanakit, Biographies of Nine Kings and Queens. (Bangkok: Suwiriyan, 1999), p. 221.

Vajirananavarorasa, and the Sangha (Monastic Order) contributed to the national education between 1898 - 1902. To save budgets on location and personel, King Rama V's policy was to have temples function as schools, according to the following declaration:

“His Majesty the king was of the opinion that, as all the temples used to be places for learning, they should be given support [in this respect] to improve and become well-established. Consequently, his younger brother, Prince Vajirananavarorasa, was invited to be in charge of having education provided in all temples in the main towns all over the kingdom. The abbots in these temples must report to him and obey all of his orders, whatever they are. The king also assigned his younger brother, Prince Damrongrajaphab, the Minister of Internal Affairs, to provide facilitation so that education in the main towns will thrive throughout the country. Declared on the 11th of November, 117th year of Ratanakosin, the 10958th day in the present reign.”³

In fact, the Venerable Vajirananavarorasa played a major role in Buddhist education from the year 1892 onward, as can be seen from the fact that the book he composed was mainly used in Dhammacari in 1892. It was stated that:

“To teach Dhammacari, teachers should be careful and explain the Buddha's virtues with simple truths that they see fit for children to understand; and teach Singarovada Sutta and Upasaka Patipati that the King's younger brother, Prince Vajirananavarorasa, had composed.”⁴

³ History of Mahamakut Buddhist University under the Royal Patronage. (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University Press, 1978), p.p. 97-99.

⁴ Drafted Rule No. 1: Educational Requirements of General Pre-elementary Curriculum in School, The Minister of Religious Affairs, 1892. (Unpublished Manucrypt).

He and the Sangha, therefore, had a significant part in the management of curricula, especially of Buddhism, so much that King Rama V felt the need to express his apology as follows:

“As he had a thorough observation and became so very pleased, he made known his apology for the contempt he had held in mind. It was not the contempt for the Buddha, the Dhamma that the Buddha disclosed, and the Sangha who attained the purity. It was directed only to those ordinary monks who studied Ganthadhura/Vipassanadhura (Scripture/Meditation), repeated chanting and pursued only their self-interest. Those who studied Ganthadhura aimed to know only for themselves. When they gained knowledge, they never devoted themselves to imparting it for the benefits of others. It was enough for them to pursue it on the basis of self-interest. Those who studied Vipassanadhura were worse. They repeated the main chanting. Despite this contempt in his mind, now that he had witnessed the full performance of their abilities, he ascertained that all the monks who form the commission were free of the features he detested. His Majesty the King therefore expressed his apology. Their performance contributed to Buddhism and thus the dignity of King Monkut, and also to the public community extending from His Majesty the King onward. May the monks enjoy longevity and carry on the tasks!”⁵

Apart from the Sangha’s major role in education, King Rama V himself also considered the subject of Buddhism to be important, as expressed in the letter he wrote to the Venerable Vajiranavararasa:

“As for the educational affairs, please assist with your serious consideration to the root of it. Please do not confine yourself to monastic affairs. Another matter is that the teaching of religion should increase in schools both in the capital and

⁵ *History of Mahamakut Buddhist University under the Royal Patronage*, pp. 65-66.

the main towns. Be concerned that later generations will be drifting away from the religion, and an increasing number of them will be lacking morality in their hearts. If so, it would no longer be correct to say in the future as we do today that, of the large number of the ignorant, those who receive education will behave better than those who do not. Most people unguided by morality turn to dishonesty. If they have little knowledge, they cannot cheat a lot and cannot do so neatly. If they have more knowledge, they can cheat a lot more and in a sophisticated manner. Training in literacy does not at the same time train people to be good or bad. It is only instrumental to learning about good and bad. I therefore see that, if there is a new and easy book about basic [moral] conduct that is compulsory for every school to use, such book will be very beneficial. A book that contains Dhammacakkhu (the Eye of Wisdom) would still be too complicated. It must be very simple...and it will be useful if questions are provided for teachers to ask students – questions such as what are the first, the second elements, etc. in Pancasila.”⁶

Because of the Venerable Vajiranavarorasa’s major role in educational provision, it followed that the standard contents of Dhammacari showed an influence of the Dhammayuttika Sect. According to Venerable Paisal Wisalo:

“The author therefore did not see that it was necessary to know things beyond the temporal. Perhaps, it is because of this that important doctrines, such as Trilakkhana (the Three Characteristics) or Ariyasacca (the Four Noble Truths) were not mentioned in the textbook of morality that he composed for schools to use. Paticcasamuppada or Itappaccayata (the Dependent Origination) cannot even be expected. Only Pancasila and Pancadhamma were emphasized. This can be observed in the curriculum for Wat Bavaranives Vihara School,

⁶ Ibid., pp. 88-89.

the model for other schools affiliated to Mahamakut Buddhist University. In the Religion Section, only codes of conduct are taught, i.e. Gihipatipatti (Codes of Morality for Laity), and Dhammacariya (Righteous Conduct) is confined to Pancasila.”⁷

Consequently, the subject of Buddhism taught in this period only contained matters related to Pancasila and Pancadhamma. Moreover, the Venerable Vajiranavarorasa’s Buddhist world view was under the influence of King Rama IV, who faced the surge of modern science into the country. This certainly affected the contents of Buddhism. Venerable Paisal Wisalo stated his views:

“...In the time of the Venerable Vajiranavarorasa, rationalist Buddhism (under modern scientific world view) initiated by King Rama IV spread as never before...The influence of rationalism that reduced Buddhism to the teachings about mundane reality or the temporal welfare can be observed in his writings, and also in the curricula and textbooks. The prominent example is the book *Navakovada* (Advice to the Neophyte), especially in the Gihipatipatti Section...In this book, the teaching about Paramattha (the highest good) was omitted. Only the teachings about Ditthadhammikatha (the good to be won in this life; temporal welfare) and Samparayikatha (the good to be won in the life to come) were retained.”⁸

Although the curricula in this period are focused to the basic teachings such as Pancasila and Pancadhamma, and emphasized Ditthadhammikatha, they were still in the spirit of traditional Buddhism and helped maintain Buddhism as part of the national educational system, including its influence on Thai society. King Rama V’s reform of the country to face the threat of colonization had an impact on the educational system as well. An important

⁷ Venerable Paisal Wisalo, *Thai Buddhism in the Future: Trend and Crisis Solution*. (Bangkok: Sodsri-Saritwong Foundation, 2003), p. 28.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

mission of the ruler in such time was to build a strong educational system in the nation. The objectives and contents of the study of Buddhism, therefore, serve to teach students to be humble and obedient, which were considered the appropriate characteristics of subjects of the nation. This led to the conception of good citizenship as formulated during the reign of King Rama V. Wit Wisadaves expressed his view on this point as follows:

“If we examine the curricula and textbooks, we will find that the government required that many subjects be taught to train the youth’s mind and attitudes to be a good member in the present regime, i.e. the monarchy, and to be a strong basis for the creation of solidarity for the formation of a nation state. The important attitudes that the government wanted to inculcate in the students were patriotism, consciousness of Thai nationality, discipline, sacrifice, obedience, and loyalty to the King.”⁹

The conception becomes clearer in the reign of King Rama VI who, unlike in the past, focused on loyalty to the nation state, rather than on the religious teachings such as Sadha or Sila. From 1909 until the reign of King Rama VI, the contents of the curriculum of Buddhist studies were adapted to fit the State’s ideology that included loyalty to the King, patriotism, etc. This will be discussed in the next section.

2. Thai School Curricula between 1911 - 1921

It needs to be remarked that the objectives of the curricula between 1911 - 1921 were not clearly indicated either. However, it can be summarized that, in 1911, the goal was for every citizen to have at least pre-elementary education that gave them knowledge sufficient for subsistence and occupation after school. The curriculum of 1913 aimed to undo the popularity of desk jobs and to raise awareness of the significance of special subjects that people could master and apply to their local occupation. In 1921, the focus was on

⁹ Wit Wisadaves, Thai Philosophy of Education 1868 - 1932. (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2001), p. 33.

vocational education.¹⁰ In 1911, the subject of Morality (or Moral Studies) occupied 8% of all studies in the pre-elementary level; 4.85% in the elementary level; and 4.46% in the secondary level. In 1913, it occupied 4.5% of all studies in the elementary level; 4.66% in the lower secondary level; and 2.83% in the middle and higher secondary level. The decline of the subject's proportion in relation to other subjects is due to an increasing focus on studies that would contribute to the country's progress rather than on the study of Morality. King Rama VI stated:

“...the Education Department overlooked the essential point and misunderstood that it was sufficient to teach students to be literate, able to calculate and keep accounts. Indeed, our ancestors taught that speaking skill is primary, calculating skill secondary, writing skill tertiary, while good and bad are stamps. This implies that good and bad cannot enter the comparative scale and must be considered as stamps. That is, whoever does good or bad things are stamped as being so. Whenever they are so stamped, nothing can ever be undone. The stamps appear as they are. This is essential. Therefore, people should be properly trained when very young. The Department of Education is now aware of this fact, and consequently is considering giving more instruction on morality. The results should gradually become visible.”¹¹

In spite of the King's statement, the statistics showing the declining percentage of morality instruction suggest that the Department of Education focused on subjects that are more relevant to livelihood. Meanwhile, the subject of Buddhism or Morality was re-conceived as a subject that suits

¹⁰ Pornpen Pathoomsiri, Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

¹¹ Chamuen Darunarak (Cham Sunthorawet), Important Royal Missions of King Rama VI. (Bangkok: Business Organization of the Teachers' Council, 2513), pp. 104-105, cited by Wuttichai Mulasilp, In the Beginning of Educational Reform: From King Rama V-VII. (Bangkok: Love and Live Printing, 2541), p. 155.

the promotion of nationalism during the reign of King Rama VI in its emphasis on loyalty to monarchy. In the curriculum of 1911, the subject of Morality, therefore, aimed to teach students to be good subjects who love the nation and are loyal to the King through the teaching of gratitude, gentleness, politeness, obedience, etc. This can be seen in the following quotation from the textbook on morality in 1914:

“Apart from our household and school, which are tiny, we have something greater to love. It is our country that we call, “the Thai country” or “the Nation of Siam.” Bear in mind that it is the Thai country. Never forget. This is because it is our homeland. We have to love it devotedly, much more than the house we live in, more than the school we study in. Apart from our relatives and friends who are but small people, there are others who require our greater devotion. They are our king and our fellow Thais or, in other words, our nation. This is because we are born as Thais; we are fellows; we are of the same nation; we speak the same language. How can it be possible that we love and help each other less than we do people from other nations, who are foreign and speak different languages? If anyone accuses us of untruth to our faces that the Thai country is not good in this or that respect, or that our king is not good in this or that respect, we absolutely cannot remain silent because the accusation will stab at our hearts as if with a real knife. It will give us extreme resentment and soreness.”¹²

In 1911, a critical incident that is to influence Thai education – a rebellion led by Captain Khun Tuayhanpitak (Dr. Leng Srichan) – took place. This group of rebels was dissatisfied with, and wanted to overthrow, the existing regime in order to change to democracy with constitution as the highest law, and to a system of parliamentary government. However, its

¹² Phraya Thammasak Montri and Phra Anukitwithun, Dhammacariya, Vol. 2. (Bangkok: Aksaranit Press, 1914), pp. 95-96.

plan failed because of a leak of secret information into Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath's ears, and all rebels were consequently arrested.¹³ In this year, King Rama VI issued a royal command to establish the "Wild Tiger Corps" to train civil servants to be patriotic, humane and devoted. Apart from personnel development, the Wild Tiger Corps also served to defend the country's territory. Basic warring tactics were taught and drills were conducted in Nakorn Pathom and Rajburi on a regular basis.¹⁴ The incident inevitably affected the curriculum of 1911 which strongly emphasizes loyalty to the monarchy. The establishment of the Wild Tiger Corps was to serve in building citizens loyal to the nation and the King. Buddhist doctrines in this curriculum were accordingly interpreted in line with the nationalist conception of loyalty to the country and the King. A major contribution was made by the Venerable Vajirananavarorasa, then the Supreme Patriarch, who played a significant role in explicating the doctrines for the purpose of cultivating the senses of nationalism and loyalty to the monarchy. Consider the following quotation:

"The country is analogous to our body. The head is analogous to the King. It is indispensable, necessary, because we all need direction. Next are the heart, lungs and liver analogous to ministers, intendants and governors respectively. The hairs and nails are analogous to subjects."¹⁵

In 1913, the doctrines taught in the subject of Morality were revised and became more nationalist. In particular, the objective of the subject was to inculcate the Wild Tiger's qualifications through scout training. Students were to have real-life practice, to self-regulate as a group, to be rewarded with golden sheets and punished with dog's skins, and to be stimulated through religion and royal instruction to arouse the Wild Tiger's spirit. The contents of the subject were not traditionally Buddhist. Bravery

¹³ Thanakit, Biographies of Nine Kings and Queens, p. 259.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁵ Venerable Vajirananavarorasa, Thoughts and Words about Religion. (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University Press, 2537), p. 63.

and thrift, for instance, were given more emphasis. Some doctrines were therefore reinterpreted and reconceived to suit the State's policy. For example, the teaching about gratitude was extended to include parents, teachers, the King, country-fellows and the nation, as appeared in the morality textbook:

“When children grow up and acquire more knowledge, they become aware that people deserving their gratitude, apart from their parents, include also our King. Now, it is sufficient to know that His Majesty sustains our religion and sustains us Thais, our well-being. He should therefore be regarded as the great benefactor...When you learn that the King, parents and teachers are our great benefactors, I therefore remind you to always think of their beneficence. When you grow up, you will see by yourself how you can express your gratefulness. When you are still young, bow, pay them respect, and always hold in mind their favors. Thereby, you are known as a grateful child, and so take a step towards being a good child.”¹⁶

The instruction of thrift – a matter considered insignificant or rare in the Pali Canons - was given emphasis in the subject of Morality in the curricula of 1913 and 1921. The motive is understood to stem from the economic crisis starting around the end of the reign of King Rama V until early in the reign of King Rama VI when the country was repeatedly plagued by droughts and floods. In 1908 and 1911, there were major flood; in 1910 a drought; in 1917 another big flood; and between 1918 and 1920, another drought. A crisis in rice production followed in 1919. The government, as a result, barred rice exports in 1920, which led to a deficit of 81 million Baht. The country used to have a surplus of 40 million Baht in normal times. International reserves were consequently reduced. This crisis lasted until the reign of King Rama VII.¹⁷

¹⁶ Phraya Thammasak Montri and Phra Anukitwithun, Dhammacariya, Vol. 2. (Bangkok: Aksaranit Press, 1914), pp. 74-76.

¹⁷ Thanakit, Biographies of Nine Kings and Queens, p. 274.

The subject of Morality in the 1921 curriculum was comprised of similar contents and objectives to the one in the curriculum of 1913. This should be due to the fact that the country participated with the Allies in World War I on April 6, and declared war with Germany and Austria-Hungary on July 22, 1917. It is believed that this factor contributed to the curricular contents aimed at creating patriotism and the Wild Tiger's qualities, such as bravery and commitment to collective interest over self-interest. They were taught in King Rama VI's "Wild Tiger Instruction" that was incorporated as part of the curriculum, and included Buddhist doctrines, and soldiership, fighting for the country, etc.

"Those who participate in warring, some say, cannot be on the righteous path because their direct responsibility is killing, which surely is a violation of the first Precept in Buddhism. Therefore, soldiers cannot observe the Precepts. This point is usually raised by those with superficial knowledge in Buddhism, and we, who identify ourselves as Buddhists, merely nod in agreement. Indeed, our Buddha very well understood that the defense of the country is necessary, and those who have the duty in this respect are not regarded as having a wrong occupation. Sufficient evidence can be raised to show that warring for the sake of defending the country is by no means prohibited by the Buddha...The true intention of the Buddha in forbidding the taking of life was his wish to bar physical infliction on or killing of people who commit offense. It was not extended so far as to include the defense of ourselves or the country. Thus, those who understand that soldiership excludes one from Buddhism are gravely wrong. Morality can get along with soldiership."¹⁸

The reinterpretation of the Buddhist doctrines to suit nationalism such as the moral justification of the country's defense was not only the

¹⁸ King Rama VI, Wild Tiger Instruction. (Bangkok: Aksorn Chareon Thus, 1999), pp. 58-59.

policy of King Rama VI, but also of the Venerable Vajiranavarorasa, who gave various religious instructions on serving the country as being an activity sanctioned by Buddhism.

“Commanders and soldiers numbering 1,600 altogether were present in the middle of the field. [The Venerable] gave instructions to encourage soldiership and humaneness, tolerance, diligence, bravery. He referred to the Buddha before his enlightenment as a model, and advised them to observe the military rules, be mindful, wise and cautious. The latter is vital. He showed that, in the war, a moment of carelessness could lead to a disaster. In the end, he explained that the soldiers needed to follow the religious teachings but should learn to adjust them to suit their situation. They could thereby succeed as wished.”¹⁹

The Venerable Vajiranavarorasa’s idea about nationalism appeared in many other sources. In his letter to Phra Rachamuni dated January 29, 1913, for instance, he wrote: “The remark about the instruction for people to love the nation, the religion, the king and the country is right. Religious instruction must benefit the country too.”²⁰ Besides, the Venerable Vajiranavarorasa thought that for the nation to remain strong, religion and state should be in agreement. Thus, it was required that Buddhism be adjusted to the ideology of the country, as appears in his letter to the Venerable Sawanwithiwisuth Udomkanachan, the Chief Monk of Nakorn Sawan:

“In the Administrative Section, Items 11 and 12 – which indicate that novices who reach the age to be conscripted and are without exemption document should be submitted, and that men who stay in temples and reach the age to be levied should pay – are properly included. Religion must be in agreement with the State. Otherwise, both will be in trouble.

¹⁹ Venerable Vajiranavarorasa, Thoughts and Words about Religion, p. 54.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

Monks who lack prudence tend to their own benefits. That you conducted so is agreeable to me.”²¹

It can thus be seen that the ideas of King Rama VI and the Venerable Vajiranavarorasa – the head of the State and the head of religion – concerning Buddhism and nationalism had great impacts on the Thai school curricula, especially the contents of the subject of Morality, which served the nationalist ideology.

3. Thai School Curricula between 1928 - 1937

The curriculum of 1928 was the last before Thailand’s political revolution. Significant events during this period include, for instance, the publication of *The King of Siam’s Edition of the Pali Tipitaka* in 1925; in 1928, the increase of moral education in the school curriculum by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1928; and the launch of a Buddhist textbook contest by the Royal Institute in 1929.²² Moreover, in early 1926, King Rama VII had the Department of Religious Affairs transferred back to the Ministry of Education, and changed the title of the latter to “Ministry of Religious Affairs”, citing as the reason that “Education should not be separated from the temple.”²³ Prince Pittayalaprueetthiyakorn was assigned the position of Minister of Religious Affairs. The King was of the idea that since foreign civilizations were spreading to the Thai people, and since Buddhist values need to be safeguarded, education cannot be separated from the temple. Buddhism would provide morale to Buddhists.²⁴ This idea later led to the intertwinement between the subjects of Morality and Buddhism.

²¹ Venerable Vajiranavarorasa, Preference in Sangha Administration. (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University Press, 2533), pp. 71-72.

²² Siriwat Kamwansa, History of Buddhism in Thailand. (Bangkok: Charansanitwong Printing, 1999), pp. 110-111.

²³ Pin Malakul, About Education. (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council (Ladprao), 1973), p. 25.

²⁴ Thanakit, Biographies of Nine Kings and Queens, pp. 340-341.

In the curriculum of 1928, the subject of Morality occupied 3.7% of the contents. Although not very high, the percentage was still higher than that in the curricula of 1913 and 1921, for instance, which had no place for the subject in the higher secondary level. However, the aforementioned events, which should have affected the status of the Buddhist Studies subject, did not bring about any changes in terms of its contents and objectives. Still, no clear objective of the subject was given, and no particular doctrines were given emphasis in the contents. Only a general statement could be found that it was to be taught in accordance with the Buddhist Studies subject offered in the Military Cadet School. The teachers were left to their own devices and had to decide on their own which sections or chapters of the textbook should be taught, and in what order, to students in the 7th or 8th year of the secondary level. Buddhist students were required to participate in chanting prayers and listening to a sermon at least once a week. These activities were highly encouraged by authorities to be undertaken in temples outside school hours. This requirement, however, did not apply to non-Buddhist students.

Such curriculum, on the one hand, showed flexibility. On the other hand, it implied a lack of regulation, standard, and development amidst the dynamism of Buddhism at the time. One of the reasons for this may be due to the economic crisis that started late in the reign of King Rama VI. Although the Elementary Education Act was announced, only 3.6% of the budget was allocated to the Ministry of Education, which was very low in comparison to the Ministries of Defense and Metropolis, which received 24% and 16% respectively.²⁵ This rendered Prince Thaninivati, the then Minister of Education, incapable of initiating significant changes. Wuttichai Mulasilp commented on this as follows:

“His terms as the Minister of Education seem to be the most unfortunate period in the history of Thai education. If one likens it to a tree just planted into the soil, one could probably

²⁵ Wuttichai Mulasilp, The Beginning of Educational Reform: From King Rama V-VII, p. 172.

say, “No rain!” It was deemed sufficient for him to carry on and maybe make some minor improvements. It would be very hard for him, however, to start new projects. But he gave it his best efforts as far as the situation allowed.”²⁶

Buddhist education during this period is revealed through textbooks such as “*Sasana Khuna*” (Religious Virtues) that won the first prize in the annual contest of 1929. Composed by Her Serene Highness Poonpisamai Disakul, it consists of seven chapters on the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha; the Five Precepts of Buddhism; the virtues of parents, religion and the King. The contents focused mainly on loyalty to the monarchy.

“His Majesty the King graciously allowed members of the royal family and young children of civil servants to have an audience with him on the occasion of Visakha Puja day in order to follow in his virtuous path. He benevolently gave dolls to children who were too young to understand the teachings in order to give them the impression that we have the virtuous Buddha as role model. He also had books on Buddhism containing explanations that are easy to comprehend published and distributed to Thai children to aid them in the understanding of Buddhism. The beneficence His Majesty the King showed to children demonstrates his wish that we be good in the future. We have to recall his great favor, and do more and more good deeds to render us worthy of his kindness. In this way, we are the ones truly grateful to him...Almost all children sing or hear the Royal Anthem. It is sung to remind ourselves of his great beneficence in bestowing on us the well-being under his rulership. When we appreciate his merit, we bless him and wish him the same happiness he has provided us.”²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

²⁷ Her Serene Highness Poonpisamai Disakul, Ministry of Education’s Textbook: Buddhist Instruction for Children on “Virtue of Religion”. (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council, 1957), pp. 32-33.

Instructions of Buddhism in Thai schools have a long history of serving the state's goal in inculcating loyalty to the monarchy. The political revolution in 1932 led by the People's Party, however, brought about a change from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. The contents and objectives of the Buddhist Studies subject were altered and adapted in response to the new political regime. The curriculum of 1937 was the first after the revolution. It strongly emphasized general and vocational education, as well as the three elements of education, i.e., Buddhist, Moral and Physical Education.²⁸ Such curriculum came into existence only after completion of the Second National Educational Plans of 1932 and 1936 that focused mainly on morality.²⁹

The subject of Buddhism, formerly known as the subject of Morality, became known under a new title, "Citizens' Duties and Morality." It occupied 3.57% of the contents for the elementary school level, and 3.33% for the secondary school level. The contents related to Citizens' Duties included obligations towards family, groups, the nation, the religion, the king, the constitution, and the state. Those related to Morality were adapted to fit the new regime, and consequently covered teachings about honesty, generosity, sportsmanship, politeness, gratefulness, and solidarity. The teachings on morality were reconceived and taught with respect to one's self, one's groups, one's superiors, the Nation, the Religion, the King, and the Constitution. However, this reconception was not in keeping with the original Buddhism. Buddhism seems to have been used as an instrument to disseminate the constitutional ideology which was new to the society. Many historical anecdotes seem to support this understanding. Some people of that time did not understand the term "Constitution." Some believed it was the name of General Phraya Phahon Pholphayuhasena's son who would bring great fortune to the country and the people. Claiming constitutional

²⁸ Pornpen Pathoomsiri, Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

²⁹ Ministry of Education, Mr. Lieng Chayakan, Ministry of Education and National Educational Plans. (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers' Council (Ladprao), 1986), pp. 35-41.

rights and freedom, some monk attendants refused to serve the monks. Some youths neither went to school nor obey their teachers in the exercise of their liberty.³⁰

The instructions on citizens' duties went hand in hand with the instructions on morality so as to impart knowledge about the Constitution and other elements in the new regime, e.g. parliament, Cabinet, court, rights and duties, and election. Instructions on morality acquired new contents, such as elements supporting the new regime – honesty, generosity, gratefulness for the party, and solidarity of the party. The term “party” was supposed to be taken from the “People’s Party,” who brought about the revolution. The People’s Party used other methods to link Buddhism to the new regime. For instance, in 1945, Marshal Por Piboonsongkram, then a major, proposed in the Cabinet meeting on September 18, 1940, to build the Sri Maha Dhatu Temple as a monument of democratic regime so as to praise Buddhism together alongside the Nation. At first, the temple was named “Wat Prachadhipateyya” (Temple of Democracy). It was only after the acquisitions of banyan shoots from the Sri Maha Bodhi, soil from the Holy Grounds of Buddhism, and the Buddha’s relics discovered at Maha Stupa Dhamma Rajika in India, that the government re-named the temple as “Sri Maha Dhatu Temple.”³¹ This clearly shows an attempt to link Buddhism to the system of government.

Many reasons can be raised to explain this phenomenon. For instance, the revolution brought with it political turbulence. In 1933, Colonel Phraya Phahon Pholphayuhasena, Lieutenant Colonel Piboonsongkram, and Navy Commander Luang Supachalasai staged a coup against the government led by Phraya Manopakorn Nititada. In the same year, a rebel group under the leadership of Prince Bavaradej and General Phraya Srisidhisongkram (Din Tharap) attempted to overthrow the government. The group disagreed with the People’s Party’s ideology and

³⁰ Thanakit, *Biographies of Thai Prime Ministers*. (Bangkok: Pyramid, 2002), p. 32.

³¹ Kanuengnit Chantabut, *Movement of the First Generation of Young Monks: 1934-1941*. (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2528), p. 162.

its conduct of affairs. For example, the Cabinet did not take cases of *lèse-majesté* seriously. The government brought back Luang Praditmanutham (Pridi Phanomyong) to implement a communist regime. The political turbulence led to King Rama VII's decision to abdicate in 1934. In the following year, the Non-commissioned Officers' Rebel took place. It was the first time that a rebel – Sergeant Sawas Mahamad – who refused to confess was sentenced to death.³²

The turbulence affected the stability of the state. General Phraya Phahon Pholphayuhasena, the highest authority then, felt he needed to steer the country back to a lasting normal condition. One of the most effective methods was to inculcate new consciousness through education. People were instructed about the new regime, which made them easier to govern in the democratic system. Education again became an effective instrument utilized by the state to govern the people, according to Wit Wisadaves:

“In the modern world (and in some places in the ancient world), education has a significant political role in preparing people for a desirable system of government. If the government sees that the present regime is suitable, they will train the youth to have characteristics in accordance with that regime. If the government wants to change the regime, they will again train the people accordingly. In cases where the state has absolute authority in educational provision, this role is evident.”³³

As a result, the original Buddhist teachings were combined with the additional contents to accord with the new regime, and were widely used in the 1937 curriculum. The most distinctive aim of the curriculum was to facilitate the government in their effort to establish as stable and normal a state as possible.

³² Ibid., pp. 41-59.

³³ Wit Wisadaves, Thai Philosophy of Education 1868-1932, pp. 32-33.

4. Thai School Curricula between 1948 - 1955

The curriculum of 1948 had as its general goal education for quick literacy and subsistence.³⁴ In it, the subject of Morality was separated from that of Citizens' Duties, occupying 3.57% of the curriculum's contents. The subject's aim was to promote faith in Buddhism, participation in rites and ceremonies, and to develop appropriate manners and moral characters. Its contents covered Ratanattaya (the Three Gems), Pancasila, and Pancadhamma, which were the focus of the original teachings. Nevertheless, it is noted that emphasis was also given to manners in assembly, reverence, obedience, punctuality, precision in work, commitment to common interest over self-interest, all of which were new and different from the original teachings. Although some could be classified as part of the original teachings, they were not principal. The rather limited basis was elaborated into teachings about manners.

This indicates that the subject of Buddhist studies was used to serve the State's policy of the time as well. Between 1938 and 1944, the policy of the government led by Marshal Po Piboonsongkram was to build the nation's economy through the nationalist framework. The practice known as "The State's Convention" was prescribed for the people to follow, and was enforced through the Conservation-of-National-Culture Act in 1940 and Gazette on Culture the Thai People Must Observe in 1941. The aim of the convention was to reorganize the way of life of the Thai people so that it conformed to that of civilized nations. Twelve conventions of the State were declared during 1939 and 1942 to make known the cultural practices Thai people should observe, such as table manners (using utensils rather than bare hands, etc.) and the prohibition of betel chewing. There was also a gazette prescribing public appearance. For example, Thai men were requested to follow the Western dress code rather than wearing silk pants in public. Rather than a *jong-kraben* (loincloth), women were requested to

³⁴ Pornpen Pathoomsiri, Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

wear a sarong together with shoes and a hat. According to a well-known motto of the day, “The hat leads Thailand into being a superpower.”³⁵

The cultural reform had great impacts on the Thai society and required very extensive campaigning. In 1948, Marshal Po Piboonsongkram returned to premiership and remained in the post until 1957. The reform had, therefore, sustained implementations. The curricula between 1948 and 1950 shared the same goal of teaching manners and conventions through the subject of Morality. Once more, this reflects having education serve Marshal Po Piboonsongkram’s policy of “the State’s Convention” to train people and reform the culture.

An important lesson on obedience in the curricula was evidently also in keeping with the government’s policy. On May 16, 1944, the Office of the Prime Minister declared Viradhamma (Doctrines of Braveness) of the Thai Nation on the basis of the nationalist ideology. It included seventeen items characteristically nationalist, e.g. “Thais love their nation more than their lives,” and “Thailand speaks in one voice and follows the leader.” In addition, the Six Maxims of Thais followed suit with “Our death is better than the nation’s death.” and “We agree with the wishes of the group.”³⁶ Moreover, the media effectively disseminated the conventions of the State and the National Cultural Council’s regulations, including marches, mottos, speeches, and other nationalist ideas. Newspapers such as *Pramuan Wan* then headlined mottos such as “Believe in the Leader, and the Nation will be safe,” whereas Thai Rasadorn announced “Believe in Piboonsongkram and the Nation will be One.”³⁷

In 1950, the curriculum gave 3.33% of its contents to the subject of Morality both in the lower and higher secondary levels. The subject was composed of three parts, i.e. Buddhism, Dhammacariya, and Gihipatipatti. The contents of the Buddhism part were apparently increased. They now included the Buddha’s biography, Pancasila, Pancadhamma, the Buddha’s

³⁵ Thanakit, *Biographies of Thai Prime Ministers*, pp. 73-78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

admonition, the holy days, and the Buddhists' daily practices. The part of Dhammacariya covered gratefulness, loving-kindness, and politeness. In the higher secondary level, more original teachings were found such as Sati (mindfulness), Sampajanna (clear comprehension), Hiri (moral shame), Ottappa (moral fear), Akusalamula (roots of evil), Sappurisadhamma (virtue of the righteous), Vesarajjakarana-dhamma (qualities making for intrepidity), Aprihaniyadhamma (conditions of welfare). The part of Gihipatipatti comprised Gharavasa-dhamma (virtues for a good household life), Laity happiness, Ditthadhammikatta, Gahapatidhamma (virtues of landholder), noble etiquette and social manners, etc.

The interesting feature of the subject of Morality in the 1950 curriculum was Gihipatipatti (e.g. Gahapatidhamma, Self-management, Wealth management, Causes of disgrace to family, Laity happiness). It was revived after appearing in the curricula during the reigns of King Rama V and King Rama VI, and, apart from its focus on temporal welfare, was elaborated in order to teach one about economic status through the instruction about Gahapatidhamma, Wealth management, Laity happiness. It was, therefore, in accordance with Marshal Po Piboonsongkram's policy to economically build the Nation.

The political situation was rather turbulent during the time, as there were repeated uprisings. In 1948, the Chiefs-of-Staff Rebel, or the Generals' Rebel, was conducted by a group of high-ranking military officials such as Major General Somboon Saranuchit and Major General Net Khemayothin. Mr. Fong Sittitham was accused of rebelling to separate the Northeastern region in order to set up a new state. In 1949, the Wang Luang Rebel was launched by a group of navies, ex-politicians, ex-Free-Thai members and supporters of Pridi Phanomyong. In 1951, the Manhattan Rebel took place.³⁸ These uprisings greatly impacted the stability of the government and the country because the rebels were subdued only after violent fights.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 98-105.

As a result, to ensure further peace in the country, the teachings - e.g. of gratefulness, politeness and obedience - that facilitate ruling were given much emphasis in the curriculum. The threats were not only internal but also external through the rise of communism. Kowit Wongsurawat described Marshal Po Piboonsongkram's policy as follows:

“The nationalist political policy during Marshal Po Piboonsongkram's second term of premiership was absolutely different from his policy in the first term. That is, the nationalist sentiment was raised through animosity, not towards the West (especially USA), but towards communism instead...Therefore, when Thailand decided to ally themselves with the capitalist democracy, it was unavoidable to stir up a hostile sense toward communism. The propaganda was not only in response to the global situation but also contributed to the nationalist sentiment.”³⁹

Marshal Po Piboonsongkram's anti-communist policy led to the Anti-communist Act in 1952.⁴⁰ The teaching of Buddhism in schools had to be readjusted to the situation and it very soon became the State's instrument to ward off communism. Buddhist teachings and monks' roles consequently incorporated the anti-communist element as the Venerable Paisal Wisalo remarked:

“In the past four decades, the Sangha became one with the State in the sense of being subservient, so much so that they can be said to be the State's extension. They provided various services to the State's policies. First, serving the anti-communist policy, monks became the government's mouthpiece. They went so far as to allow a senior monk to teach without reserve that “Killing communists is not

³⁹ Kowit Wongsurawat, Thai Politics and Administration: Multi-dimensions. (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2004), pp. 76-77.

⁴⁰ Thanakit, Biographies of Thai Prime Ministers, p. 115.

immoral.” It came as no surprise that the Sangha did not reprimand him. Meanwhile, a project of Buddhist mission, Dhammacarika, was set up to bring hill-tribe people into the religion instead of letting them join [communism].”⁴¹

Buddhism in this period became the symbol of Thainess employed in the fight against communism. Although this adaptation benefited the country and raised the role and status of Buddhism in the society, it clearly showed that Buddhism was subservient to nationalism, as Phra Pisal Wisalo stated:

“A project of Buddhist mission, Dhammadhuta, targeted people in the rural areas within the scope of communist pervasion. The project Dhammacarika targeted hill-tribe people with the aim of converting them into Buddhism. It was believed that becoming Buddhists would guarantee that they would never become communists, since communists were not ‘Thais’ according to the government’s nationalist definition.”⁴²

When Buddhism became the State’s instrument in fighting against the spread of communism, it was no surprise that the contents of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the curricula during this period were in keeping with this policy. Apart from the addition of teachings to create obedient citizens, other elements were included to promote Buddhishood as the symbol of Thainess. Suwanna Wongwisayawan gave the following comments:

“Moral education for the youth focused on gratefulness, discipline, and loyalty to the Nation, the Religion, and the King. Expectations in terms of morality from the perspective of the Thai State did not change much after the modernization period. More emphasis was given to the role of monks in every region to preach and protect the nation’s interests and

⁴¹ Venerable Paisal Wisalo, Thai Buddhism in the Future: Trend and Crisis Solution, p. 87.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 116-117.

the King, and also to lead social development and perform strict meditation practice to win people's faith. It can be said that the Ratanattaya - the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha - was elaborated to serve the ideology of the Thai nation."⁴³

It turned out that the elementary curriculum of 1955 did not contain a subject of Morality, but subjects of citizen's duties, health, geography and history, physical education, handicraft, music and singing, etc., all of which were included in the Social Studies course. The teaching proportion of each subject was not indicated. However, the following statement on the curriculum of 1955 appeared in the document of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development:

"It is the most advanced curriculum. That is, it contains clear curricular and course objectives. Contents are integrated and categorized as courses. It has also changed from Subject Curriculum to Broad-fields Curriculum with the aim of contributing to children's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development through the four elements of education, i.e. Moral Education, Buddhist Education, Physical Education, and Craft Education."⁴⁴

The change of curricular structure that led to its integration in the Social Studies course left it unclear what the exact proportion and contents of the subject of Morality were. However, the twenty-first Objective of the elementary curriculum indicated the promotion of children's of physical, intellectual, social and emotional development in order to prepare them for democratic citizenship. This was in accordance with the National Educational Plan of 1951, which declared that the State will provide its people with education sufficient for their subsistence and for them to

⁴³ Suwanna Wongwisayawan, Buddha-dhamma in Thai State: Social and Epistemological Considerations. (Bangkok: Institute of Thai Studies, Thammasat University, 1986), pp. 68-69.

⁴⁴ Pornpen Pathoomsiri, Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

develop into good and healthy citizens equipped with occupational knowledge and democratic spirit.⁴⁵ From the curriculum of 1955 onward, the contents of the Buddhist Studies subject were changed again in response to the State's policy of raising democratic consciousness. This brought on significant consequences as well.

5. Thai School Curricula between 1960 - 1981

The curriculum of 1960 fell under the National Educational Plan of 1960, whose goal was to train students to be moral and cultured, have Hiri-Ottappa and commitment to common good over self-interest.⁴⁶ The goal of the curriculum itself was to provide citizens with education sufficient for subsistence and for development into good citizens equipped with occupational knowledge, skills, and commitment to contribute to the country's growth. Special emphasis was given to moral, physical, Buddhist, and craft education with the goal of developing children into good citizens in the democratic country through training in self-development, human relations, occupational skills, and responsibility for one's duties.⁴⁷ Wittichai Mulasilp criticized the curriculum of 1960 as follows:

“The idea of preserving national identity is significant, but people in general, including the authorities in education [provision], did not give it much consideration until recently. The aim of education was not different. The policy of “reaping the fruits others have sowed” was apparent. For example, the curricular goals indicated in the National Educational Plan of 1960 were all copied from the educational plans in the USA. Moreover, they were written in such formal language that even

⁴⁵ Ministry of Education, Mr. Lieng Chayakan, Ministry of Education and National Educational Plans, p. 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁷ Pornpen Pathoomsiri, Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

teachers could barely decipher them, let alone laypersons. They were therefore not very practical. The problems of ambiguity and misunderstanding about the goal of education have continued to today.”⁴⁸

In the lower elementary level, no subject related to Buddhism could be found in the Social Studies course. Conventions, morality, and culture were broadly described without clear identification with any religious values. In the higher elementary level, the proportion of morality instruction was indicated in the contents of the Social Studies course. The Buddha’s biography, Pancasila, Pancadhamma, noble etiquettes and social manners were covered. In localities where the majority had faith other than Buddhism, it was noted in the curriculum that other doctrines could be instructed, on the condition that the syllabus was approved on a semester basis by an inspector of the Ministry of Education. This was the first time that non-Buddhist doctrines could be taught in the subject of Morality. The reason for this was probably to maintain consistency with democratic principles, which were especially focused on in this curriculum.

The proportion of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the elementary curricular contents was therefore only 0.74%, the lowest percentage since 1892. In the lower secondary level, morality was taught as part of the Social Studies course and occupied 3.33% of its contents. It covered the Disciples’ biographies, Buddhists’ duties, and other doctrines such as Ditthadhammikattā, Apayamukha (ways of squandering wealth), Laity happiness, and Gharavasa-dhamma. In the higher secondary level, morality was also taught in the Social Studies (A) course, and occupied 1.66% of its contents. It covered moral principles, the Buddha’s biography, merit-making, etc. Pali and Arabic were offered as elective courses. It was the first revival of Pali after its long absence in Thai school curricula.

A significant event during this period was the celebration of the 25th Buddhist century. The occasion was thought to be so important that the

⁴⁸ Wuttichai Mulasilp, The Beginning of Educational Reform: From King Rama V-VII, p. 175.

government announced three special public holidays. The celebration lasted from May 12 - 18, and a royal decree was announced that Sanam Luang (the public square in front of the Royal Palace) be dedicated to the Sangha for the occasion.⁴⁹ Although this event should have raised awareness and interest in Buddhism, neither proportion nor contents of the subject of Buddhist Studies showed any increase in the curricula.

Social needs were also important factors in determining the reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrines. Thailand was then under the premiership of Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata whose policy was to prioritize national economic development. This was evident in the National Economic Plan I, 1961 - 1966. The Buddhist teachings were adapted again accordingly. The Venerable Paisal Wisalo gave the following comments:

“In Thailand where Buddhism used to be the mainstream, nationalism now stood out and took over its influential role, after having developed its own stability under the shade of the religion. The nation and religion seemed to be one. Yet, the nation’s interests, or the government’s interests, were superior to those of Buddhism. If the latter’s teachings were not in keeping with the government’s interest, compromises were made by method of ‘concealment.’ For instance, the teaching of Santosa (satisfaction with what one has) was erased from the Sangha’s teaching following the request of Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata who was implementing his National Economic Plan.”⁵⁰

The teachings related to economy since the time of Marshal Po Piboonsongkram – teachings about thrift, diligence, and Laity happiness – were retained, as they were consistent with many of the curricular objectives, e.g. to teach students wise use of wealth, time, and energy; to instruct them

⁴⁹ Chamnong Thongprasert, Maha Chula in the Past. (Bangkok: Maha Chulalongkorn Buddhist University Press, 1989), pp. 128-129.

⁵⁰ Venerable Paisal Wisalo, Thai Buddhism in the Future: Trend and Crisis Solution, p. 115.

about ways to support their family's economic conditions and ways to earn a living; to raise awareness about supporting Thai businesses and products as ways to contribute to the nation's economy. After the coup in 1958, Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata announced that only 10% of the country was developed, while the rest were in need of serious interventions, thereby justifying his and the following governments in carrying out their missions of development. It is evident that Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata's government considered Thai people's equal prosperity to be its main mission.⁵¹

The curriculum of 1975 for higher secondary school level contained eight courses that have Buddhism as part of the subject matter, i.e. Social Studies 3 (S 503), Social Studies 4 (S 504), Global Religions (S 031 and S 041), and Buddhism in Thailand (S 042). Buddhism occupied on average 10% of the contents, and covered topics such as the Buddha's biography, Mangala (blessings) in Buddhism, knowledge about global religions, and Buddhism in Thailand, which includes religious rites and Thai manners. The course objectives were for students to appreciate the value of religion, to apply the teachings for both personal and common good, and to perform religious rites with consideration for one's economic status, and with an aim to preserve culture. According to the curricular objectives, students were to become decent and able citizens who are aware of their rights and duties, are capable of finding methods of peaceful conflict resolutions and justice building in the democratic society, and value and sustain the stability of the Nation, the Religion, the King, and Thai culture.

The curriculum and the subject of Buddhist Studies included topics of personal and social peace because of, firstly, the bloodshed event of October 14, 1973, which greatly impacted the nation's stability; and secondly, the rising democratic atmosphere after the fall of the dictatorship. Kowit Wongsurawat gave the following remarks:

⁵¹ Kowit Wongsurawat, Thai Politics and Administration: Multi-dimensions, p. 98.

“The October 14 incident led to the fall of military dictatorship after its fifteen-year domination over Thailand, including the end of Thanom-Prapas-Narong group of power. This did not only allow other groups to accumulate power, but also was a key to democracy. Moreover, after this incident, the roles of university students and lecturers – ‘the intellectuals’ – increased while the military and the police suffered a deep decline in credibility.”⁵²

In their anti-government movement, university students played a significant role in campaigning for democracy. The government inevitably was made aware of the youth’s behavior, values, and attitudes. As the students’ roles became more visible, the government’s authority became increasingly threatened, and it therefore had to take caution to prevent possible future resistance. The subject of Buddhist Studies, especially in the higher secondary level of the 1975 curriculum, focused on social peace and democracy to encourage students who were about to enter universities to maintain social peace, which is the role desired by the government. The curriculum of 1978 expressed the national goal of providing education to all citizens to benefit their life and develop society. The curricular objective was for students to become good persons with quality, knowledge, abilities, peace in life, and good citizens of society.⁵³ The curriculum was under the National Educational Plan of 1977, which aimed to develop citizens’ quality so that they could support themselves and contribute to the growth of society. The plan emphasized Thai social safety, stability and well-being, and also specific purposes such as understanding in and enthusiasm for participation in the democratic regime with the King as the head of the State, and of commitment to the Nation, the Religion, and the King.⁵⁴ These were in

⁵² Ibid., p. 115.

⁵³ Pornpen Pathoomsiri, Evolution of Elementary Curricula. (Elementary Curricular Development Division, Curricular Development Center, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development), (Unpublished Manuscript).

⁵⁴ Ministry of Education, Mr. Lieng Chayakan, Ministry of Education and National Educational Plans, p. 55.

accordance with the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1977 - 1981) which included a section related specifically to educational development, improvement of curricula and learning process in response to the national educational policy under the democratic regime with the King as the head of the State, and with commitment to the Nation, the Religion and the King.⁵⁵

In the curriculum of 1978, the elementary level contained 25% of studies of Buddhism, which made up 2.66% of the contents in Life-experience Development course and 22.33% in Character Development course. The latter contained elements of morality, but it was not specified from which religion they were derived. Most, however, seemed to belong to Buddhism, such as Metta (loving-kindness), Karuna (compassion), Mudita (sympathetic joy), Upekkha (equanimity), gratefulness, meditation method, community life, cultured character, loyalty to the Nation, the Religion, and the King. The Life-experience Development course covered the Buddha's biography, Pancasila, Pancadhamma, Iddhipada (path of accomplishment), the holy days, Buddhamamaka (Buddhist) vow, Buddhabhasita (the Buddha's sayings), and religious rites. Apart from the Character Development course that contained the subject of Morality without any specific reference to a particular religion, Buddhist studies comprised 2.66% in the curriculum.

Some tension seems to exist between the spirit of nationalism and democracy, and the content of the subject of Buddhist Studies seems to reflect this. At the elementary level, for instance, it was commonly taught that "Buddhism is Thailand's national religion." At the same time, however, it is affirmed that "since every religion teaches everyone to do good deeds to live happily, one has the liberty to put one's faith in any religion," and also "The king sponsors every religion." Moreover, it was included in the curricular objectives that students should be able to explain why Thais accepted Buddhism as their national religion, and also be able to describe

⁵⁵ Office of National Economic and Social Development Commission, Office of Prime Minister, The 4th National Economic and Social Plan 1977 - 1981. (Bangkok: Reungsaeng Printing, 1977), p. 270.

Buddhist doctrines, components of Buddhism, religious rites, etc. These objectives were extended to cover all religions. Students should, for example, be able to give brief descriptions about the merits and contributions of every religion. This extension seems to be the result of the curricular focus on democratic principles.

Since the curriculum's goal was to develop students into good citizens in a democratic system with the King as the head of the State, it comprised educational principles for the sake of building national solidarity with peace as a shared goal, and of allowing local communities partial curricular management to fit their needs. The democratic principles at the heart of this curriculum affected the objectives and percentage of religious study. That is, in the contents of the subject of Morality, no clear reference was made to any religion. Local communities were permitted to teach the majority's religion. Involved parties then requested that the contents and percentage of Buddhist Studies be clearly indicated, which prompted the Ministry of Education to give additional descriptions on the subject of Buddhist Studies in the curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990). This will be discussed in the next section.

The percentage of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the lower secondary level was 1.19. It was offered as part of the Social Studies course (S 101) and Our-Country course (S 102), both exclusively offered to students of the seventh Grade. The contents covered the history of Buddhism, Dhamma, rites and ways of life based on Buddhist and other religious teachings. Meanwhile, no elective course in the Social Studies category was related to Buddhism. Although there were religious courses in the curriculum (such as Religious Prescriptions, Religious History, Morality), they were mostly about Islam. For instance, in the course Religious Prescriptions, Islamic practices were taught such as Namaz, fasting, rules of Zakat, and Fitrah. The Religious History included Tawrat, Muhammad's

biography, etc.⁵⁶ The Ministry of Education added five elective courses in the Social Studies category, i.e. Oneness, Qur'an, Religious Prescriptions, Religious History and Morality.⁵⁷ There was no elective course on Buddhism. Apart from the list of elective courses in the Social Studies category, Pali disappeared from the list of elective courses in the Foreign Languages category despite its presence in the previous curricula. It may be due to the fact that foreign languages such as Pali are closely tied to courses in other categories. Since Pali is closely related to Buddhism, when the latter was excluded from the list of electives, so was the former. Meanwhile, a course on the Arabic language was still present because courses on Islamic Studies not only remained, but increased, in the curriculum.

The objectives of the lower secondary curriculum of 1978 included, for instance, to teach students to know their rights and duties; to know how to work as a team; to maintain unity and to sacrifice for the common good; to solve conflicts through peaceful, rational and principled means; to be proud of being Thai, and to be loyal to the Nation, the Religion and the King; to know about and have faith in democracy with the King as the head of the State; to participate in the maintenance of national safety and security; and to promote good understanding among humanity and coexist peacefully. It can be seen that the inculcation of loyalty to the Nation, the Religion, and the King, remained. The new objective about peaceful conflict resolution was introduced after the unrests of October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976. In these incidents, university students were considered as the cause of social uprising and violence, and also as wanting to destroy the Nation, the Religion, and the King. Thus, the addition is by no means a surprise. Kowit Wongsurawat gave the following comments:

“On October 6, 1976, university students and people gathered at Sanam Luang. A drama was played by Thammasat University's Thai Dance and Drama Club to re-enact the

⁵⁶ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Lower Secondary Curriculum, 1978. (Bangkok:Printing House of the Teachers' Council (Ladprao), 1982), pp. 81-83.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 228-229.

incident in which Electricity Authorities employees had been hanged. The Armored Cavalry's Radio Station broadcasted a news report that a puppet of Prince Vajiralongkorn was used in the drama. On the next day, two newspapers, *Dao Siam* and the *Bangkok Post*, published pictures of the drama in which the university students imitated the hanging. Their headlines suggested that these students committed 'lèse-majesté' Meanwhile, the Seri Radio Club broadcasted attacks on the students. It was claimed that their requests to expel the monk Thanom and to bring justice to the case of the Electricity Authorities employees were just pretexts to stage the uprising, and that their true goal was to destroy the Nation, the Religion, and the King. The radio club also demanded the government to swiftly put an end to the gathering in order to prevent bloodshed."⁵⁸

The instruction of peace-building through democratic means was not only in keeping with the then National Economic and Social Plan, but also with the government's policy. General Kriengsak Chamanan, the Prime Minister, invited Professor Kasem Suwanakul, the President of Chulalongkorn University, to be the Minister of University Affairs to reduce the tension between the higher education institutions and the government. University lecturers and students then had difficult relationship with the previous government, especially due to the bloodshed of October 6, 1976. Moreover, to restore harmony in the country, an amnesty was granted to everyone involved in the gathering at Thammasat University during October 4-6, 1976.⁵⁹ The higher secondary curriculum of 1981 shared some objectives with that of 1978, e.g. to teach students to respect the rights and liberty of others; to know one's own and others' duties; to exercise one's rights constructively on the basis of laws, morality, and religion; to be aware of the shared Thainess; to sacrifice for the common good; to love the Nation and democracy; to secure the Nation, the Religion, and the King

⁵⁸ Kowit Wongsurawat, *Thai Politics and Administration: Multi-dimensions*, p. 119.

⁵⁹ Thanakit, *Biographies of Thai Prime Ministers*, p. 303.

through clever means; to understand political, economic, social conditions and problems of the country and the world; to have a sense of belonging to humanity; to be able to arrive at peaceful and rational means of conflict resolution. The objective of peaceful conflict resolution remained since 1978. Those students who studied in the lower elementary level under the curriculum of 1978 were the same as those who studied in the higher secondary level under the curriculum of 1981. The attitude building was therefore continuous.

The percentage of the subject of Buddhist Studies was 6.65% and included in S 402-Social Studies course and S 606-Social Studies course, both of which were compulsory for Grades 10 and 12 students respectively. Elective courses included History of Thai Society and Culture (S 0210), Buddhism in Thailand (S 041), and Buddha Images and Buddhist Arts in Thailand (S 042). Each course had a different objective. S 402 was supposed to teach students to learn to make their mind calm, firm, swift and ready to study and work effectively. S 606 was supposed to create good understanding among followers of different faiths; S 0210 to make students aware of the unity of Thainess through the Nation, the Religion, and the King, and that Thainess was molded by common cultures, traditions, customs, and arts. S 041 was supposed to provide knowledge and understanding about the origin of Buddhism in Thailand and about the King's roles with regard to Buddhism; and S 042 about histories and meanings of important Buddha images in Thailand.

This curriculum also retained some objectives from the previous curricula, e.g. peaceful conflict resolution; good understanding among followers of different faiths; awareness in the significance of the Nation, the Religion, and the King. In addition, the inculcation of attitudes that facilitated the building of Thai nationality was also clearly indicated. Courses related to Thainess were thus included in this curriculum. Courses about Buddhism – Buddhism in Thailand, History of Thai Society and Culture, Buddha Images and Buddhist Arts in Thailand – were now linked to Thainess.

One of the reasons for the emphasis on Thainess is probably related to the 200th anniversary of Ratanakosin, celebrated between April 4-21, 1982.⁶⁰ The educational curriculum was adjusted so that it takes into account the long history of the Thai nationality. The common feature of curricular objectives and contents was the linking of the subject of Buddhist Studies to Thai society, Thainess, or, to be more precise, the Thai State. They were related in such a way that the subject was to build good people, who were no different from the good citizens from the State's perspective, as Suwanna Wongwaisayawan commented:

“Consideration of the Venerable Vajiranavavarorasa's recommendations on the relationship between Buddha-dhamma and the Thai State since the reign of King Rama V – ones which continued to develop in the form of the subject of Morality in the curricula from 1905 - 1978 and 1981 – shows that the learning of morality in the Thai State is basically the learning of Buddhism, which covered the Buddha's biography, auspicious virtues, religious rites, and Buddhist holy days. It can be said that consideration of the moral contents mainly explained from the State's perspective indicates that the development of a “good person” is not separable from that of a “good citizen”...It is remarkable that the explanation of the Buddha-dhamma as the nation's morality was highly continuous.”⁶¹

The subject of Buddhist Studies in the curriculum, consequently, focused on democratic principles, e.g. respect for others' rights and liberty; awareness of one's own and others' duties; constructive exercises of rights on the basis of laws, morality and religion; common awareness of Thainess; sacrifice for the common good; love for the Nation and democracy. The objectives seemed to be influenced by many political factors. That is,

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 315.

⁶¹ Suwanna Wongwaisayawan, Buddha-dhamma in Thai State: Social and Epistemological Considerations, p. 51.

during General Prem Tinasulanon's premiership, one of the important accomplishments was the suppression of the communist terrorists through the politics-led-military policy known as Decree 66/2523, which allowed communist collaborators to submit themselves, and consequently weakened and terminated the Communist Party.⁶² However, on April 1, 1981, a group of military personnel led by General San Chitarapatima, together with a group of young military officers known as "Young Turks" (e.g., Colonel Manoon Roopkachon, Colonel Prachak Swangchit and Colonel Panlop Pinmanee) staged a rebel by seizing television stations, main roads, and important military headquarters. However, they failed.⁶³ Although communism and the rebel were not related, both were threats to democracy. They seem to have prompted the government to employ educational curricula and the subject of Buddhist Studies to inculcate faith in democracy. During this time, the government tried to improve the political system to make it as democratic as possible. After the incident of October 6, 1976, the governments between 1976 - 1988 were called "half-democratic" since the military was still in control in spite of the Constitution, political parties, and elections.⁶⁴ Democratization was therefore one of the leading policies that General Prem Tinasulanon prioritized during his premiership. This was evident in his farewell statement on August 5, 1988:

"Thank you, colleagues in every Cabinet that used to work with me. Thank you, political parties that have invited me to continue my terms as Prime Minister. I informed the leaders of these parties that it has been sufficient for me because I have worked for a considerable time and have had an opportunity to sustain democracy, develop politics in the democratic regime, so that it is lasting and uninterrupted. During my terms, I also had opportunities to understand politics, to get to know political parties and politicians, whether they worked with me or not. I have known them well enough to

⁶² Thanakit, Biographies of Thai Prime Ministers, p. 313.

⁶³ Ibid., p.p. 313-314.

⁶⁴ Kowit Wongsurawat, Thai Politics and Administration: Multi-dimensions, p. 122.

say that the experience was not easy to come by. I therefore think it is time, and ask you to take care and develop the politics in our democratic regime so that it is progressive and secured.”⁶⁵

The government implemented its democratic policy through the curricula for all students in the country. By doing so, their ideas, ideology, and policies were most effectively imparted to the people and put to practice. Buddhist Studies was one of many subjects that could respond to the government’s goals, and this method has always proven to be successful.

6. Thai School Curricula between 1990 - 2001

The curriculum of 1990 was a revision of the 1978 one, and was aptly called “Curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990).” For the sake of clarity, it is here referred to as the curriculum of 1990. Its principles were the same as those in the curriculum of 1978, e.g. to provide education to aid in building unity in the nation under the shared main goals, and also to allow local communities to develop parts of the curriculum to fit their conditions and needs. The curricular objective for the elementary level was to develop students so that they could advance their quality of life, and consequently become prepared to contribute to society according to their roles and duties as good citizens under the democratic regime with the King as the head of the State.

The proportion of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the elementary level was 5.1%. The subject was incorporated in two courses – Life-experience Development and Character Development. It occupied 11.42% in the lower secondary level and was taught in the six courses on Buddhism, i.e. S 018 and S 0113. The subject occupied 12.12% of the contents in the higher secondary level and was a part of six courses on Buddhism, i.e. S 048 and S 0413. For the first time, these courses – formerly known under the title of “Dhammacari,” “Dhammacariya,” “Cariya,” “Citizens’ Duties,” “Morality,” and “Social Studies” – became known with a new official title of “Buddhism”. In the previous curricula, the percentage of the subject of

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

Buddhist Studies was in decline until the year 1990. Upon receiving complaints from many parties, the Ministry of Education provided a clarification about the contents and percentage of the subject, and issued an additional handbook exclusively for the Buddhist Studies curriculum. According to the Ministry, when the percentage of instruction on Buddhism increased, schools faced the following difficulties:

“In the lower secondary curriculum of 1978 and the higher secondary curriculum of 1981, problems were found in the required Social Studies courses because subjects were not as clearly identified as in the previous curricula. An attempt has been made to integrate them. In the process, the subject of Morality disappeared from the curricula, yet its contents still exist and are integrated into both required and elective courses. Requests, complaints, and criticisms were heard from organizations and individuals that the subject of Buddhism or Buddhist Studies was not given proper consideration in the curricular design. The Ministry of Education, as a result, announces an addition of contents in the Social Studies courses in the secondary curricula. It will be applied in 1983 for the lower secondary level, and in 1984 in the category of elective courses for the higher secondary level.”⁶⁶

The Ministry of Education’s clarification about the integration accounted for the disappearance of the subject of Buddhist Studies, especially from the elementary curricula from 1960 to 1978. However, it did not provide clarifications about subjects concerning other religions. The elective courses in the Islamic Studies category, for instance, were not integrated and did not disappear from the curriculum. Instead, such courses increased in number, and the details of their contents were clearly indicated.

⁶⁶ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Handbook for Buddhist Subject Curriculum in the Lower Secondary Curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990). (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council (Ladprao), 2536), p. 2.

It was remarked by many that this was quite different from the case of Buddhist Studies. The Venerable Payutto commented on the integration of religious subjects as follows.

“To combine religious principles, we have the concept of integration in mind. When it is applied, what we get is a new religion not based on real experience. So, when integration is intended to combine religious principles, it turns out that we destroy the religion’s integrity. Certainly, the religion loses its integrity. And, when we say we are universalizing morality, it instead becomes a doctrine, a dogma newly molded. When it is taught to children, it becomes indoctrination leading to dogmatism. So, even though the aim is to flee from indoctrination, it becomes indoctrination itself.”⁶⁷

There is yet another reason why the Ministry of Education did not give clear identification of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the curricula until 1978, which led to the decline in the percentage of Buddhism instruction, and why some of their courses, e.g. Character Development, focused on universal morality instead. In keeping with Thailand’s democratic spirit, the Ministry included moral elements of every religion in the curricula, and provided the following explanation:

“In 1902, the Ministry of Religious Affairs added the subject of ‘Cariya’ for the first time in the curricula for every level, and gave it a high priority with the aim of training children’s character. The priority remained until 1932 when the country became democratic after the revolution. People were then given more rights and liberty, and curricula were revised. The subject of Cariya was also revised and expanded into Citizens’ Duties and Morality. In response to the democratic principles, the Morality subject contained ethical elements

⁶⁷ Venerable Payutto, Educational Reform: Where will Buddhism be? (Bangkok: Thammasarn, 2001), pp. 67-68.

common to every religion. However, in later curricular revisions, the contents of the subject were adapted because the youth were found to have increasing moral and ethical problems.”⁶⁸

It can be seen that in accounting for the universalization of morality among different religions, a justification related to democratic principles was raised, which was in accordance with objectives in the previous curricula that focused on unity through education. The Ministry realized that if special emphasis was given to a particular religion, democracy would be undermined and social peace might be obstructed, possibly leading to disunity in the country. On this issue, the Venerable Payutto stated the following:

“The important point is that, in the Thai background, there is no issue of religious liberty, but harmony among religions. Therefore, Thais do not have a suspicious attitude. Neither are they always alert to secure their rights and protect themselves [in this regard]. When Buddhism is mentioned, just do so straightforwardly. Neither aggrandizement nor discrimination is implied. As for those Thais clinging to the Western idea of negative liberty, when they hear the mention of Buddhism and not other religions, they become suspicious or deem it is discriminatorily. They are stuck with that and are blinded to the problems to solve on a factual basis.”⁶⁹

According to the Ministry of Education, more consideration to the subject of Morality was given due to the youth’s problem, and more courses on religions were included. Examples included Jesus’ Teaching, Christian Kingdom of God, Qur’an, and Commandments, elements of which were

⁶⁸ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Handbook for Buddhist Subject Curriculum in the Lower Secondary Curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990), pp. 1-2.

⁶⁹ Venerable Payutto, Setting up Ministry of Buddhism – What are the true reasons? (Bangkok: Buddha-dhamma Foundation, 2002), p. 26.

present since the curriculum of 1960. It can be said that the curriculum of 1990 was much more open to religious courses. However, the percentage of the instruction of Buddhist Studies decreased in the elementary level, which led to complaints from many parties as described above. When the contents about other religions were added, contents about Buddhism were consequently decreased, so that the curricular structures were not disturbed, as indicated in the explanation from the Ministry of Education:

“Even though the announcement to add more Buddhist contents was based on many parties’ good will, the supervision, follow-up, and evaluation of its application showed that problems were found both in practice and instruction. That is, schools had to find extra hours, because the contents were increased, but not the study hours. Most teachers lacked adequate understanding of Buddhist doctrines. Schools lacked teachers with proper knowledge in Buddhism. The instructions just replicated the textbooks. Rote learning was adopted rather than analytical and applicative methods. Moreover, neither teachers nor people in the society were good models for students both in behavioral and practical terms.”⁷⁰

Despite the explanation, the Ministry of Education’s mistakes can be detected. Why did the Ministry not solve the problems in its follow-up and evaluation of the curricular application? For example, teachers could have been trained to have better knowledge and behavior. It was possible that the main problem was not in the curriculum itself but in the quality of teachers. Ineffective instruction might be due to ineffective teachers, not the inappropriate curricula. If the solution had been implemented without any improvements, the Ministry may have had to reconsider their own system.

⁷⁰ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Handbook for Buddhist Subject Curriculum in the Lower Secondary Curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990), pp. 1-2.

The contents of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the elementary level consisted of nine parts, i.e. 1) the history and significance of Buddhism; 2) biographies of both male and female disciples of the Buddha, including the model Buddhists; 3) monks and appropriate conduct towards them; 4) Buddhists' duties; 5) Buddhist holy days; 6) Buddhist teachings; 7) Buddhist proverbs; 8) mental exercise and wisdom cultivation; 9) religious rites. The objectives were for students to develop faith in Buddhism and awareness of its significance; to know, understand, and appreciate the virtue of Ratanattaya; to have knowledge and understanding about Buddhism and its teachings; to develop thinking skills and behave in accordance with Buddhist teachings; and to know and perform the Buddhists' duties.

The contents of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the lower secondary level consisted of eight parts. They included 1) the history and significance of Buddhism; 2) biographies of both male and female disciples of the Buddha, including model Buddhists; 3) Buddhist teachings; 4) monks and appropriate conduct towards them; 5) Tipitaka, Buddhist proverbs, Pali and Buddhist terms; 6) Buddhists' duties; 7) mental exercise and wisdom cultivation; and 8) Buddhists' manners, religious rites, and Buddhist holy days. The objectives were for students to develop faith in Buddhism and awareness of its significance; to know, understand, and appreciate the virtue of Ratanattaya; to know and understand the Buddha's biography and Buddhist teachings; to develop thinking skills, behave in accordance with Buddhist teachings, choose and apply the appropriate teachings to develop oneself and society; to be good Buddhists and perform Buddhists' duties; and to know, understand, and perform in religious rites properly.

In the higher secondary level, the contents of the subject of Buddhist Studies included all eight parts of the lower secondary curriculum, but prioritized differently. They were 1) the history and significance of Buddhism; 2) biographies of both male and female disciples of the Buddha, including model Buddhists; 3) Buddhist teachings for life and society; 4) monks and appropriate conduct towards them; 5) Buddhists' duties; 6) Tipitaka, Buddhist proverbs, Pali and Buddhist terms; 7) mental exercise and wisdom cultivation; and 8) Buddhists' manners, religious rites, and Buddhist

holy days. The objectives were for students to develop faith, appreciation, and consciousness of Buddhism's significance and Ratanattayya's virtue; to know, understand, and be able to analyze Buddhism and its teachings appropriately; to take into account different ideas and judge them with Buddhist rational principles; to develop thinking skills, behave in accordance with Buddhist teachings, and apply the teachings to develop oneself and society; and to be good Buddhists and perform Buddhists' duties.

The above information shows that the categorization of contents in the curricula was standardized. That is, in the elementary level, the contents were categorized into nine parts. Students in every elementary grade had to study these parts with the contents and details proper to their level. Similarly, in the lower and higher secondary levels, the contents were categorized into eight parts, and the difficulty adjusted to suit each grade. Although the categorization into either nine or eight parts is considered to be comprehensive, it gave rise to problems. Firstly, since the contents overlapped among categories, they could not be easily arranged, and sometimes contents and objectives could recur. For instance, when studying about Buddhist holy days, the variation or depth of content do not extend beyond Dhammassavana Day, Magha Puja Day, Visakha Puja day, and Asalha Puja Day, and were repeated in the teachings for every grade. Similarly, in the mental exercise and wisdom cultivation part, elementary students studied the rising-falling method of meditation, while lower secondary students studied breath-counting, and higher secondary students studied Anussati (the Ten Reflections). Although the methods differed from one level to another, the doctrines related to them are one and the same.

Secondly, there was a problem in doctrinal arrangements. Same doctrines were broken down and their components were taught to different grades. Examples of them were Disa (the Six Directions), Bhrama Vihara (the Four Divine States of Mind), and Mangala (the Thirty-eight Blessings). Even Ariyasacca, the heart of Buddhism, was parceled out for instruction in different grades as the teachers saw fit. Therefore, only slices of the Buddhist doctrines were taught to each grade. The Ministry of Education gave the following explanation:

“By breaking down of the Buddhist teachings covered in the Character Development category, it can be seen that each grade is taught only some parts, and not all of the doctrines. However, all will eventually be taught when students reach higher grades. Consideration is given to difficulty of contents relative to children’s development. For example, of the Disa, only four items (Respect for Parents, Respect for Teachers, Respect for Seniors, Love for and Unity among Siblings) are taught in the Second Grade. One more, i.e. Love for and Unity among Friends, is taught in the Fourth Grade. When students reach the Sixth Grade, they are taught every aspect of the issue.”⁷¹

Although the method of breaking down the contents of Buddhism was useful in that it allowed adjustment to fit students, it lacked continuity and completeness because some doctrines in the curricula were not entirely taught. For instance, of Attha (Welfare), only one item, i.e. Ditthadhammakattha, was taught, and the other two were left out. The Venerable Payutto gave the following comments:

“The Buddha never taught only Metta. This was the reason why he taught the entire set for us to practice. If we break them down, it will be dangerous. In our society, even in education, people like to teach only some items. Metta is singled out from its set. So is Karuna. Finally, it is not known what set they belong to. The reason why the Buddha taught in sets is because all items in the sets form the whole, and all must be practiced to perfection. If not, it can lead to danger. Metta and Karuna, if not practiced together with the rest of the items in their set, can be harmful.”⁷²

⁷¹ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Handbook for Buddhist Subject Curriculum in the Elementary Curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990). (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council (Ladprao), 2536), Preface.

⁷² Venerable Payutto, Prilgrimage and Dhamma Writings. (Bangkok: Sahathammik, 2543), p. 101.

Meanwhile, Buddhism was explained in relation to the democratic perspective as before. For instance, in the S 048-Buddhism course, it was stated that:

“Emphasis is given to Indian society in the Buddha’s time to show that ruling based on the caste system led to social injustice, and did not allow human potentials to flourish. It was a factor that gave rise to Buddhism at that time, and is the foundation of democracy today.”⁷³

The linking of Buddhism in the Buddha’s time to Thailand’s democracy showed that the subject of Buddhist Studies was adjusted in response to the government system. One of the reasons the curriculum of 1990 still focused on democracy was that the democratic regime remained unstable. After Thailand experienced “full-democracy” for the first time during General Chatchai Choonhawan’s premiership, Thai politics became unstable again when a coup was launched by the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC).⁷⁴ Moreover, in the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1987 - 1991), it was indicated in the section of Moral and Cultural Development Plan that development of democratic consciousness should be conducted through educational curricula. In the plan, measures were given such as training and integration of moral development and values. The training was meant to be offered in both formal and non-formal educational curricula, and was also offered to educational administrators to foster discipline, respect for laws, and observance of duties towards the Nation, the Religion, and the King.⁷⁵ The use of education curricula to mold good citizenship as defined by the governments can be observed continuously, and was clearly indicated in

⁷³ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Handbook for Buddhist Subject Curriculum in the Higher Secondary Curriculum of 1978 (Revised in 1990). (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council (Ladprao), 2541), p. 12.

⁷⁴ Kowit Wongsurawat, Thai Politics and Administration: Multi-dimensions, p. 122.

⁷⁵ Office of National Economic and Social Development Commission, Office of Prime Ministry, The 6th National Economic and Social Plan 1987 - 1991. (Bangkok: United Production, 1987), pp. 91-93.

the above National Economic and Social Development Plan. The subject of Buddhist Studies was highly flexible and could be adjusted to meet every government's policies, and this will continue to be the case.

The curriculum of 2001 is used in the present time. In its overall structure, no course detail is specified, which should be due to the principle of student-centered life-long learning and self-development to allow students to flourish fully and naturally according to their potentials. The curriculum is flexible in terms of contents, time, and learning arrangements. It allows every form of educational provision to meet every target group, and supports credit transfer and accumulation system. Under this principle, no specification is given to courses in different categories. For instance, the proportion of time that should be allocated to each course category is not specified. It is left for each school to decide as they see fit which course categories should be taught to which grade and to what extent. However, the high flexibility can lead to confusion in practice. When each school is relatively at liberty in their educational provision, different standards both in qualitative and quantitative terms are almost unavoidable.

Objectives of this curriculum are for students to realize their self-worth, have self-discipline, observe the teaching of Buddhism or the religion of their faith, uphold morality, virtues, and desirable social values. According to the Learning Standard S 1.1, students are to understand the history, significance, and teaching of Buddhism or the religion of their faith, and put them into practice as a basis for living together. According to the Learning Standard S 1.2, students are to adhere to morality, do good deeds, uphold desirable social values, and have faith in Buddhism or their religion of choice. According to the Learning Standard S 1.3, students are to follow the teachings and rites of Buddhism or of the religion of their faith as well as desirable social values, and apply them in order to self-develop and contribute to the good of society, environment, and peaceful coexistence. It is noted that, according to these learning standards, the subject of Buddhism is not required. It is simply mentioned. That other religions are not specifically mentioned was meant to show the curriculum's flexibility. This, however, gave rise to complaints from involved parties, especially

from Buddhist groups, who gathered on April 10, 2001 and announced their demand to the government.⁷⁶

To sum up, five thousand Buddhists from thirty-four organizations assembled and made five requests. One of them demanded that Buddhism be contained in the core curriculum for basic education, and taught with the same standard all over the country. Moreover, it was also requested that Buddhism be a required course for every Buddhist, and have credits and proportion of time no less than those specified in the present curriculum. Due to education reform, the Ministry of University Affairs and the National Educational Commission were merged into the Ministry of Education. This impacted the structure of Buddhist affairs, e.g. the Sangha's administrative system, management of religious monuments, and the significance of the subject of Buddhist Studies in the school. Moreover, participation of representatives from other religions in the administration of Buddhist affairs left some monks and Buddhists uncomfortable. The Sangha and the Buddhist organizations consequently demanded that the Office of Education Reform include the subject of Buddhist Studies in curricula of all levels, and withdraw representatives from other religions from the Commission on Religion and Culture, or set up an independent organization for Buddhist affairs.⁷⁷

On April 11, 2001, a newspaper reported that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra accepted the requests from these organizations and called for a brainstorming meeting to solve the problems.⁷⁸ It was also reported that the Prime Minister closely observed the structural problem of the new ministry. Insisting he was one-thousand per cent Buddhist, the Prime Minister promised to give urgent consideration to the requests and to solve the problems in the way the majority preferred. At the same time, Mr. Kasem Wattanachai, the Minister of Education, stated that teaching Buddhism in schools and declaring Buddhism as the national religion were not a problem because

⁷⁶ Thairath (2001, April 10):1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ Thairath (2001, April 11):1.

they were in keeping with the government's policies. However, he said that good understanding with other religions should be fostered because good Buddhists follow the Buddhist teachings, do not discriminate against other religions, and can live peacefully with people of different faiths.⁷⁹ On 23 January 23, 2002, the Ministry of Education appointed a commission to set up detailed contents of the subject of Buddhist Studies for the curricula of the twelve-year basic education. The commission had sixty-three members, such as the Venerable Payutto, Dr. Sirikorn Maneerin, Professor Chamnong Thongprasert, with the Venerable Prayoon and the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Education as the advisor.⁸⁰ When the Buddhist Studies core curriculum was completed, the Venerable Prayoon gave the following explanation:

“A remark about the basic education curriculum of 2001 is that this curriculum mentions contents and learning standards in general only, and does not provide details of the course categories. That is because the basic education curriculum of 2001 allows each school to work on the details by themselves. In this curriculum, Buddhism instruction is described in ten lines only. Buddhists are concerned. Buddhism is a sensitive matter. If each school is allowed to design their own course contents, there is a fear that this may lead to schisms. The disunity in the religion will certainly impact the harmony of people in the country. Therefore, it is requested that a core curriculum be set up for the Buddhist Studies course categories for every school to commonly use.”⁸¹

Thus, the curriculum that makes no specific mention of any religion was revised so that the phrase, “Buddhism or the religion of their faith,” was included. The reason no religion was specifically mentioned was to

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁰ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Provision of Buddhist Contents. (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers' Council (Ladprao), 2002), p. e.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. c.

allow practical flexibility. As has been shown, such practical flexibility unfortunately led to practical confusion. Although “Buddhism” was later added in the curriculum, it does not necessarily have to be taught to non-Buddhist students in largely non-Buddhist communities. A problem that follows is how to handle students in communities with mixed faiths. To solve this, the Director-General of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development issued a document No. MOE 0607/4389 with the following details.

“In the provision of Strand 1: Religion, Morality, Ethics in the part related to Buddhism, the school should arrange for Buddhist students to study [Buddhism] 2 hours or 2 periods per week (50-minute period), or as the school sees fit. A focus should be on teaching them to be good persons. Hours should be allocated to other courses in the Social Studies categories.”⁸²

The Venerable Prayoon offers the following criticism: “The Director-General’s document is an explanation, not an order. Thus, we cannot be certain that schools will conform. We need to follow up on this issue.”⁸³ It may be said that the ambiguity in the curriculum is caused by the practitioners or the policy makers, that is, the Ministry of Education itself. Meanwhile, protests were heard from people who took part in setting up the Social Studies Strand. For instance, Mr. Vinai Sama-oon, who was responsible for drafting the contents for Islamic Studies, sent a letter dated February 1, 2003 to Mr. Praparpong Senarit, the then Director-General of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development. In the letter was a collection of criticisms from Muslim organizations regarding the contents for Buddhist Studies that contained the statement, “Buddhism is the national religion.” The conclusion was that the statement contradicts the Constitution and historical facts.

⁸² Ibid., p. j.

⁸³ Ibid., p. F.

“The phrase ‘national religion’ is not present in the Constitution. Curricular contents should be in keeping with the Constitution. This is because the contents are part of the curriculum and the latter is approved by the authority of Education Act, which is in turn approved by the authority of the Constitution. Since the Constitution does not identify a national religion, its addition in the contents should therefore be deemed contradictory with the Constitution...The term, ‘national,’ according to historical and present facts, cannot be confined to a particular religion since the Thai people have many faiths, and Thailand now officially recognizes five religions, i.e. Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Brahmanic Hinduism. They are all ‘national.’ The Constitution does not require faith in any particular religion, so there is no room to interpret that a particular religion is the national religion. Faith is an individual’s right as specified in Section 38 of the Constitution, no matter in what religion.”⁸⁴

Whether or not Buddhism is the national religion was a major concern of the commission that was responsible for setting up the detailed contents of the Buddhist Studies subject. The following explanation was therefore given in the Buddhist Studies subject curriculum:

“Historically, the background of Thai nationals was intertwined with Buddhism. Since the time before Thais had a clear history, they have continuously had faith in Buddhism. Therefore, it can be asserted that the history of Thailand is the history of the nationals with faith in Buddhism...That makes it surely right that Buddhism is the national religion. When Thais around the country listened to His Majesty the King’s speech given to Pope John Paul II, the head of Roman Catholics, who came to have an audience with him at the Chakri Maha

⁸⁴ Vinai Sama-oon, Letter dated 1 February 2003 (to the Director-General, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development. Mr. Praparpong Senarit)

Prasat Throne Hall on May 10, 1984, they heard this particular part of his statements: ‘Thais are good religion-followers. Most of them have faith in Buddhism, the national religion.’⁸⁵

This reflects the fact that the curricular flexibility often led to ambiguity and confusion both in theoretical and practical terms. Each party could use this flexibility to support their faith. It should be noted that it did not serve the educational goal of knowledge development. Rather, it was to serve each party’s identity agenda. It also reflects the significant relationship between politics, education, and religion in the Thai society.

The percentage of the Buddhist Studies subject in the Social Studies, Religion and Culture course category is 8% in the elementary level, and 6.66% in the lower and higher secondary levels. The contents are comprised of seven parts, i.e. 1) the history and significance of Buddhism; 2) Buddhist teachings; 3) biographies of both male and female disciples of the Buddha; 4) Buddhists’ duties; 5) mental exercise and wisdom cultivation; 6) Buddhist holy days; and 7) seminar on Buddhism, problem-solving and development. The last one is excluded for the elementary level. It can be seen that these seven parts are similar to those in the curriculum of 1990. As a result, both curricula face similar problems. The advantage now is that the contents are standardized and systematized. However, they still overlap and doctrines are broken down for learning.

The complexity of the contents in each part varies from one level to another, which is advantageous in that it shows the profundity of the doctrines. However, this method cannot avoid the overlap of contents, and often requires the unnecessary breaking-down of doctrines. For instance, Mangala Sutta, Disa, Trisikkha (Threefold Training), Trilakkhana, Sangahavatthu (Principles of Kindly Treatment) are parceled out for instruction over different grades. Of Mangala, students in the Seventh-Grade study items 1 - 3, while those in the Eighth- Grade study items 4 - 6, for

⁸⁵ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Provision of Buddhist Contents. (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council (Ladprao), 2002), p. 1.

example. The breaking-down deprives the students, and even the instructors, of comprehensive understanding and may also lead to inaccurate understanding and wrong application. Moreover, the order in which each item is taught is not in accordance with that in their set. For instance, items higher in the order of Mangala are taught before the lower ones. Even if the ordering does not have to be taken so seriously, the shuffle can still confuse students.

Regarding the instruction about model Buddhists, many well-known Buddhists, both laity and monks, are raised as exemplars. Many of the previous kings - King Ramkamhaeng, King Narai, King Taksin, King Rama V, etc. - are included, although they contributed to the country in many aspects other than religious. The instruction on interesting issues from the Tipitaka focuses on good citizenship.⁸⁶ This reflects the relationship between the Religion, the Nation and the King, and is in accordance with Section 7 in the National Education Act (1999), which states that the learning process must include inculcation of political conscience in democracy with the King as the head of the State, of pride in Thainess, and of the will to protect common good and national interests.⁸⁷ Therefore, the contents of Buddhism is continuously adjusted and closely tied to the Nation-Religion-King institution.

The subject of Buddhist Studies is also adjusted in response to needs in the modern Thai society. For instance, the seminar on Buddhism, problem-solving, and development is meant to link Buddhism with community development and social regulation, to sufficiency economy, and to sustainable development. The part of mental and wisdom exercise is adjusted to include a study the role of local wisdom in applying Buddhist teachings to daily life.⁸⁸ The adjustment of the Buddhist Studies subject is in response to the

⁸⁶ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Provision of Buddhism Learning Contents, p. 157.

⁸⁷ Office of National Educational Commission, Office of Prime Minister, National Education Act 1999. (Bangkok: Prikwan Graphic, 1999), pp. 5-6.

⁸⁸ Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, Provision of Buddhism Learning Contents, pp. 134-161.

9th National Economic and Social Development Plan, which aims for “sustainable development and Thai people’s well-being,” including shared values. According to the Plan, Thais should be aware of the country’s crisis and the need to change mentality, attitude, and working process by adopting as guidance the “Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy,” which may support a change to effectiveness-oriented administration of the country. It also aims for the majority of Thai people to receive education, to life-long learning, to be good persons with virtues and honesty, to live in the society of knowledge and learning, to be able to conserve local wisdom and maintain valuable cultures and customs.⁸⁹

The adjustment makes the Buddhist Studies subject relative to society. Therefore, after the economic crisis in 1997, it was not a surprise that the subject of Buddhist Studies was again adjusted in response to the economic situation. The curriculum of 2001 was set up during Thaksin Shinawatra’s premiership when the country had just suffered the economic crisis. The 9th National Economic and Social Plan (2002 - 2006) contained a vision of the desirable Thai society with focus on opportunities and equality given to all Thais so that they can develop their potentials and become good and competent persons who possess virtues, morality, ethics, discipline, respect for laws, responsibility and public mind, and are equipped with the ability to think for and rely on themselves. The plan aimed to develop sustainable and competitive economy and a stable economic system that is ready to advance on the basis of well-rounded knowledge.⁹⁰ These aims in the National Economic and Social Plan were results of painful lessons Thais learned in the economic crisis, including the lesson that the making and implementation of policies must be based on well-rounded knowledge about global situations.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Office of National Economic and Social Development Commission, Office of Prime Ministry, The 9th National Economic and Social Plan 2002 - 2006. (Bangkok: Printing House of the Teachers’ Council (Ladprao), 2001), pp. 13-15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹¹ Kowit Wongsurawat, Thai Politics and Administration: Multi-dimensions, p. 156.

The government then gave much consideration to the instruction of Buddhism, and consequently set up “Buddhist schools” as suggested by Prof. Dr. Chai-anan Samutawanich. He proposed to set up pilot Buddhist schools with teachers as Buddhist models, and with a Buddhist instructional process. The Ministry of Education supported such establishment in the hope that it would be a turning point that brings the immense value of Buddhist teachings to Thai society. It was deemed highly suitable for the country whose population is 95% Buddhist. The Buddhist schools are not different from normal schools except that Buddhist teachings are applied in the school administration and student development. Special focus is given to the integration of Trisikkha framework.⁹² Although the definition of Buddhist school can be further studied from the Document for Provision of Buddhist Contents, 2002, by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development,⁹³ the Buddhist schools still use the same contents in order to be in line with the curriculum of 2001. This means that they may also suffer from the ambiguity of the curriculum, and are in fact not altogether too different from other schools. Any school without a clear curriculum, without a clear guideline and standard, cannot provide effective education.

An examination of the Buddhist school’s curriculum reveals that the curriculum is still ambiguous because no clear amount of academic credits or contents are indicated. The percentage of Buddhism instruction is not different from that in the normal curriculum because the curricula are basically the same. In the Buddhist school’s curriculum, extra-curricular activities are added such as Buddhist-vow ceremony, Buddhist manners contest, Buddhist children camp, morning time activities (such as commemoration of the Nation, the Religion, and the King, chanting, well-wishing to others), and activities of good deeds during the day (such as mindful walking to the canteen).⁹⁴ Although these activities show integration of Buddhism into daily life, it is not integration of Buddhism into other course categories.

⁹² Ministry of Education, Guideline for Buddhist School. (Bangkok: Express Transportation Organization of Thailand, 2003), pp. Preface-3.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

These activities used to be performed in schools in the past. It may then be said that Buddhist schools are simply schools that bring back atmospheres of old times. According to a policy, two pilot schools were to be set up in each province in 2003. In 2003, eighty-nine schools participated in the project. In 2004, there were fifteen-thousand Buddhist schools around the country.⁹⁵

Although the number of Buddhist schools has increased, many questions can still be raised, especially in terms of their quality and the consistency of the percentage, contents, and methods of Buddhist instruction in the curriculum. It seems that Buddhist schools are Buddhist mainly in style, and not sufficient consideration is given to the contents and instructional methods. However, the concept of a Buddhist school is interesting in terms of education, especially Buddhist education, because it shows a trend of using Buddhist teachings as the core of education for the nation's citizens. This is in keeping with the past, in which the country's education was totally dependent on Buddhism. It should be further studied whether the 'Buddhist school' provides an educational system that allows access to the true Buddhishood, or whether it is simply another instance of Buddhist education in the shadow of the government's ideas and policies, as it has continuously been for more than a hundred years.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 29.