

Declining Number of Buddhist Monks and Its Impact on the Future of Buddhism¹

*Charnnarong Boonnoon**

Abstract

This paper builds on the research project “Report on Preliminary Observations on Trends of Number and Quality of Buddhist Monks in Rural Thailand,” supported by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center (public organization) in 2007. The objectives of the project were to (1) conduct a qualitative survey on the causes of the declining number of Buddhist monks and its impact on the rural community, and (2) make preliminary observations and policy recommendations on the situation. The survey adopts a statistical approach covering the period between 1999 and 2006 based on various documents and field surveys in some areas of the provinces of Chiang Mai and Ubon Ratchahani.

The findings show that the period under study saw a declining number of Buddhist monks and novices, and that the decline had nothing to do with economic factors. Rather, it was caused by the following: public education

¹ This paper builds on the findings of the research project “Report on the Preliminary Observation on the Trends of Number and Quality of Buddhist Monks in Rural Thailand,” supported by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center (public organization) in 2007. It was published in book form in 2008.

* Pali vi; B.A. in Buddhist Studies (Philosophy - First Class Honors), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University; Ph.D. (Philosophy), Chulalongkorn University; currently Assistant Professor and Head of Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University.

was more accessible to the rural community; the education provided by the Sangha was not appropriate to the changing society and values; the rural labor sector had changed; and rural households had fewer children and would prefer to have them spend shorter time in monkhood. On the other hand, the statistical survey between 2007 and 2010 reveals a slight increase in the number of the monks, but a decrease in the number of novices. The overall picture, however, points to a reduced number of both groups.

Survey based on academic documents

According to P.A. Payutto (1984) in his *Sangha Institution and Thai Society*, the number of Buddhist monks and novices nationwide in 1964 was 237,770 out of the country's total population of 28,072,431, representing a ratio of one monk/novice to 110 persons (P.A. Payutto, 1984: 21). The number could be broken down as follows:

The number of monks of traditional 3-month ordination:	at least	91,138
The number of regular monks:	about	61,372
The number of novices:		85,260

P.A. Payutto commented that the first group entered monkhood for three months during the Buddhist Lent (Rain Retreat), representing only 60% of the total Sangha. In remote rural areas, there was a shortage of monks after the Buddhist lent. Some *wats* had only one monk residing, while others had two or three. Sometimes there was no abbot to be found – not to mention senior long-termed monks. Even monks of 4-5 year residence were hard to find. As a result, local communities sometimes felt a lack of moral support, especially when a significant presence of monks was needed. For instance, when a religious event was organized, monks from other communities had to be sought (ibid, 42-43). This was the situation concerning the number of monks in Thailand about 40 years ago.

In 1995, Chamnong Adiwatthanasiit conducted a survey on Thai ordination behaviors, using a set of questionnaire with 920 monks/novices. The findings reveal the following statistics: (1) 43.54% of monks/novices followed the traditional ordination; (2) 25.10% wanted to study the Dhamma-Vinaya; (3) 13.04% wanted to devote the ordination merit to

someone dear to them; (4) 7.10% wanted to carry on the torch of Buddhism; (5) 6.30% went into monkhood for their livelihood; (6) 5.12% had a strong faith in Buddhism (Chamnong Adiwatthanasit, 1995: 44-48). Groups (1), (3), and (5) combined make up 62.88%, representing what P.A. Payutto called the people “who are the burden to and yet benefit from the Sangha”. They do not contribute to the strength of the faith. Groups (2), (4), and (6) combined representing 37.32%, on the other hand, can be considered the pillar for the continuity of Buddhism. Evidently, 31 years later, the number of the latter group remains relatively unchanged.

In 1999, the National Education Commission, the Prime Minister’s Office, produced a report of the religious situation in Thailand. The report included the number of Buddhist monks in the country, as provided by the Information Center, Ministry of Education, as of January 1999, as follows:

The total number of monks/novices in 1999 is 365,140: 267,300 monks and 97,840 novices. In terms of geographical regions, the northeastern region saw the highest number of 148,147 or 40.57% of the total population of monks/novices. This number can be broken down to 101,072 monks and 47,075 novices, representing 37.81% and 48.11% respectively. The northern region had the next largest number of 71,234 monks/novices or 19.51%, consisting of 43,668 monks and 23,566 novices representing 16.34% and 28.17% respectively. The southern region saw the smallest number with 23,288 monks/novices or 6.38%, consisting of 18,924 monks and 4,364 novices representing 7.08% and 4.46% respectively. The central, western, and eastern region recorded 60,382, 36,922, and 25,167 monks/novices or 16.54%, 10.11%, and 6.89% respectively. The numbers can be broken down further as follows: 49,305 monks in the central region, 32,204 in the western region, and 22,127 in the eastern region, representing 18.45%, 12.05%, and 8.28% respectively. As for novices, there were 11,077 in the central region, 4,718 in the western region, and 3,040 in the eastern region, representing 11.32%, 4.82%, and 3.11% respectively. In addition, the year 1999 witnessed

13,257 nuns and 39,667 monastery boys (National Education Commission, Prime Minister's Office, 1999: 42-43).

In 2002, Phramaha Hansa Nithibunyakon undertook a study on novice ordination in Thailand (between 1980 and 2000) drawing on information from the Statistics and Information Section, Planning Division, Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education. The study yields an interesting picture of the changing numbers of monks/novices during 19 years from 1980 to 1998, as follows: In 1980, the number of monks/novices was about 500,000, while the year 1998 saw it come down to 250,000, a reduction of 259,405 or 50.95%, comprising of a reduction of 168,540 monks (47.2%) and 90,865 novices (59.74%) (Hansa Nithibunyakon, Phramaha, 2002: 95).

In 2007, Phramaha Kittiphat Sinak undertook a study on the trends and crises of short-termed ordination in Thai society, as represented by Bangkok and Ratchaburi province. The study was based on the number of ordination only in the Mahanikaya Sect in the two provinces from 2002 to 2004. The report reveals that during that period, Buddhists opted for a short-term ordination lasting between 7 days to one month, representing nearly 70% of the ordained total. In other words, of every ten ordained monks, seven were in for a short-term ordination, while the remaining three stayed on for longer terms (Kittiphat Sinak, Phramaha, 2007: 77-78). In terms of age groups, the majority of the ordained in Bangkok were between 20 and 25 years old, representing 63%, followed by the 26-30 age group representing 35.6%, and the over-40 age group, the smallest, representing only 1.4%. The situation in Ratchaburi province showed a similar trend, i.e. the majority of the ordained were between 20-25 years old, representing 73.3%, followed by the 26-30 age group, representing 13.3%, and the over-40 age group, the smallest, representing 3.3% (ibid, 92).

The data suggest that more young men preferred to go for short-term ordination. This was different from 1964 when P.A. Payutto commented on the changing situation of ordination. In those days, short-term ordination meant three months of traditional stay in monkhood. Presently, short-term ordination takes place outside the Buddhist Lent period, and lasts less than

one month. The number of short-term ordained monks/novices accounts for 70% compared to 60% in 1964 as cited by P.A. Payutto. Thus, the regular or long-term monks/novices are estimated to be 30-40% of the total monk/novice population.

Statistical Survey in 2007

The 2007 preliminary survey based its analysis on the 2002-2006 information obtained from the Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism. It must be admitted that the raw data were not perfect, as they did not distinguish between the new and existing monks. The analysis, nevertheless, yielded the following findings:

1. The overall number of monks/novices in the country between 2002 and 2006 is shown in the table below:

Table 1.1 Overall number of monks/novices in the country between 2002 and 2006.

Type	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Monks	267,818	246,112	265,335	265,442	250,437
Novices	103,026	89,920	76,352	75,093	62,830
Total	370,844	336,032	341,687	340,535	313,267

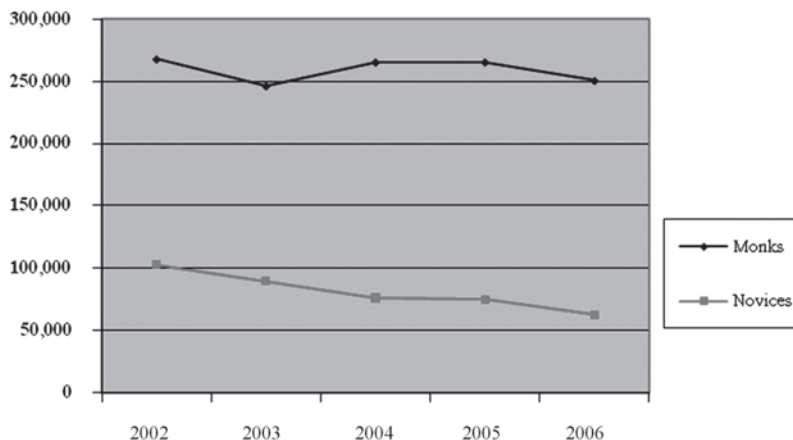


Chart 1.1 Graph showing the changing number of monks/
novices in the country between 2002 and 2006.

The chart shows an irregular changing pattern in the number of monks. Some years saw a significant reduction, followed by an increase in the following year, and another reduction afterwards. The number of novices reflects a consistent decline. The bar chart below gives a clearer picture of the trend (see Chart 1.2).

Declining Number of Buddhist Monks and Its Impact on the Future of Buddhism

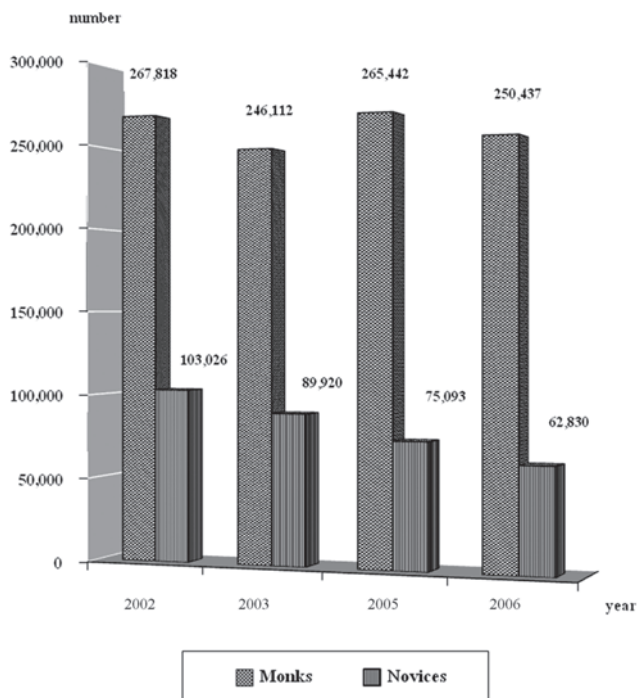


Chart 1.2 Chart comparing the number of monks/novices in the country from 2002 to 2006.

It is noteworthy that the number of monks in the country from 2002 to 2006 stayed fairly stable, ranging from 250,000 to 300,000, while that of novices decreased on a regular basis, from 100,000 in 2002 to 60,000 in 2006.

2. In terms of percentage, the change of number during the previous four years is as follows: in 2002 the total number of monks/novices was 370,844 (100%) consisting of 72% of monks and 28% of novices. In 2006 the total number of monks/novices was 313,267 (100%) consisting of 80% of monks and 20% of novices. Against the reduced number of monks as seen above, the number of novices saw a regular decline. In other words, the percentage of the number of monks increased as the presence of novices declined (see chart).

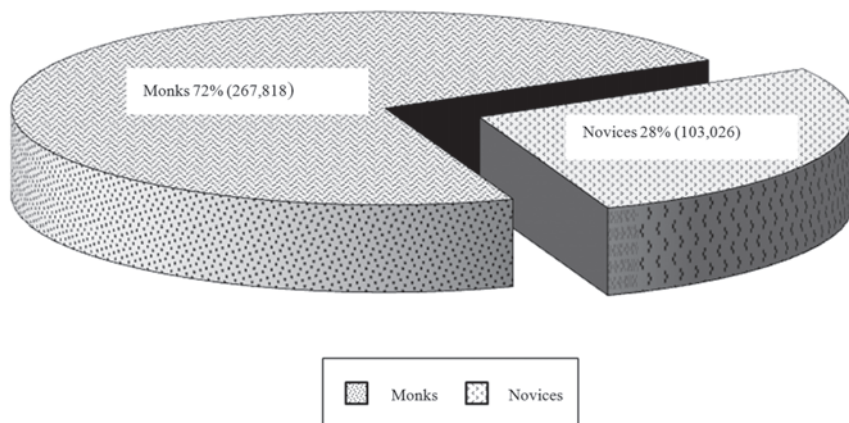


Chart 2.1 Comparison between the percentages of monks and novices in 2002.

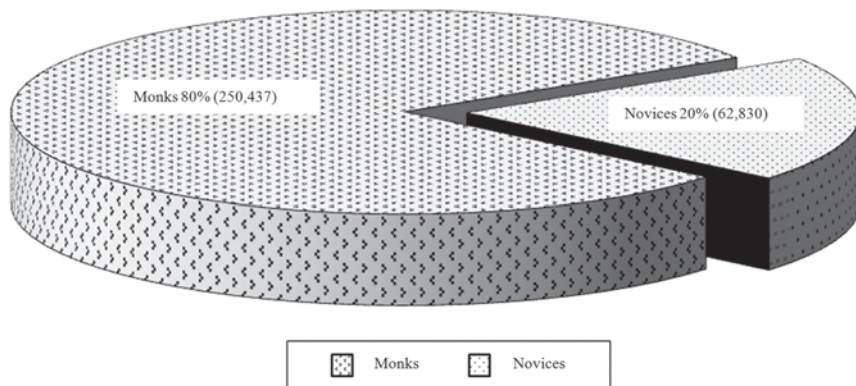


Chart 2.2 Comparison between the percentages of monks and novices in 2006.

Charts 2.1 and 2.2 indicate that the gap between the numbers of monks and novices was increasing. While the number of monks was in decline, novices who were supposed to carry on the torch were getting smaller in number and at a quicker pace. The fact that the numbers of monks and novices were in inverse proportion indicates that there will be fewer

monks in the future. The regular, long-term priests will further decline as time goes on, while religious heirs will be harder to come by.

3. In terms of geographical distribution of the number of monks/novices in the country in 2006, the total number was 313,267, which can be broken down into 250,437 monks (79.94%) and 62,830 novices (20.06%). The northeastern region saw the highest number of monks/novices, 123,776 (39.51%), followed by the central region (including Bangkok) with 98,647 (31.49%), the northern region with 32,750 (10.45%), the eastern region with 22,970 (7.33%), the western region with 19,808 (5.68%), and lastly the southern region with 17,316 (5.53%).

Table 3.1 showing percentages of monks and novices according to geographical distribution in 2006.

Geographical Region	Total		Monks		Novices	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	313,267	100.00	250,437	100.00	62,830	100.00
Central	98,647	31.49	84,470	33.73	14,177	22.56
Eastern	22,970	7.33	20,526	8.19	2,444	3.89
Western	17,808	5.68	15,701	6.27	2,107	3.35
Northeastern	123,776	39.51	98,592	39.37	25,184	40.08
Southern	17,316	5.53	15,239	6.08	2,077	3.31

Source: Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism as of 31 December 2006.

If one compares the 2006 statistics of the Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism, with the 1999 report of National Education Commission, Prime Minister's Office which relied on the Information Center, Ministry of Education, the change is quite evident. In 1999, the northern region recorded the country's second largest population

of monks/novices, i.e. 43,668 monks and 27,566 novices or 16.35% and 28.17% respectively. It was second to the northeastern region but preceded the central region. However, the 2006 statistics shows that the northern region was delegated to the country's third position after the northeastern and central regions.

4. The comparison of 2006 and 1999 statistics reflects another interesting change. In 2006 the number of monks declined from 1999 by 16,863 (6.30%) whereas that of novices was down by 35,010 (35.87%). When this picture is juxtaposed with the number of Buddhists in the country, it can be seen that the number of Buddhists in 2006 reduced from 1999 by 17.91% while the country's population increased by 1.89%. Thus, it could be said that the number of monks/novices is inversely proportional to the number of the country's population but relational to the number of Buddhists (see Table below).

Table 4.1 Comparison of numbers and percentages of monks, novices, Buddhists, and the country's population in 1999 and 2006.

Type	1999	2006	Increase/decrease
Monks	267,300	250,437	Reduced by 16,863 (6.30%)
Novices	97,840	62,830	Reduced by 35,010 (35.78%)
Buddhists	57,134,880	46,902,100	Reduced by 10,232,780 (17.91%)
Country's population	61,661,701	62,828,706	Increased by 1,167,005 (1.89%)

The statistics in 4.1 could be represented by a bar chart (Chart 4.1) giving a clearer picture of the change that took place during 1999-2006.

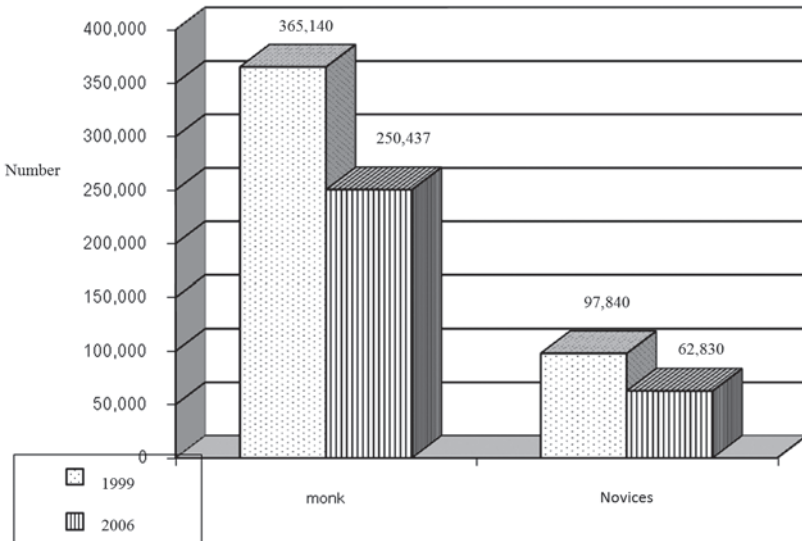


Chart 4.1 Comparison of the reduced numbers of monks and novices between 1999 and 2006.

Using the 1964 statistics from P.A. Payutto's study and those in 1999 and 2006 to compare the number of monks/novices with the total Thai population, one will find that while the country's population increased significantly, there was little change in the number of monks/novices. In other words, the number of monks/novices did not rise in proportion to the increased population (see Chart 4.2).

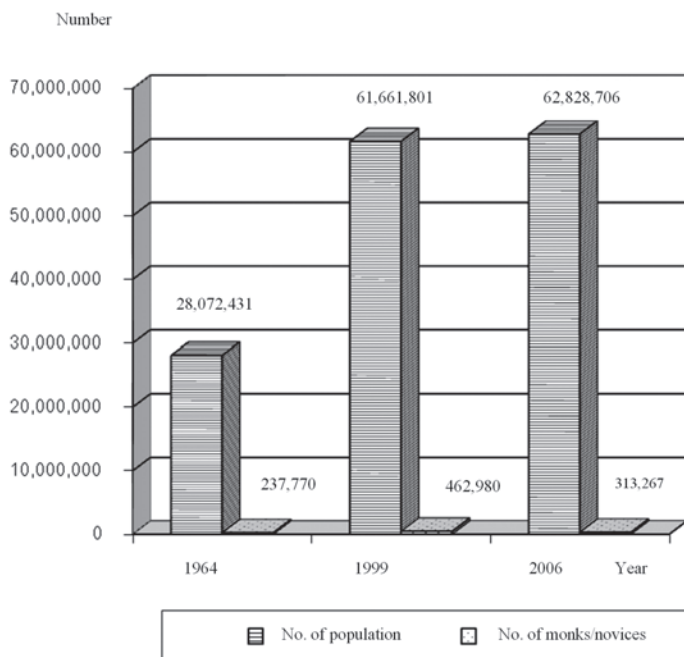


Chart 4.2 Comparison of the Thai population and numbers of monks/novices in the country in 1964, 1999 and 2006.

5. Based on the above statistics, it can be concluded that the numbers of monks/novices declined on a regular basis during the years of the survey. However, the statistics from 2002 to 2006 from the National Office of Buddhism did not differentiate between the existing and new monks/novices. This survey, therefore, cannot specify the actual number of monks/novices with more than one year of religious life who constituted the regular force responsible for religious duties or propagation of Buddhism. In view of the inadequacy of the yearly statistics, the researcher resorted to P.A. Payutto's conceptual framework to approximate the actual number of long-term ordained monks. This is done by leaving out the 60% of monks with short-term traditional ordination. This figure was in line with Chamnong Adiwatthanasi's study on "Ordination Behaviors of Thai People". Some went into monkhood because they followed the ordination

tradition, because they wanted to devote ordination merit to someone dear to them, or simply to afford livelihoods. This group made up 62.88% of the total. Others wanted to preserve the Dhamma-Vinaya, to carry on the torch of Buddhism, or to live out their faith. This group constituted the remaining 37.12%. The figure that was left out corresponded with the findings of Phramaha Kittiphath Sinak's study which indicated that those who underwent short-term ordination from 7 days to one month in Bangkok and Ratchaburi province constituted nearly 70% of the monks (i.e. 68.30% and 68.32% respectively). Thus, it can be surmised that the figure of 60% of the yearly statistics did not reflect the real presence of the monkhood. 40% would represent a more truthful picture. A consideration of the statistics in 1999 and 2006 yields the following outcomes:

5.1 In 1999, the total number of monks/novices was 462,980 (100%). Subtracting 60%, the actual number would be about 185,192. Against the total population of 61,661,701, the ratio of monk/novice to the general population in 1999 would be 1 : 333.

5.2 In 2006, the total number of monks/novices was 313,267 (100%). With 60% subtraction, the actual number would be about 125,307, about 59,885 (32.34%) lower than in 1999. Against the total population of 62,828,706 (with an increase of 1,167,005 or 1.89% from 1999), the ratio of monk/novice to the general Thai population would be 1 : 501 (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Comparison of the reduced number of monks/novices in 1999 and 2006 with the country's total population.

Year	Monks/novices	Total population	Average ratio
1999	185,192	61,661,701	1 : 333
2006	125,307	62,828,706	1 : 501
Reduced/ increased	Reduced by 59,885 (by 32.34%)	Increased by 1,167,005 (1.89%)	Reduced by 50.45%

According to P.A. Payutto (1986), in 1964 the ratio of monk/novice to the general population was 1 : 110. In 1999 the ratio increased to 1 : 223, while 2006 saw it increase further to 1 : 391. In other words, the ratio of monk/novice to the general population in 2006 decreased by 50.45% from 1999 and by 344.45% from 1964.

One assumes that after 60% subtraction, the number of long-term, regular monks/novices in 2006 would be 125,307 against the total Buddhist population of 46,802,100. The ratio of monk/novice to the Buddhist population would then be 1 : 371. If one further subtracts 25,061 novices (20%), the number of monks would be 100,246, and the ratio of monk to the Buddhist population would be 1 : 466. Without taking into account various social factors, including the shortage of monks in the rural areas, the situation of Buddhist monks would not be too much of a concern.²

2007 Field Survey

A field survey was carried out in Chiang Mai province. Interviews were conducted during August 20-21, 2007 with ecclesiastical officers at the level of abbot and deputy abbot in 10 *wats* (monasteries) in the districts of Mueang, Hang Dong, and San Pa Tong, as well as with Phrakhrū Phipitsutathon (Dr. Phramaha Boonchuai Sirintharo), Vice Rector, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus. Another field survey was conducted in Ubon Ratchathani province, interviewing deputy ecclesiastical provincial governors, deputy ecclesiastical district officers of Det Udom, assistant ecclesiastical district officers, ecclesiastical sub-district heads, and abbots of six *wats* during August 26-27, 2007. Other interviews were also given by an ecclesiastical sub-district head and

² To render this study more up-to-date, the author conducted further surveys on the number of monks/novices from 2007 to 2010 based on the information obtained from Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism. It is found that there are some interesting positive changes as well as challenges. The information on this matter can be found in the “Annex” to the paper.

secretary to the ecclesiastical district officer of Tha Maka, Kanchanaburi province, ecclesiastical sub-district head of Nong Khayang, Uthai Thani province, and student monks of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University who used to spend some time at the study centers of a *wat* in Phang-Nga province and of Wat Sariang in Mueang district of the province of Nakhon Si Thammarat. Several interesting observations were made; however, the details will not be presented here since they are not the focus of this study.

On the basis of the findings of the field surveys and the aforementioned statistics, the overall picture of the Buddhist situation in Thailand and its possible impacts on Buddhism in general is as follows:

1. The Nature of the Problems

While the number of monks was declining in urban areas such as Mueang districts and other provincial districts, there were still monks and novices in significant numbers outside the urban areas such as sub-districts and villages. Usually there were few regular monks, ranging from one to four, residing in each *wat*. In most cases, there was only one monk per *wat*, acting as abbot or discharging abbot duties. Some *wat* did not have monks residing permanently throughout the year. The community, however, solved the problem by inviting monks from other areas or *wats* to stay in its vacant *wat*. The length of stay partly depended on the faith and attentiveness of the community and partly on how the monks conducted themselves in their daily religious activities. If there was no untoward incident, the villagers would usually ask them to stay on.

Economic conditions were not the most significant factor accounting for the number of monks in each *wat*. Whether in or outside the urban areas, their number remained more or less the same. Nevertheless, economy could to a certain extent determine the number of monks. Affluent families did not want their children to remain in monkhood for too long, as there were better educational choices available or they attached greater importance to family security. The most important factor was always education. A number of rural people still looked to ecclesiastical education as a means to improve their social or economic standing, while many monks needed

further educational opportunities. Those *wats* that attracted a lot of monks and novices tended to be those that offered Pali study or general Buddhist Scripture programs, and were situated not too far away or were easy to get to. The situation was also true with *wats* famous for meditation practice. On the contrary, *wats* that were not involved in religious education or affairs would have few monks residing. A number of monks/novices stayed in monkhood because they hoped to receive further and higher education. Others stayed on because they had administrative duties (ecclesiastical officials) or educational obligations to attend to (e.g. dhamma teachers). In areas with little or no educational opportunity, monks or novices who had stayed in monkhood for more than a year would eventually leave for another district, province or region where education was more available. Bangkok, for instance, was an ideal place for further education.

Thus, monks who permanently stayed in the *wat* usually were ecclesiastical officials charged with administrative duties in such positions as abbot, acting abbot, provincial, district, or sub-district governor. These kinds of obligations held in check a number of monks who stayed in monkhood out of religious necessity. At any rate, such duties were no guarantee that they would stay in monkhood or in the locality forever. Administrative duties could be complex, giving rise to anxiety or even causing conflict with other monks. If the ecclesiastical officials did not receive cooperation or support from those concerned, they might eventually become disheartened and decide to leave the administrative positions or even monkhood.

Each *wat* surveyed saw a significantly reduced number of novices. Some *wat* might have monks but no novice. For instance, in Tha Maka district of Kanchaniburi province, Wat Mai Charoenphon in 2007 had 28 monks but no novice at all. Wat Takhram-en had 33 monks and only one novice. The entire sub-district of Wai-neo had altogether 71 monks and again one novice. The shortage of novices was becoming a norm in every region. In the northeastern region, for example, the sub-district of Top-hu had 61 monks and 2 novices. The future trend was therefore easy to foresee in light of the statistics and field surveys. Older monks with long

years of experience in religious education and dissemination would be smaller in number for health reasons. Some monks of the middle generation might be available for replacements. However, the new generation of monks was a matter of concern for the Sangha, for the statistics and findings of the field surveys all pointed in the same direction, i.e. less long-term ordination and significantly fewer novices.

The modern generation opted for a shorter stay in monkhood and preferred being ordained outside the Buddhist Lent. Many considered it to be a sin if they were to be ordained and leave monkhood during the Buddhist Lent. About 40 years ago, a short-term ordination would mean a stay of three months during the Buddhist Lent. Today, a short-term ordination means any period from 7 to 15 days. In terms of short ordination, the number of ordained monks did not decrease dramatically. A large number of Buddhists still like to be ordained as monks each year. Yet, the purpose of ordination has changed. In the past, they expected to receive religious teaching and became morally better persons. Now, it is more of a traditional practice to repay their parents' kindness. This surely is indicative of the coming crisis regarding the number of monks in the future.

In terms of the quality of monks, there might not be clear-cut evidence that their quality will be lower, as no tool was created to measure this aspect in this survey. However, in the self-assessment by the monks in each area under survey, almost every interviewee said that the quality of the monks today was much lower. Some even commented that the more recent generation of monks had little or no quality. As far as the length of ordination is concerned, those who opted for a longer term tended to be older people with little enthusiasm to learn the Dhamma-Vinaya. They were more inclined to seek refuge in religion in the later stage of their lives. Thus, it could be surmised that the overall quality of monks today is lower than that of the past.

2. Main Reasons for the Decreased Number of Monks³

The study finds that there are several major reasons for the decreased number of monks and novices, some of them overlapping or related. They are as follows:

2.1) The reduced number of novices seems to be due to the compulsory education policy of the State. Compulsory education is now extended to Grade 9 and will soon be extended to Grade 12. As a result, less and less children are being ordained as novices. In the past, ordination provided an education opportunity. Many novices in rural areas stayed on and became young monks because they wanted to continue their education or because of their strong faith in the religion.

2.2) There is a shortage of labor in the villages. In former times, a household with several children could afford to have a son who took (traditional) ordination stay in monkhood for the entire Buddhist Lent period or even for a year. The practice would pose no problem for the family. Today, families tend to have only one or two children; hence their labor contribution to the family is essential, and therefore a young man cannot remain in monkhood for long. One month, perhaps, is the maximum, and in most cases, only 15 days. Preferably, ordination would be held in the dry season. The Buddhist Lent is the time for farming which requires much labor. The village is short of manpower because the family has become smaller as a result of a successful family planning during the last 30 years. In addition, owing to modern economic growth, more employments are available in the rural areas.

2.3) “Knowledge” obtained from ordination does not correspond with current reality. In the past, people became ordained because it was a “useful” thing to do for a lay person. An ordained monk would learn how to read and write as well as other practical skills including technical education. Upon leaving the monkhood, he would be more eligible to start

³ The material in this section was based on the interview with Phra Phaisan Wisalo by e-mail.

his own family, and many parents would be willing to give him the hand of their daughters. An ordained life would have made him a “ready” man, and would have provided him and his family with other spiritual benefits. Today, however, knowledge necessary for a layman is available elsewhere, such as schools, universities, and institutions other than the *wat*. The kind of knowledge essential to modern living is also different from that of the past. *Wats* are no longer considered as exclusive sources of knowledge, and monks no longer as experts. Hence, it is no longer considered necessary that a person obtains education in the *wat* system.

2.4) The *wat* does not have proper educators or teachers well-versed in worldly affairs, moral studies, or even social manners. At present, most *wats* in the rural areas do not perform this function, because the abbots or monks do not have the required knowledge or skills. This is partly because they are newly ordained, they possess little knowledge of the Scriptures and Dhamma practice, and they have little practical skills. These factors render it nearly impossible to attract young men to join the Sangha. They also fail to motivate the parents to support their sons’ long-term ordination, and so they remain happy with a 15-day traditional ordination.

In summary, the *wat* has lost its former social functions, retaining only ceremonious duties that have little to do with worldly affairs. It focuses more on merit-making appeals and religious rites and ceremonies, and has lost the ability to draw the crowd to its premises as it once did.

2.5) Monks do not inspire confidence. Although monks today do not have a lot of worldly knowledge, they can still attract the community to the *wat* if their moral conducts are exemplary. Parents want their children ordained by, and learn how to conduct themselves properly from, senior monks. Unfortunately, very few abbots seem to lead inspiring lives. Their conducts are oftentimes not too different from those of ordinary lay people. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the villagers are not too eager to have their children ordained by such monks. There are even instances where members of rural communities in the areas surveyed get into fights with the monks or abbots of their *wats*.

2.6) All of the above five factors seem to be the reasons that keep people away from ordination. What is more, there are fewer monks in the rural areas because they prefer to reside in towns or cities. Those living in towns do not wish to move to rural areas, probably because they prefer a life of comfort. However, the issues of comfort aside, several monks are unwilling to stay in the rural areas because they do not feel any tie or affection to the place or to their fellow monks. The fact that they have to fend for themselves to have access to higher education has made them feel indifferent to their environment. In addition, once they have succeeded in obtaining higher education, the existing educational system in the rural areas does not give them the opportunity to put their knowledge to good use. The only way they can utilize their knowledge and play some meaningful role is to stay in the urban community or in areas where educational opportunities are available, such as Buddhist universities or Buddhist Scripture schools. They prefer staying in such environments to starting something anew themselves in which success is uncertain.

2.7) Monks or Buddhism are no longer the go-to choice of society mainly because the *wat* cannot provide education in a systematic and successful manner. Admittedly, although the education provided by the *wat* might not have been all that systematic in the past, it still functioned adequately in the worldly and moral spheres; at least, this was the case with the *wats* in the urban area. Today, it is ineffective in providing worldly knowledge, giving way to schools and universities. Religious education does not fare too well either. Consequently, the *wat* has lost its appeal for people to ordain or study with the monks. The monks themselves are found rather lacking in quality. Not only do they have limited knowledge, their daily conducts are also often far from praiseworthy. They have become more materialistic. This problem is tied to the education policy of the Sangha that allows each *wat* to have a free hand in managing its affairs. The Sangha would supervise only the examinations and assessments. Education focuses on the knowledge of the scriptures rather than practice, relying on rote learning rather than thinking skills and practical application appropriate to the modern world.

3. Overall impacts on Buddhism

The shortage of monks does not seem to be as serious a problem as the lack of their quality. Phra Phaisan Wisalo commented that if the number of monks was to reduce by half, and their quality was to double, the Sangha institution and Thai society would be much improved. In the context of low quality, the bigger number of monks might undermine public confidence in the Sangha, and it would indeed be an immense burden to discipline them or prevent them from going astray from the Dhamma and Vinaya. On the other hand, the public might view a significantly reduced number of monks as a spiritual deficiency. People feel more comfortable with the presence of monks in the village, for monks provide a spiritual comfort, perform various religious functions, and encourage the community to make merits. Merit-making is something that the community values highly.

Perhaps the most serious cause for concern is that monks are no longer spiritual leaders. In the past, monks also exercised social leadership roles. This is unfortunately no longer the case today. They should still act as role models to guide and remind people of the value of spiritual happiness. Spiritual leaders that guide their society towards the path of the good life and real happiness in a world where materialism is shunned and mutual help encouraged is needed in every society. If monks cannot perform their roles as spiritual leaders, Thai society may easily fall into spiritual malaise from which it may be rather hard to escape. Sadly, monks today do not seem to help correct people's distorted views, which may account for their spiritual crisis. Worse yet, they often encourage such views, especially when it comes to a desire for material gains, hope for a windfall, fortuitous success, and divine intervention.

Professor Dr. Prawase Wasi said that Buddhism is an ideology concerning the community. The Sangha is a community. Ordination is related to the community; it does not occur in isolation. When monks function as a community, it will help prevent them from breaking the Vinaya (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999: 29). A community life implies mutual help and appropriate social relationship between the monks and other Buddhist members or the lay people. Without

proper mutual help regarding the basic necessities and loving kindness between the monks and lay people, the fabric of the Buddhist community may be easily destroyed. In other words, the fact that there are few monks in each *wat* is a reason why monks cannot keep the Dhamma-Vinaya for long, as they live in isolation in the *wat* environment. At the same time, lay people tend to leave the issue of a decreased number of monks to the Sangha to solve. This evidence is supported by the ordination trend of the new generation who prefer to follow short-term traditional ordination as a gesture of gratitude to their parents only. Other practices include ordination as an education opportunity for social upgrading or a rest period at the end of life. The latter group usually will not study the Dhamma-Vinaya or follow a strict religious life. Allowing such incidents to happen reflects a lack of responsibility on the part of lay people in the community. As a result, some monks may become frustrated and leave, according to several ecclesiastical officials interviewed.

The traditional way of passing on Buddhist teachings may also be affected, as it takes some time before the newly ordained monks can begin to fathom the depth of the Buddhist teaching both in theory and practice. The teaching monks usually are practitioners with many years of experience. In the current situation, not only is the number of monks decreased, but the monks who continue to stay in monkhood are also fewer. Monks with few years of experience may not have sufficient knowledge to pass on the teachings or educate the community. Meanwhile, those with sufficient knowledge tend to stay in urban areas with schools or universities or in remote areas difficult for the rural folks to get access to. The kinds of traditional Dhamma practice needed by local communities are harder to find. With fewer responsible monks who could act as resource persons and with fewer candidates to carry on the torch, it will be difficult to provide quality education as an alternative option for modern society. All these negative factors fuel one another, leading to fewer monks receiving training and even fewer religious heirs to pass on the teachings.

The fact that the new generation does not seem to appreciate the significance of religion has become a huge concern affecting Buddhist society as a whole. The situation has been going on for quite some time.

The Sangha generally is not aware of the extent to which modern society, together with all kinds of media, could exert influence. In addition, as a result of the government economic and social development policies, more rural areas have been urbanized, thus affecting the existence of the rural *wat*. The new lifestyle that comes with development efforts and modern cultural influx from the outside has an impact on the rural community. More attention is given to wealth and affluence that go counter to traditional religious belief. The intellectual arrogance and direction of the country's economic and social development modernization efforts are difficult for the Buddhist institution to withstand (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999: 26). Besides, the Sangha does not offer any concrete alternative to society. Even religious education has to follow the national trend. If the Buddhist education cannot produce academic excellence that the Sangha is supposed to possess or lead society to an acceptable level, the Sangha will be a meaningless force to society, as commented by P.A. Payutto forty years ago.

Despite being aware of the direction in which social development is taking, the Sangha has not come up with new ways to develop existing monks with the ability to effectively respond to the needs and problems of the modern society. The kind of education that the new generation is interested in is geared towards upgrading their social existence, but such education, however, cannot create religious ideology in the minds of the new generation of monks. In the meantime, the efforts to create religious heirs continue in the same old vein, providing no new knowledge or experience in the understanding of the Dhamma. Monks in the rural areas are small in number, with little religious education, limited resource support from the government, and inadequate intellectual inputs. In such a situation, they do not have an enabling environment for mutual learning and meaningful exchange of experience based on long years of religious involvement or dissemination. It is, therefore, difficult for them individually or for the community to keep a strong faith and bring about meaningful and positive impacts in the future.

References

(all in Thai)

- Kittiphat Sinak, Phramaha, 2007. *Trend and Crisis of Religious Heirs Due to Ordination Practice in Current Thai Society, Case Study of Ordination in Bangkok and Ratchaburi Province*. Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Comparative Religious Studies, Graduate School, Mahidol University.
- Teaching Staff of Liangsiang Printing House, 1993. *Vinaya Muk, Book III, Standard Version*. Bangkok: Liangsiang Printing House.
- Chomnong Adiwatthanasi, 1995. "Research Report on Ordination in Thai Society, *Center for Buddhist Studies Journal, Chulalongkorn University* 2, 2 (May-August 1995: 43-68.)
- Payutto, P.A., 1989. *Direction of Education of the Sangha*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya.
- Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996. *The Tipiṭaka in Thai, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Version, Book 10, 11*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Printing House.
- Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaya, 1999. *The Sutta and Commentary in Translation, Majjhimanakāya, Mūlapaṇṇāsaka Vol. 13*. 4th printing, Bangkok, Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaya Printing House.
- Payutto, P.A., 1984. *The Sangha Institution and Thai Society*. Bangkok: Komol Khimthong Foundation.
- National Education Commission Office, Prime Minister's Office, 2000. *1999 Report on Religious Statistics of Thailand*.
- Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism, 2007. *Basic Information on Buddhism*, printing house not mentioned.
- Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999. *Crisis in Buddhism*, Bangkok: Ruan Kaew Kan Phim Printing House.
- Hansa Nithibunyakon, Phramaha, 2002. *Crisis in Buddhism: Case Study of Novice Ordination in Thailand (2000-2002)*. Thesis for Master's Degree in Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University.

Annex

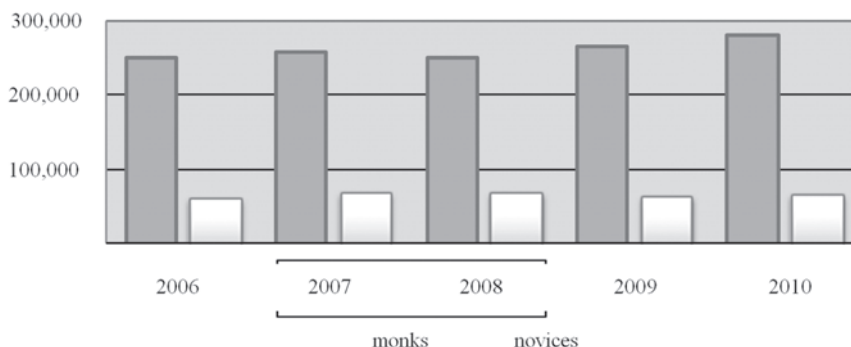
Latest Additional Information Survey (2011)

The information of Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism, between 2007 and 2010 (as of 31 December 2007, 31 December 2008, 31 December 2009, and 31 December 2010) can be analyzed to show the increase and decrease in the numbers of monks and novices in the country as follows:

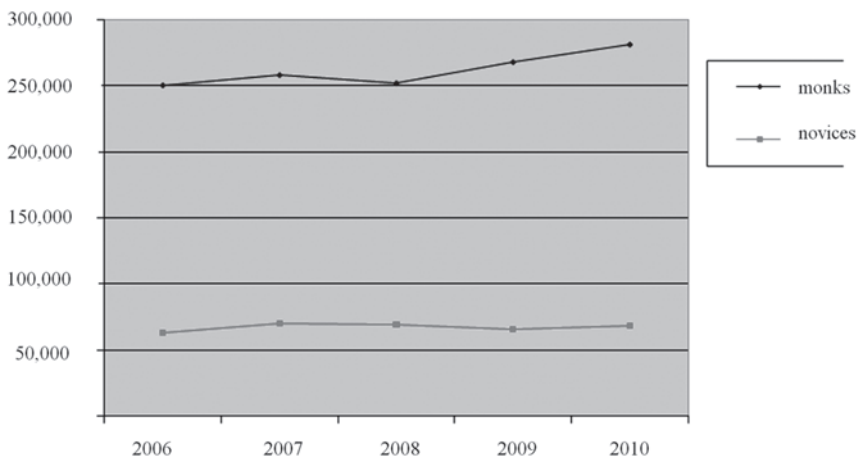
1. Table showing the total number of monks and novices in the country during 2007-2010

Type	2007	2008	2009	2010
Monks	258,163 (78.64%)	251,997 (78.36%)	267,939 (80.25%)	281,168 (80.42%)
Novices	70,125 (21.36%)	69,607 (21.64%)	65,937 (19.75%)	68,459 (19.58%)
Total	328,288 (100%)	321,604 (100%)	333,876 (100%)	349,627 (100%)

Number of Monks-Novices 2006-2010



The above table can be turned into in a bar chart to illustrate the increased number of monks and while the number of novices stays fairly consistent.



On comparing the increase and increase in numbers during 2007-2010, one will find some interesting changes as shown in the table below:

2. Table showing the increase and decrease of monks and novices in the country (during 2007-2010)

Type	2007	2010	Increase/decrease
Monks	258,163	281,168	+ 23,005 (8.91%)
Novices	70,125	68,459	- 1,666 (2.37%)
Total	328,288	349,672	+ 21,384 (6.51%)

The table above reveals the increased number of monks and reduced number of novices, while the overall picture shows how the monks increased during the four years under comparison. However, the table below comparing 2002 with 2010 reveals an increase in the number of monks and

a reduced number of novices. Table 4 also compares the numbers of monks and novices in 1999 and 2010.

3. Table comparing the increase/decrease of the numbers of monks/novices in the country (2002-2010)

Type	2002	2010	Increase/decrease
Monks	267,818	281,168	+ 13,350 (4.98%)
Novices	103,026	68,459	- 34,567 (33.35%)
Total	370,844	349,627	- 21,217 (5.72%)

4. Table comparing the increase/decrease of the numbers of monks/novices in the country (1999-2010)

Type	1999	2010	Increase/decrease
Monks	267,300	281,268	+ 13,868 (5.18%)
Novices	97,840	68,459	- 29,281 (30%)
Total	365,140	349,627	- 15,513 (4.24%)

On comparing Table 4 above with Table 5.1 (in the main paper), one will find that from 1999 to 2006 the overall number of monks/novices reduced by about 59,885 or 32.34%. When the 1999 statistics is compared against that of 2010 in terms of types, the number of monks increased by 5.18%, while that of novices reduced by 30%. The overall picture, however, is that the number of monks/novices reduced from 1999 by about 15,513 or 4.24%. This was different from the period between 1999 and 2006 in which the numbers of monks and novices went in the same direction, i.e. going down. The positive change in information during 2007-2010 warrants an explanation as to the cause and possible consequences. This will need more detailed and competent information surveys from the agencies concerned.