



THE CHULALONGKORN JOURNAL OF
BUDDHIST STUDIES

Volume 8, 2014 ♦ ISSN 2229-1229

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PUBLISHED BY

CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand

Ecclesiastic Titles (*Samaṇasatti*): Advantages and Problems*

Watchara Ngamchitharoen**

Background and significance

Samaṇasatti are ecclesiastic titles or ranks conferred by the monarch or the government on members of the *Saṅgha* in recognition of their religious activities. The titles are often associated with administrative positions in the administration of the *Saṅgha* community; in this respect, they are similar to the honors and titles bestowed upon public servants and nobility in the affairs of the state. The *Samaṇasatti* system of the *Saṅgha* order has long been in existence in every country whose national or predominant religion is Buddhism.

H.R.H. Prince Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab (2000, 33-34) offers an explanation of the origin and the benefits of the system. The monarch and the state became involved in the *Saṅgha* administration in order to protect and support the *Saṅgha* order. For instance, King Ashoka the Great helped solve the schism in the *Saṅgha* administration. As a result, the *Saṅgha* order came to be modeled on the state administration ranging from planning the administrative structure to establishing titles for its leaders such as *Saṅghanāyaka*. The system is designed to facilitate

* From the research project “Ecclesiastic Titles (*Samaṇasatti*): Advantages and Problems,” commissioned by the Center for Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University

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the co-management of Buddhist and state affairs, thereby strengthening the foundation of Buddhism in the country.

The state's involvement in the *Saṅgha* affairs was considered beneficial to both the *Saṅgha* and itself. Somboon Suksamran explains that the state's support for the *Saṅgha* affairs enables it to control other affairs at the same time. Its political power over the religious order is derived from the role it or its leader plays as the defender of religion and the *Saṅgha*. This role helps maintain the social order. If it is not well-executed, Thai people may lose their faith in the *Saṅgha* and Buddhism as well as in other moral compasses (Somboon Suksamran, 1977, 29). The security of both the *Saṅgha* order and Buddhism based on such support in turn benefits the state, contributing to the maintenance of law and order in society and enabling the government to perform its tasks on a more secure basis.

Regarding the origin and legitimacy of *Samaṇasatti* within the *Dhamma-Vinaya* framework, although during the Buddha's time the system did not exist in the same form as today, there is evidence that the Buddha conferred the title of *Etadagga* on *Arahanta* with special abilities or skills such as intellectual excellence or the ability to perform supernormal acts. He praised Ven. Sāriputta for his profound wisdom and Ven. Moggallāna for his supernormal powers. It is noteworthy that the title of *Etadagga* had something to do with administrative duties as well. Ven. Sāriputta was the chief disciple on the Buddha's right, while Ven. Moggallāna was the chief disciple on his left. As chief disciples, they significantly helped the Buddha in the administrative, governing, and propagation works. The Buddha used to compare himself to *Dhammaraja* and Ven. Sāriputta to his Prime Minister (Department of Religious Affairs, 1982, 165-166).

After the Buddha's death, Buddhism became the main religion in a number of countries. The monarchs of those countries themselves became its principal patron, promoting and supporting Buddhism in various ways in accordance with their customs and practices. They have also recognized members of the *Saṅgha* as religious heirs, providing them with all the basic necessities as well as conferring titles or ranks on them for their achievements (Department of Religious Affairs, 1982, 165-170).

With regard to the royal practice of conferment of religious titles, Prince Damrong (2000, 39-40) views that “every country with Buddhism as its main religion has this tradition. I understand that (Sri) Lanka was the first to start the tradition. *Samaṇasatti* in Siam only started in the latter period of Sukhothai when the Lankan *Saṅgha* model was popular. It is likely that the practice of *Samaṇasatti* was borrowed from Lanka as well.”

Therefore, the *Samaṇasatti* system and *Cittavājanī* (ceremonial fans) of the Thai *Saṅgha* was most likely borrowed from Sri Lanka. The *Samaṇasatti* system first appeared during the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai who conferred religious titles on distinguished monks for their performances of religious affairs. The system underwent a series of changes during the Ayutthaya, Thonburi and early Rattanakosin periods. It was finally crystallized during King Rama VI’s reign. The current system has greatly helped support the administration of the *Saṅgha* order (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, abstract).

In light of this development, *Samaṇasatti* is something that the monarch conferred on monks known for their virtues and special abilities to encourage them and other monks to perform religious duties for the sake of strengthening and propagating Buddhism. *Samaṇasatti* is also an element of the *Saṅgha* administration. The titles and ranks render their holders more respectable in their performance of administrative duties to the monks as a whole, contributing to greater efficacy.

Despite its useful and important function in the *Saṅgha* administration and structure, and despite the support of the state in the supervision of the *Saṅgha*, *Samaṇasatti* is beset with a host of problems, including criticisms against the administrative duties that come with the titles.

The *Samaṇasatti* system is regarded as the state’s tool in its attempt to control and exploit the religious order for its own good rather than for the good of the religion (Phra Phaisan Wisalo in Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 57). In addition, it is often seen as a replica of the entitlement system in the lay world that has given rise to greed and unscrupulous practice in the form of lobbying, financial payment, and vying for positions. For example, Thammaraksa thinks that “*Samaṇasatti* is a matter concerning *Kilesa* and

Tanhā. It is created to show off one's *Pāramī* in a wrong manner and leads to danger for those who are deluded. Buddhists should join hands to stop the practice so that our religion will be cleared of these blemishes (Prasop Thammaraksa and Khamhuto, 1975, 20).

Besides, the *Samaṇasatti* system is sometimes seen as conflicting with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. For example, it spells out the class system marked by inequality and the lack of freedom. This does not fit well with the *Sanḥa* community which the Buddha established with the concept of freedom and equality in mind under *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

In short, Thailand and other neighboring Buddhist countries have a system of *Samaṇasatti* in place, and mention is made in the Tipitaka about the conferment of the titles of Chief Disciples or *Etadaggain* various fields. These must have been advantageous and beneficial to the religion to a certain extent. The practice has, as a result, continued. In Thailand, the system has been adopted since the Sukhothai period. Nevertheless, *Samaṇasatti* today has become problematic with regard to its conferment, the activities leading to it, the conducts relating to it, as well as the social criticisms directed at it. If they are allowed to continue in this manner, adverse effects may increase, and they may become counterproductive. It is therefore important to carefully investigate the system's advantages and disadvantages so that the public may be informed. It is equally essential to analyze the problems related to it and propose meaningful solutions.

Meaning and background of *Samaṇasatti*

The word “*Samaṇasatti*” as currently used means ecclesiastical honorific ranks or titles conferred by the monarch. The titles come with *Cittavījanī* or “Phat Yot” in Thai (meaning ceremonial fans indicative of the ecclesiastical ranks/titles). They can be compared to the titles and ranks given to the nobility and civil servants in the lay counterpart or in the state system. Some evidence shows that in the past *Samaṇasatti* used to be called “*Bandasak Phra*” (titles for monks) which later fell out of use, because of their similarity to the titles used by the nobility (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview). In any case, they are associated with the administrative positions

in the *Saṅgha* administrative structure. Phra Methithammaphon (Prayoon Dhammacitto), currently Phra Brahmapundit, rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, explains the meaning of *Samaṇasatti* as follows:

Samaṇasatti are titles conferred by the monarch to monks, comparable to such titles in the lay world as Khun, Luang, Phra, and Phraya at the time of absolute monarchy. While the latter have already been abolished, the *Saṅgha* titles in use since the Sukhothai period continue to exist. (Phra Methithammaphon [Prayoon Dhammacitto], 1990, 34)

Samaṇasatti or titles for Buddhist monks are associated with the *Saṅgha* administration and administrative positions. It is no accident that monks with high *Samaṇasatti* tend to hold positions in the the *Saṅgha* administration. For instance, in the Ayutthaya period, Phra Buddhācārāya was Ecclesiastical Chief Officer of *Araññavāsī* (Forest Monks), and Phra Wannarat of Wat Pa Kaew was Ecclesiastical Chief Officer of the Right *Gāmaṇāsī* (Town Monks). Both Buddhācārāya and Phra Wannarat are *Samaṇasatti* or ecclesiastical titles (Phra Methithammaphon [Prayoon Dhammacitto], 1990, 33-34). In present-day Thailand, monks with high *Samaṇasatti* also hold high administrative positions. For example, in the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council Rule No. 24 (1998) on the Appointment and Removal of Ecclesiastical Administrative Officers, monks who are Ecclesiastical Governor-General (*Mahāsaṅghamaṇḍalapāṃokkha*) must hold at least a position of Somdet Phra Ratchakhana, although in practice they tend to hold a position of Somdet Phra Rachakhana, Suphannabat level – the level second only to the Supreme Patriarch. On the other hand, monks in high administrative positions tend to be promoted to higher *Samaṇasatti* ranks. For example, a monk who is appointed Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor but who holds a position of Phra Maha Parīṇū or Phra Khru Saññāpaṭṭa will soon quickly be promoted to Phra Rachakhana Ordinary Level. *Samaṇasatti* and administrative titles/positions are therefore closely related and support each other.

However, in some cases “*Samaṇasatti*” could include both the status or rank and the administrative position, as they are closely related. Prince

Damrong explains in Thamniap Samanasak (*Samaṇasatti* Directory) that in King Rama VI's reign, Somdet Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa, the Supreme Patriarch, was given a royal permission to regulate the *Samaṇasatti* order in 1912 by separating ranks (status) from positions. The status consists of 21 levels starting from Phra Phithitham to Supreme Patriarch. The position classification, on the other hand, includes 11 levels, with levels 11 to 4 divided further into Administration and Scripture Divisions, starting from deputy abbot and deputy *Ācariya* to *Sakalasāṅghapariṇāyaka*. The reason for the separation was that in former times, *Saṅgha* ranks and positions were combined as one. Monks with certain ranks were supposed to assume certain duties. For instance, monks with Somdet Phra Rachakhana titles would also act as Ecclesiastical Governor-General. However, by the time they could be promoted to Somdet Phra Rachakhana, most were quite aged and could no longer work actively. There are also other reasons for separating ranks and positions. Ranks are more appropriate to senior monks, while positions are more becoming to those with abilities. This separation may facilitate the *Saṅgha* administration more considerably (Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab (2000, 97-102).

This paper will use “*Samaṇasatti*” in a popular sense, i.e. to refer to the status or rank of a monk. It does not include any administrative position. What follows is a brief description of the evolution of *Samaṇasatti* from the Buddha's time to the present day.

It is believed that during the Buddha's time, the *Saṅgha* administration was already in place without *Samaṇasatti* which came into being later. There were only incidents in which the Buddha called his disciples – Bhikkhu, Bhikkhuni, *Upāsaka*, and *Upāsikā* – who excelled in various fields *Etadagga*, e.g. in wisdom and lodging preparations (*Senāsana*). Some people maintain that *Etadagga*, especially with regard to the *Saṅgha* was the basis of the *Samaṇasatti* system (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 26). Besides the honors received, these *Etadagga* monks were seen to have engaged with the *Saṅgha* administration. For example, Ven. *Sāriputta* was appointed the Chief Disciple on the Buddha's right hand and *Dhamma* Prime Minister responsible for looking after the *Saṅgha* in the south, while Ven. *Moggallāna* was made Chief Disciple on his left hand to supervise the

Saṅgha in the north (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 19). In other words, the *Samaṇasatti* system was modeled on the Chief Disciple and *Etadagga* concepts in the Buddha's time, for their jobs are the same although they are called differently (Phra Thammakittiwong [Thongdi Suratecho], 1993, 4).

Prince Damrong described the origin and development of the *Saṅgha* administration and *Samaṇasatti* in Thailand. The *Saṅgha* administration is believed to have been established in the Buddha's time. With more people being ordained, it was necessary to set up some kind of administration, or at least put into effect rules governing the relationship between teachers and students in the schools. The *Ariya-Sāvaka* monks who had other student monks under their charge conducted themselves as if in the *Saṅgha* organization. After the Buddha's death, Ven. Mahā Kassapa presided over the Rehearsal (*Saṅgīti*); this was equivalent to his being the head of the *Saṅgha* administration. After his death, there were other Elders who subsequently headed the *Saṅgha* community. Later, Buddhism was divided into various sects. The Third Rehearsal took place in the reign of King Ashoka the Great who adopted Buddhism, acting as its patron and for the first time declaring it the country's main religion. The king requested Ven. Moggallāputtatissa-Thera to preside over the rehearsal which was organized in order to eliminate heretics from his kingdom. Apparently, it was not possible to keep them out of the religion altogether. A number of false monks remained. As a result, it was necessary to rely on the king's power to keep the religion untarnished. The *Saṅgha* administration in a country with Buddhism as its principal religion needed the state's support.

In the same way, when Buddhism spread to other countries, its stability depended on the support of the monarchs who acted as its patron. The *Saṅgha* administration in each country, therefore, varies according to its cultural and national context, as supposedly in the case of Siam, Cambodia, Burma, Mon, and the Singhalese region. It is often modeled on each country's national administration, ranging from structural planning to the appointment of the *Saṅgha* chief. In this way, the religious and state administrations could go hand in hand, making it possible for Buddhism to establish a secure footing in the countries concerned.

In Prince Damrong's view, the oldest evidence of *Samaṇasatti* in Siam was found in King Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription of 1782 which states that in the city of Sukhothai there was a patriarch, Pu Khru, Mahā Thera and Thera. It appeared that the patriarch was the highest position, while the Pu Khru was possibly equivalent to Phra Khru today – a position second to the patriarch. Mahā Thera and Thera in all likelihood were senior and elderly monks of good standing who are well-versed in *Dhamma*; their positions were in accordance with the *Vinaya* practice rather than appointed by the monarch.

The fact that *Samaṇasatti* exists in every country that has Buddhism as its principal religion may have derived from the practice initiated by Lanka. In Siam, *Samaṇasatti* took shape in the latter Sukhothai period which saw the widespread popularity of Lankan Buddhism. It may be inferred that *Samaṇasatti* was most likely adopted from Lanka as well (Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab, 2000, 30-40).

So, according to Prince Damrong, *Samaṇasatti* in Thailand began in the Sukhothai period, during King Ramkhamhaeng's reign. During the reign of King Mahathammaracha Lithai, Siamese scholars were sent to Lanka to request Phra Mahā Sāmi (called "Swāmi" in some cases – Researcher), a patriarch, to come to Sukhothai to propagate Lankavamsa Buddhism. Patriarch Phra Mahā Sāmi was a Lankan who lived in the town of Phan (possibly Mottama today). The patriarch must have advised the Sukhothai king to establish *Samaṇasatti* to monks following the Lankan tradition. In the Sukhothai period *Samaṇasatti* was uncomplicated, as there were only two levels: the patriarch and Pu Khru or Phra Khru (Phra Methithammaphon [Prayoon Dhammacitto], 1990, 36).

Nevertheless, *Samaṇasatti* and titles must have existed in some form before the Sukhothai period. Stone Inscription No. 18, in octagonal shape, found in San Sung in the province of Lop Buri, included the word "Saṅghapāthākam," while Stone Inscription No. 121 at Hin Khon in the district of Pakthongchai, Nakhon Ratchasima province included the words "Kammarataṇaṇ Sīrajabhikshu and Upādhayāya Sīrajabhikshu." The former stone inscription was carved in 674, the latter in 700. The words

thus inscribed in all likelihood indicate a combination of *Samañasatti* and titles (Phra Mahā Nirutta Thitasamvaro, 2009, 2). Also, the stone inscription at Wat Kamphaeng-ngam, Sukhothai province, of 1350 uses a number of words to call the *Saṅgha*, which could be some form of *Samañasatti* used in the Thai kingdom before the introduction of Lankavamsa Theravada Buddhism. For instance, Chao Thera could be both *Samañasatti* and a title, as in Chao Thera Satthathamthararattanachan (Natthaphat Chanthawit, 1986, 10-13, referenced in Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 52).

Besides, there is evidence of the appointment of *Samañasatti* and titles together with their paraphernalia from the Lankan model found in the Kalayānī Inscription discovered at Songkhayongdistrict outside the city of Hanthawaddy (Bago/Pegu) in eastern Burma. Ten inscriptions werealtogetherdiscovered. Two were written in Magadhi (Pali), and eight in the Mon language. They were inscribed in 1476 during the reign of King Dhammaceti of Pegu (1460-1491). The gist of the inscriptions is that the king of Pegu wanted to revive Buddhism in Mon and therefore sent 22 Mon monks to Lanka to study Buddhism and be re-ordained in the Lankan tradition. Having permitted the ordination, Lankan King Bhuvanekabahu granted various titles to the Mon monks and presented them with a number of gifts and articles including robes, curtains, canopies, rugs, fans with ivory handles, and betel boxes. The practice of granting titles and articles is likely to have become a model for the Thai *Samañasatti* and paraphernalia later on (Phra Mahā Nirutta Thitasamvaro, 2009, 4).

Types and levels of *Samañasatti*

Apart from being divided into statuses and positions in King Rama VI's reign, *Samañasatti* can be divided into other categories. The rationale for *Samañasatti* allows us to categorize it into two types:

- 1) On the basis of knowledge: the monarch grants *Samañasatti* to monks and novices who have passed the Pali Scholar Examinations from Level 3 to 9, with each level being accompanied by different ceremonial fans (Phat Yot).

- 2) On the basis of performance: appointments for *Samañasatti* are made in light of performances in various fields, including public

work and education. Such *Samañasatti* includes Phra Khru Prathuan Venerable Teacher, Phra Thananukrom (*Thānānukkamā*), Phra Khru Sanyabat Venerable Teacher, and Phra Rachakhana.

However, *Samañasatti* can also be divided according to levels and types into 5 groups:

1. Phra Racha Khana represents high levels of *Samañasatti*. Monks with this title are called the Right Venerable or “Chao Khun.” There are 7 levels of subdivisions:

1) Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakhatayan, His Holiness Supreme Patriarch – for a royal family member, the title is His Holiness Royal Supreme Patriarch

2) Somdet Phra Rachakhana, Suphannabat level, second to the Supreme Patriarch

3) Phra Rachakhana Chao Khana Rong, Hiranyabat level, third to the Supreme Patriarch (Deputy Somdet Phra Rachakhana)

4) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level – divided further into three types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level, with a specific title and accompanying ceremonial fan

(3) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level

5) Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level – divided further into two types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level

6) Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level – divided further into two types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level

7) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Level – divided further into four types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Parīññū Ordinary Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

- (2) Phra Rachakhana, Pariññū Ordinary Level
- (3) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Upgraded Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
- (4) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Upgraded Level

2. Phra Khru Sanyabat (Venerable Teacher) is a *Samaṇasatti* with the title “Phra Khru” conferred by the monarch, with a royal letter of appointment and ceremonial fan. There are many groups and levels as follows:

1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Governor at Provincial level:

- (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor
- (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Deputy Provincial Governor

2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor:

- (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
- (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level
- (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
- (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level
- (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level

3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Ecclesiastical District Governor:

- (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
- (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level
- (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
- (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level

(5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level

(6) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level

(7) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level

4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor:

(1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level

(3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level

(5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level

(6) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(7) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, First Grade Level

(8) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Second Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(9) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Second Grade Level

(10) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Third Grade Level

5) Phra Khru Sanyabat for Royal Monastery:

a) Abbot of Royal Monastery

(1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level

(2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level

(3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, Third Grade Level

- b) Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery
 - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
 - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level
 - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery, Third Grade Level
- c) Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery
 - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
 - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level
 - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
 - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
 - (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level
- 6) Phra Khru Sanyabat of Private Monastery:
 - a) Abbot of Private Monastery
 - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
 - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level
 - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
 - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
 - (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
 - (6) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, First Grade Level
 - (7) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, Second Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(8) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, Second Grade Level

(9) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, Third Grade Level

b) Deputy and Assistant Abbots of Private Monastery

(1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Private Monastery

(2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Private Monastery

3. *Thānānukkamā* is the *Samaṇasatti* order outside the directory by which the monarch permits Phra Rachakhana to appoint fellow monks in the ecclesiastical entourage in their honor as appropriate, e.g.:

1) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Level, as right-hand and left-hand Palat, assistants to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch

2) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Somdet Phra Rachakhana

3) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana Chao Khana Rong, Hiranyabat level

4) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana Chao Khana Rong, Suphannabat level

5) Phra Khru *Thānānukkamā*, First Class Level, as assistant to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch

6) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level

7) Phra Khru *Thānānukkamā*, Second Class Level, as assistant to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch (Phra Khru Paritta)

8) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level

9) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level

10) Phra Khru *Vinayadhara*

11) Phra Khru *Dhammadhara*

12) Phra Khru *Upasampatācariya*

13) Phra Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Level

14) Phra Khru *Saṅgharaksa*

15) Phra Khru *Samuha*

16) Phra Khru *Tīkā*

17) Phra *Samuha*

18) Phra *Tīkā*

4. Phra *Pariñṇā* is *Samaṇasatti* for a monk who has passed the Pali examination from Levels 3 to 9. At each level there is a ceremonial fan according to each *Samaṇasatti*. This is a matter of education or *Ganthadhura* and has nothing to do with administration. In the former time it was not regarded as part of the *Samaṇasatti* until Somdet Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa the Supreme Patriarch re-regulated the system (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 76).

5. Phra Khru Prathuan is a title appointed by the Supreme Patriarch for a monk who is a member of the committee overseeing education and administration of Buddhist studies schools and state schools. “Phra Khru” at this level is not a formal title, but merely a prefix to the monk’s name. For instance, when Monk Buntham is appointed Phra Khru Prathuan, he will be called Phra KhruBuntham.

The above classification and order of *Samaṇasatti* does not encompass all possible positions. It does not include, for example, Phra Phithitham responsible for ceremonial arrangements. Besides, the order of ceremonial fans can be very complex, especially at the levels below Phra Rachakhana. For example, the positions of monks with Pali qualifications Level 9 are lower than those of Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor at Special Grade Level, and Phra Khru Palat assistant to Phra Rachakhana but higher than those of Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level and Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level.

Criteria and procedures in the appointment and promotion of *Samaṇasatti*

In the old days it was the monarch himself who decided on the appointment and promotion of *Samaṇasatti*. It was a personal decision based on the performance or qualifications of individual monks. There was no formal criterion or regulation. It was the royal prerogative to confer *Samaṇasatti* on a monk as the monarch saw fit. During the reigns of King Rama V and King Rama VI, when Somdet Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa was the Supreme Patriarch, the monarchs would consult the Supreme Patriarch before conferring a title on a monk. Since then, it has become a

practice in which the *Saṅgha* plays an advisory role as to whom to appoint and promote. Today, the appointment and promotion are governed by a set of rules and regulations by which the *Saṅgha* participate in the procedure starting with the abbot, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor, and Ecclesiastical Regional Governor to Ecclesiastical Governor-General. The names then are submitted to the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council for approval. Then it is the duty of the National Buddhism Office to submit the list to His Majesty the King for proper conferment of *Samaṇasatti* in accordance with the official regulation.

Monks who are to be appointed or promoted must meet the required criteria. For example, a monk to be appointed as an ecclesiastical administrative officer must have extensive public service experience.

Purpose of *Samaṇasatti*

The above description shows that *Samaṇasatti* is designed to honor and encourage monks to conduct themselves and do good work in a manner beneficial to the religion and the nation as a whole. For example, in the appointment of Phra Rachakhana at a higher level, since the time of absolute monarchy to the democratization in 1932 to the present day, in particular during King Rama IV's reign, there is a detailed description of the work and achievements of the monk concerned and how they have benefited the country and the religion.

Legitimacy of *Samaṇasatti* and the administration of the *Saṅgha* and the State

Samaṇasatti as conferred by the monarch and the state and as part of the *Saṅgha* administration is under the state's supervision. Therefore, it is seen as a legitimate institution, or at least one that is not in serious conflict with the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and in accordance with the Buddha's permission (the Tipitaka, Volume 4, No. 186, p. 295). It is not in serious conflict with the principles governing seniority by years spent in monkhood, ability based on knowledge and performance, *Saṅgha* administration and relationships

based on the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Monks bestowed with *Samaṇasatti* titles still observe the seniority principle except in some extraordinary cases such as royal and state functions in honor of the monarch (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). They earn their honors on the basis of their knowledge, competence, and achievement, comparable to the ways in which the titles of *Etadagga* and such administrative positions as the preceptor (*Upajjhāya*) are given. This is in line with the *Saṅgha* administrative principles. The Buddha permitted competent monks to act as preceptors charged with administrative duties as well as imparting knowledge and training to their disciples (the *Tipitaka*, Volume 4, Nos. 66-67, pp. 82-92).

Advantages and problems of *Samaṇasatti*

Samaṇasatti is a stratagem by which the monarchy and the state honor and promote monks who have performed good deeds. It has other important administrative purposes which have been viewed in various lights, both negative and positive. In sum, there are four different views on the matter:

1. *Samaṇasatti* has both advantages and disadvantages, just like any other phenomenon, as viewed by Professor Chamnong Thongprasert (specially appointed), Member of the Royal Institute.

2. *Samaṇasatti* is in itself well-founded. It is a method used to honor and encourage monks who perform good deeds. The problems surrounding it arise through human interference, as viewed by Phra Suthithammanuwat (Thiaph Siriñāṇo), Dean, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalalai University.

3. *Samaṇasatti* is neutral – neither good nor bad. It is created by humans, but made advantageous or disadvantageous by the people involved, as viewed by Professor Sathianphong Wannapok (specially appointed), Member of the Royal Institute. He remarks that “*Samaṇasatti* in itself is neither good nor bad. However, in a time when some people are dishonest or consumed by greed, it can become a tool for financial gains” (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999, 234). This view is similar to that of some Buddhist scholars who gave an interview for an M.A. thesis on “Buddhism and *Samaṇasatti*: Case Study on the Views of Buddhist Academics and Student Monks in Universities” by Phra Maha

Wichian Saisi. To them, *Samaṇasatti* itself is neutral; whether it turns out to be positive or negative depends on the people involved (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 203).

4. *Samaṇasatti* is harmful. It has no advantage whatsoever because it has nothing to do with Buddhism. It blocks the way to *Nibbāna*, and leads monks to delusion. People who maintain this view include Prasok Thammaraksa and Khamhuno (1975, 11).

1. Advantages of *Samaṇasatti*

Despite divergent views on this issue, it seems that *Samaṇasatti* does have certain benefits, as will be discussed in what follows:

1. *Samaṇasatti* is used to honor and encourage monks who perform good deeds. *Samaṇasatti* is a way to pay respect to or acknowledge the good deeds of virtuous monks and their contributions to the religion, people, and the nation. *Samaṇasatti* is, therefore, a way to inform the general public about their good work, thus encouraging the monks to continue their endeavor.

According to the research by Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, most student monks who constitute the sample population believe that *Samaṇasatti* is beneficial. The view is shared by a number of academics that *Samaṇasatti* is a necessary tool to boost the morale of monks dedicated to the cause of Buddhism, even though it may not be necessary for the monastic who seeks deliverance from suffering or *Nibbāna* (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 201).

2. *Samaṇasatti* is a tool to promote Buddhism. It is designed to honor and encourage monks who perform good deeds for Buddhism and the nation. It motivates the monk to work harder in their pursuit of *Dhamma* for the public good, leading to greater faith and appreciation among the public, thus contributing to the prosperity of Buddhism.

3. *Samaṇasatti* is a part of the monarch's charitable works. It has been practiced in the course of national history. Today it is a part of the royal charitable works to commemorate important occasions such as the birthday anniversary celebrations of Their Majesties the King and Queen.

Phra Thep Wisutthikawi (Kasem Saññato) believes this is an advantageous aspect of *Samaṇasatti*. He states: “the person who confers [*Samaṇasatti*] is the monarch who wishes to do something good for Buddhism as a religious person. Although the monarch has no political power now, his faith in Buddhism remains a personal act. (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview)

4. *Samaṇasatti* is part of an ancient cultural and traditional identity of Thailand. From what has been described above, the tradition and system of *Samaṇasatti* conferment is an important cultural and traditional royal practice of Thailand that has passed on from generation to generation over time. It is generally considered important to preserve this tradition.

5. *Samaṇasatti* is an important component of the *Saṅgha* administration. In the Thai *Saṅgha* administrative system and structure, *Samaṇasatti* is an enabling factor that enhances the efficiency of the administrative machinery and justifies the promotion of individual monks to the administrative positions. According to Phra Maha Wichian Saisid’s research, most Buddhist academics see *Samaṇasatti* as a necessary tool that helps support the *Saṅgha* administration. It encourages the appointed monks to conduct themselves in a becoming manner and other monks to perform their duties more diligently. In addition, it helps strengthen the public faith in the religion, especially as exemplified by the appointed monks (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 182). The *Samaṇasatti* system, therefore, puts the *Saṅgha* administration in good stead in relation to the general public and state agencies.

Phra Suthithammanuwat (Thiaphiriṇṇāṇo) comments that *Samaṇasatti* facilitates *Saṅgha* work because the monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles are well-respected, thus promoting greater work efficiency and compliance (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

6. *Samaṇasatti* promotes better working relationships with the state. As the *Samaṇasatti* system and the *Saṅgha* administration are created by the state to facilitate better supervision and control of *Saṅgha* work and to promote peace in the order and the country, it contributes to greater support and care from the state. Through the *Samaṇasatti*

ceremony, the relationship between the *Saṅgha* and the monarchy or the state is strengthened.

7. The *Samaṇasatti* system enables the *Saṅgha* to give counsel to the monarch or the national administration. The strengthened relationship with the monarch and the state by way of the *Samaṇasatti* system provides the *Saṅgha* with an opportunity to offer advice to the monarch or government. For example, Somdet Phra Wannarat advised King Naresuan to pardon soldiers who were found deficient in the military duties during the Elephant Battle (Songkhram Yutthahatthi) with Minchit Sra of Burma.

8. *Samaṇasatti* contributes to greater efficiency in the dissemination of Buddhism. The system commands great respect from the public who believes that monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles are able and knowledgeable. These monks are often invited to give sermons or advice, thus providing more opportunities for the dissemination of Buddhist teachings, thereby winning greater acceptance. Such an advantage is confirmed in the research work which indicates that to most academics, if the monks conduct themselves appropriately in light of their *Samaṇasatti*, they will instill greater faith in the public (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 182). This will be beneficial to the *Saṅgha* administration as well as to the dissemination and maintenance of Buddhism in many ways.

9. *Samaṇasatti* encourages the disciples or supporters of the monks who are given *Samaṇasatti* titles to serve the cause of Buddhism even further. In addition to increasing morale to individual monks, the *Samaṇasatti* system encourages their disciples, especially laypersons, to support their work and other religious activities. Phra Suthithammanuwat (Thiap Siriñāṇo) comments this advantage of *Samaṇasatti* is external in that those associated with the monks who are conferred *Samaṇasatti* titles feel that their *Ācariya* are honored. The disciples are thereby motivated to further the Buddhist cause (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

In support of this statement, Dr. Amnaj Buasiri adds that *Samaṇasatti* makes the monks' followers very proud and willing to promote, develop and maintain Buddhism even further (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

2. Problems of *Samaṇasatti*

It seems natural that everything has its pros and cons. Professor Chamnong Thongprasert (specially appointed) states that “In fact, everything has its advantages and disadvantages, depending on how you view it (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview). *Samaṇasatti* is no exception. It has its benefits and problems. The disadvantages, however, are mainly caused by people who are involved in the machinery of *Samaṇasatti*. Admittedly, *Samaṇasatti* is beneficial in light of the initial intentions in conferring such titles. There is nothing harmful or unwholesome about it. It is designed to honor virtuous and competent monks, as seen in the proclamation of *Samaṇasatti* described in the Section on *Samaṇasatti* above. Phra Suthithammanuwat shares this view, saying “*Samaṇasatti* in itself poses no problem. The problem lies with those who use it and those who consider it. The problem is with the system. I personally do not think it an undesirable thing.” (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview). According to the research by Phra Maha Wichian Saisi (2000, 182, 203), most academics consider *Samaṇasatti* as neutral. The desirable and undesirable effects come with people who are involved. If the system is improved, the *Samaṇasatti* system will be further strengthened. The findings show that the *Samaṇasatti* problem is not unsolvable. Here are some views on the problems or disadvantages of the system:

1. *Samaṇasatti* creates greed and delusion with regard to titles and gifts. *Samaṇasatti* uplifts the position of the monk who is granted the title, leading to greater recognition and honor, together with all the accompanying privileges and gifts. Some monks are carried away by all the attention and material goods and are clung to them. This is against the purpose of monkhood and training as described in the *Sikkhāttaya*, which is designed to curb desires.

This criticism is valid in that most monks are human. Dr. Amnaj Buasiri thinks that *Samaṇasatti* encourages greater desires in monks who are not well trained (Dr. Amnaj Buasiri, interview), but it does not mean that it is true for every monk or that monks with such greed or desires are all bad. Admittedly, there are monks affected by greed or delusion with *Samaṇasatti*, but the number is small. We may understand the situation better

if we compare it to that which a layperson might face. For example, there are people who are promoted to a higher rank or position and are carried away by it. They are what we call in Thai “Kingka Dai Thong” [literally meaning “a chameleon that acquires gold” or a person who likes to show off] or “Khangkhok Khuen Wo” (literally meaning “a toad on the palanquin” or a person who forgets his roots), i.e. those suffering from “self-delusion”, who are conceited and arrogant. Again, there are very few people like this, so the problem may not be altogether unsolvable. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi comments as follows:

“I think that this happens in every society. The monks’ society is no exception, but how bad is the situation? We should look at it really objectively, but not indifferently, objectively in a sense that we consider both pros and cons. In every society today, there are good and bad people, whether they are civil servants, military officials, police, teachers or monks. However, it is my belief that malicious or conceited people are few in number... In a period where there are many such people, the society is in decline. It is the same with monks. If it appears that there are many problematic monks, there will be a decline in faith. People will criticize that even monks have greed and are infatuated with ranks and titles. In fact, the Buddha taught that one who acquires a rank should not be infatuated with it. It does not mean that one should reject ranks. Ranks should continue, and one should acquire them, but one should not get infatuated with them. The problem is that a person can get carried away with them, but it is not yet that severe. It is a common thing. It just happens that today the media exerts a strong influence... Sometimes, monks are not in the wrong at all... Sometimes, we do not know what yardstick to use... Perhaps a certain monk is influential, or maybe the media is influential and turns to official laws to decide the issue; so, it has become a legal issue. Nobody can draft laws that say specifically that the issue must be such and such; if one wants to do so, one will have to come up with so many laws to cover everything (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

2. *Samaṇasatti* causes monks to vie with one another or lobby for titles, giving rise to jealousy and conflict just like in a lay society, leading to confusion and injustice among the *Saṅgha*. Honors and gifts

that come with *Samaṇasatti* can prompt monks to want to acquire it just for the sake of it, while those with a certain title want to get promoted to a higher level for greater honor and gifts. However, there is a limited number of positions or titles available each year; so, there is a fierce competition among monks, causing jealousy and conflicts among monks who are eligible for *Samaṇasatti*, especially those from the same monastery or province. The problem that follows is unseemliness and injustice in approving the list of *Samaṇasatti* as a result of lobbying. Some monks who should be given the honors are bypassed.

In Phra Thep Wisutthikawi's view, despite all the lobbying there are very few monks who resort to the practice (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Dr. Amnaj Buasiri believes that vying for *Samaṇasatti* titles exists but only to a limited degree (Dr. Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

3. *Samaṇasatti* causes monks to take delight in extravagance.

When *Samaṇasatti* titles are conferred, there is a celebration and merit making ceremony. Functions are organized, and much money is spent. There are critics who say that *Samaṇasatti* causes monks to indulge in the extravagance of the celebration and other related events.

However, lavishing celebration and merit making may be due to the financial status of the monks concerned. Some, for instance, reside in monasteries with a lot of income or are financially supported by wealthy followers. The latter may want to celebrate the occasion, falsely believing that the bigger the party they organize, the more merit they will obtain. In their opinions, a higher *Samaṇasatti* title should be marked by a greater financial offer. In such cases no bad intention or self-seeking scheme is involved. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi maintains a similar view that it is possible that some titled monks may enjoy extravagance, but it is not always the case. There seems to be a practice that lavishes monks who are conferred a higher honor with a lot of money. The monks, in turn, squander the money on extravagant events considered fitting to their new status or rank (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

Phra Suthithammanuwat holds a similar view. Organizing an event to celebrate the conferment of *Samaṇasatti* is a social value which is sometimes accompanied by a donation of money according to the monk's

status. It is done not out of a desire to please those in high positions, but rather out of a desire to make merits. He adds further that there are not many monks who organize such celebratory events. Monks in Bangkok do not like to see them organized. In some cases, it is their followers who undertake the organizing. Some monks donate the money received to other charitable causes. For instance, Phra Thammakhnaphon (Phaibun Dataxuiño), former Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Kanchanaburi, celebrated his *Dhamma Samañasatti* conferment and donated the money to school constructions. Some of his followers wanted to offer him a car, but the monk asked that the money be donated to the school construction project instead (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

4. *Samañasatti* distracts monks from the study and practice of *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Critics believe that when monks take delight in and become infatuated with *Samañasatti*, they tend to spend more time finding ways and means to obtain *Samañasatti* titles at the expense of their study and practice of *Dhamma-Vinaya*. This allegation is far from the truth. It is difficult for monks to turn away from *Dhamma-Vinaya* study and practice for the sake of *Samañasatti*, as such study and practice are the direct reasons why *Samañasatti* is conferred in the first place; they are part of the conditions leading a monk to be considered for *Samañasatti*. The inattention to *Dhamma-Vinaya* study and practice may be caused by a number of factors. Some monks may not be interested in such study and practice because of their lack of faith or because of their laziness. It is not necessarily due to *Samañasatti*.

Phra Suthithammanuwat admits that there is some truth in the above criticism but it is not necessarily an important factor. Monks with no *Samañasatti* can be uninterested in such study and practice (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview). Dr. Amnaj Buasiri holds a similar view that only in some cases is *Samañasatti* the cause of a lack of interest in the study and practice of *Dhamma* among monks (Dr. Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

5. Like traditional ranks and titles that have been abolished, *Samañasatti* should also be discontinued. Ranks and titles that were created at the time of absolute monarchy have all been abolished,

because they tended to cause social class division and inequality. Similarly, *Samaṇasatti* is a legacy of absolute monarchy and it should be abolished as well. Such a comment is not well substantiated. It is an oversimplification coupled with extreme attitudes. It is not true that ranks and titles are always the cause of discrimination or exploitation. Classification, whether in terms of titled status or other administrative posts, can lead to class distinction as well. In addition, *Samaṇasatti* resembles rather the modern rank system than the former system of noble titles. Indeed, the former system has not completely disappeared; rather, it is replaced by something more modern.

Assistant Professor Dr. Channarong Bunnun who is in favor of the abolition of the *Samaṇasatti* system does not agree with the above reason, arguing that *Samaṇasatti* and the lay system of ranks and titles are not related. To argue that they are, therefore, is not reasonable (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

6. *Samaṇasatti* makes monks subservient to or become an instrument of the state. The *Samaṇasatti* system was created by the state for political and administrative purposes and as a consequence was regarded as subservient to it like other civil services that function like a state apparatus.

Such view is only partially true in the case of self-seeking monks who act like state servants. In general, however, monks that agree to receive *Samaṇasatti* titles and allowances do not have that in mind. They agree to receive the honors that are created by the State for political and administrative purposes, and their acceptance is not against the rules of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. On the contrary, *Samaṇasatti* is beneficial to Buddhism, and it is essential that society functions under the same administrative order. It is rather unfair to treat the acceptance of *Samaṇasatti* as an act of subservience to the state, as the majority of monks are not of that mind. The case of Phra Thep Moli (Siricando) who had his title removed could be evidence that monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles do not follow the state's order unquestioningly. In this case Phra Thep Moli expressed his opinion frankly while other monks kept their silence (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

Besides, such a comment overlooks the fact that as part of the state's administration and under its governance, the *Saṅgha* must comply with the request or order made by the state authorities no matter whether the monks have any *Samaṇasatti* titles or not. It seems that the criticism raised here is too severe to be true, as it overlooks the fact that in any period or under any government rule, religion serves as part of the state's apparatus and is invariably involved in politics somehow. Professor Preecha Changkhwanyuen points out that religion or the *Saṅgha* clearly became a political tool after the 1932 Coup when change was in the air. For instance, when Thai people were under the influence of democratic fervor, they tried to turn the *Saṅgha* or der into a democratic organization and introduced the idea that Buddhism must be democratic. When politicians ran for an election, they used the monastery as their platform and monks as election canvassers. The professor concludes that "at no place and no time do religion and politics not intermingle" (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999, 286-287).

Furthermore, using monks as a state apparatus may be justified if it is done for social good and not against the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Providing assistance to the people and the state is something that the Buddha permitted, as seen in his statement "Bhikkhu, I permit you to go along with the king" (The *Tipitaka*, Volume 4, Item 186, p. 295), when he permitted the delay of the *Vassūpanāyikādivasa* as requested by King Bimbisāra.

In other words, the legitimacy and moral justification of the state's use of the *Saṅgha* or religion as its administrative tool depends on its intent. Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) – former Phra Dhammapiṭaka – contends that the efforts of the ruling party to make the people easier to govern and the government to function more efficiently for the sake of public good are correct and legitimate. However, if the governing is designed only for the good of the governing party and their self-directed ends, such act is problematic and illegitimate. Likewise, if good governance which utilizes Buddhism is aimed at public good, it is legitimate; if designed for self-interest, it is illegitimate. So there is a difference between being a tool for selfish ends and a tool for public good. Phra Brahmaganabhorn says that "to serve for administrative purposes is not necessarily a bad thing or an act with evil intent" (Phra Dhammapiṭaka [P.A. Payutto], 1996, 23-25).

7. The present *Samaṇasatti* system is degrading to the *Saṅgha* order and destroys the Thai traditional value because today monks request the titles on their own behalf whereas in the past they are conferred on monks by authorities. In the old days conferment of titles was the monarch's decision, while today the interested and eligible monks need to submit their requests for *Samaṇasatti* for themselves. Some view that this is a degrading act that destroys the traditional value and that it is not becoming for the monks who are supposed to leave ambition and desire for material gains behind.

Phra Thep Wisutthikawi thinks that it is not fitting for monks to ask for *Samaṇasatti* titles for themselves. However, culture has changed as a result of foreign influence, not because of *Samaṇasatti* it self. It is rather the system has made it so (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). In his view, submitting a request for *Samaṇasatti* may not be the most proper thing to do, but this is not due to the nature of *Samaṇasatti*, but because of the changing culture or system.

Phra Suthithammanuwat provides another interesting viewpoint that today the large number of monks makes it impossible for each and every monk to be duly considered for a title. So, it is necessary for the monks concerned to submit their work for the consideration of *Samaṇasatti*. We may regard such act as “presenting” or “informing” others of one's work so that they may appreciate it, just like the act of *Pattānumodanā* (rejoicing for merits done by others). We happen to use the word “request,” thus making it problematic (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

8. *Samaṇasatti* is not in line with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, because the titles conferred by the monarch are different from the titles of *Etadagga* appointed by the Buddha. Since *Samaṇasatti* did not exist in the Buddha's time and since it is the monarch, not the Buddha, who appoints the monks, it has been criticized for not being in line with *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

However, the objective or the essence of *Samaṇasatti* is similar to that of the *Etadagga*. They are not in conflict with each other. Many academics view that *Samaṇasatti* is similar to the title of *Etadagga* or even originates from it. For instance, Professor Sathianphong Wannapok

(specially appointed), Member of the Royal Institute, makes the following comment:

“I think that *Samaṇasatti* that came in to being in subsequent times was not a new creation. It had its origin from the Buddha’s time, then to Lanka, and to Thailand. Much has been developed in Thai society... *Samaṇasatti* later on was modeled on the worldly structure: division into classes, as in the case of honorific titles, from Somdet Chaophraya, Chaophraya, Khunphra, Khunluang, and Khun. If we compare them to the religious titles, we can see they are the same: Somdet Phra Rachakhana is equivalent to Somdet Chaophraya, Deputy Somdet to Chaophraya, Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level, to Khunphra, Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level, to Khunluang, and Ordinary Level, to Khun” (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999, 233-234).

These views indicate that *Samaṇasatti* has developed along the model of *Etadagga* and undergone changes into classes and divisions parallel to the system of honorific titles royally conferred on distinguished individuals. In this regard, *Samaṇasatti* should not be seen as going against the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, as it has developed from or is modeled on the title of *Etadagga*.

In addition, it is legitimate and not contrary to the *Vinaya* for the *Saṅgha* to accept its administrative structure as well as *Samaṇasatti* titles created by the state in light of the principle of “compliance with the king” when the Buddha permitted the monks to delay the *Vassūpanāyikādivasa* as requested by King Bimbisāra, although it was not in line with his original instruction. This shows that it is quite in order to comply with the authorities in minor matters that do not cause significant repercussions. The essence of the *Samaṇasatti* system and the *Saṅgha* administrative structure created by the state is not too different from the issue of delayed *Vassūpanāyikādivasa*; it may not completely be in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, but it does not bring about serious adverse effects. Dr. Amnaj Buasisi concurs, stating that “the *Dhamma-Vinaya* does not lay down any specific rule in this matter it does mention “*Rājānaṃ Anuvattitum*” – comply with the wish of the monarch. So, one can interpret the matter as not being against the *Vinaya*” (Dr. Amnaj Buasisi, Interview).

9. *Samañasatti* goes against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* in several aspects, e.g. against the principles of no class division, respect for seniority, and non-involvement in the affairs of laypeople. This is based on the notion that *Samañasatti* was not established by the Buddha, unlike the issue of *Etadagga*, and is considered as not being in line with the *Dhamma-Vinaya* in many ways. For instance, the practice of *Samañasatti* has led to class distinction, abandonment of traditional respect for seniority based on years of ordination, and greater tendency to become involved in lay affairs.

Such criticism, again, is partially correct as discussed earlier. However, there is some error of judgment here, especially with regard to the issue of class distinction and disregard for seniority. The practice of *Samañasatti* has resulted in the administrative hierarchy just like *Etadagga*—both are based on competence rather than seniority. The difference lies in the fact that *Samañasatti* appointments are made by the state. Like the principle of *Etadagga*, it does not replace or entirely do away with the observation of seniority. Monks under the *Samañasatti* system continue to observe seniority. For example, when carrying out ecclesiastical affairs, monks with a shorter monastic life must honor their senior and call them “*Bhante*,” while the latter calls the former “*Āvuso*,” in accordance with the seniority principle. Monks with a longer monastic life are not required to prostrate before those with higher *Samañasatti* who have a shorter monastic life. On the contrary, it is the latter that will pay proper respect to the former first. A monk with *Samañasatti* shall always pay respect to his preceptor or teacher with lower or no *Samañasatti* title. In this connection, Phra Thep Wisutthikawi and Professor Chamnong Thongprasert give a similar point of view that respect for seniority is still observed, except for the seating arrangements in the royal and state ceremonies, which is done, according to Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, in honor of the monarch (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

Besides the title of *Etadagga*, there are other positions in the *Saṅgha* order that are appointed based on level of competence. For example, apart from having at least a ten-year monastic life, a preceptor monk must be competent to carry out his *Upajjhāya* duties. The Buddha decreed that “O, Monks, monks who are foolish and incompetent shall not carry out the ordination duties. Any monk that does so will be considered as

having committed an ecclesiastical offence. O, Monks, I permit a competent monk with ten or more years of monastic life to do ordination duties” (the *Tipitaka*, Volume 4, No. 76, p. 105). In all likelihood, these positions are not appointed on the basis of seniority alone, as the preceptor will have to preside over the ordination ceremony and supervise monks with less than five years of monastic life.

Thus, *Samañasatti* does not create class distinction or disregard seniority. It is similar to the idea of *Etadagga* that ranks some monks higher than others, but it does not cancel out the seniority principle entirely. *Samañasatti* is different from class or caste in that the former has a certain mobility, i.e. possibility for change, while the class or caste in India remains immobile (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Class distinction as a result of *Samañasatti*, if it ever occurs, is a matter of individual monks who are infatuated with the titles and divide people into classes. In other words, to be put in a high position is a matter of merit and competence, but some people may take it too seriously (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). *Samañasatti* has no such design. The system may be devised by the state, but to consider it as a hierarchy of classes is surely not what the Buddha intended to see. Neither did he with the title of *Etadagga*. It may be acceptable to follow the state for the good of the *Saṅgha* order and Buddhism, but it needs to be kept in mind that *Samañasatti* is not an indication of class distinction as it may be for the laypeople.

The issue of *Samañasatti* being treated as a lay affair and being a barrier to *Nibbāna* has been touched upon earlier. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi makes an interesting observation that some ecclesiastical affairs are similar to those of laypeople. The case of a monk with a longer monastic life paying respect to another with a shorter monastic life but with a higher *Samañasatti* title is like that in which a father pays respect to his son with a higher title, this being based on competence (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

10. *Samañasatti* goes against the Buddha’s *Saṅgha* administration characterized by equality, fraternity and liberty. The previously mentioned problems concerning *Samañasatti* gave rise to some aspects of Buddhist practice that seem to diverge from the original *Dhamma-Vinaya* practice. Consequently, *Samañasatti* is regarded as conflicting with the

Buddha's idea of Saṅgha administration characterized by equality, fraternity and liberty.

The criticism is partially valid. *Samaṇasatti* results in class distinction. There is a sense of inequality between monks with *Samaṇasatti* and those without such titles or with different ones. Such differentiation may not signify fraternity or the sense of familiarity among monks and may even become a barrier to the liberty of the *Saṅgha*, but it is too severe, as has already been discussed in the section dealing with class distinction. *Samaṇasatti* is to all intents and purposes patterned on the *Etadagga* model. In the *Saṅgha* order, this may lead to hierarchy that is not based on the seniority of ordination, but it does not cancel out the seniority principle.

Assistant Professor Dr. Channarong Bunnun thinks that this criticism has some validity. Even without the issue of *Samaṇasatti*, inequality exists because of the nature of the *Saṅgha* administration. Monks are not all equal. For instance, there is difference in terms of years spent in monastic life or student-teacher relationships. It is true that *Samaṇasatti* destroys a sense of fraternity if monks become infatuated with the titles they receive. As for liberty, the fact that it may be limited does not mean that it does not exist. (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

Phra Thep Wisutthikawi maintains that the issue of equality continues to fall within the Vinaya framework that focuses also on competence instead of treating all monks blindly equally. Fraternity should not be affected by the issue of *Samaṇasatti* (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Dr. Amnaj Buasiri is of a similar thought that monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles are still monks who have to carry out daily routine activities in the spirit of equality, fraternity and liberty, and also have to observe the seniority principle (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

What one must be clear about is that the Buddha's *Saṅgha* administration was not democratic in the Western sense or in the sense discussed by Western philosophers. The *Saṅgha* administration is based principally on the *Dhamma-Vinaya* rather than on Western-styled equality. In the *Saṅgha* community, decisions are usually reached by consensus, as seen in such cases as ordination, *kathina* robe-making ceremony, and *Samanubhāsana* chanting related to misdemeanor of monks. The decisions are not reached by representatives in the same manner as members of the

Parliament. Monks' liberty is also limited by the *Vinaya* framework in which there are numerous prohibitions and restrictions. Liberty, ultimately a deliverance from all sufferings, is an ideal difficult to achieve, with or without the existence of *Samaṇasatti* and the *Saṅgha* administration. Even in the Buddha's time, there were many monks who joined the order without the aim of attaining *Nibbāna*. Take, for example, the Chabbaggiya monks: the Buddha said that "No animal desires to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth (*Vivaṭṭa*); they only desire the cycle of rebirth (*Vaṭṭa*)" (*Khuddakanikāya Aṭṭhakathā Dhammapada*, Part 5, p. 54). This can be interpreted that the Buddha acknowledged that most people desire the cycle of births and rebirths rather than the liberation from it, i.e. deliverance.

The issue of equality is just like that of classification on the principles of seniority, competence, and relationships, as has been discussed earlier. In other words, the *Saṅgha* under the Buddha's *Dhamma-Vinaya* are all equal in that they follow the same *Dhamma-Vinaya*, but also not equal with regard to certain issues. They are expected to show respect and obedience, as well as following orders, in proper order. For instance, the preceptor can give orders to his pupil and can punish him for any wrongdoing as long as it does not violate the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. All this is intended to ensure law and order in the *Saṅgha* community. Life in a large community is difficult and chaotic without rules and regulations and proper order. Like *Etadagga*, *Samaṇasatti* does not bring about inequality in the *Saṅgha* community to a damaging extent.

Fraternity may be affected by *Samaṇasatti*, but again not to a serious extent, as has been discussed earlier. Monks observe seniority and relationships. The majority of monks with *Samaṇasatti* are not so carried away with the title that they disregard friendships with other monks. Most relationships are maintained. There are only some monks who are so blinded by *Samaṇasatti* titles and material interests that they become inimical and hostile to other monks as in the aforementioned case of Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Ajarn Asapho).

In addition, the meaning of liberty itself is not without controversy. The monks' liberty is rather limited by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* with regard to what they can and cannot do in their daily life. They cannot always do

what they want. Their liberty is limited compared to ordinary people in democratic society. If the issue of liberty in question means that *Samaṇasatti* leads to greater administrative structure or control and to less liberty for monks to lead life as they see fit in the *Saṅgha* community, it is true to a certain extent, but it is not a serious problem. As a rule, monks have their liberty limited by the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, while the *Saṅgha* administration is carried out by those with administrative positions rather than those with *Samaṇasatti* titles. Monks with higher *Samaṇasatti* titles have neither power nor right to order those with lower *Samaṇasatti* titles who are not under their supervision. If the concern is with liberty or freedom from Kilesa and sufferings, this is a matter of *Dhamma* practice as discussed earlier. It is an individual concern and has little to do with *Samaṇasatti*.

11. *Samaṇasatti* is an exploitative means for self-seeking persons. *Samaṇasatti* may be desirable; monks who receive *Samaṇasatti* titles are honored and showered with gifts, interests, or attention. Some monks may seek them, thus allowing those involved in the *Samaṇasatti* activity to exploit the matter.

However, this is again not a serious issue. In general, the interests to be gained are not considerable. It is natural for those who seek something to repay others for their help, for example, to cover the expenses incurred and as a token of gratitude. If the amount is not considerable, it is not something to worry too much about.

So, even if it cannot be positively proven, it can be reasonably concluded that *Samaṇasatti* has more advantages than disadvantages; at least, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. *Samaṇasatti* may have some problems, but such problems are not intolerable. They can be corrected or redressed. It may be more beneficial for Buddhists to help improve the situation rather than to seek to destroy the system. *Samaṇasatti* still has its advantages and is still important to the existence of the *Saṅgha* and Buddhism.

Suggestions for solutions and guidelines to problems concerning *Samaṇasatti*

1. Possible solutions

There are four suggested approaches: abolishing the system, improving it, inculcating proper values, and controlling and monitoring the conducts and works of monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles. Some approaches can be undertaken simultaneously, while others may be more difficult to implement. They are discussed in the following:

1. Abolishing *Samaṇasatti*: The proponents of this approach argue that there are more disadvantages to *Samaṇasatti* than advantages. It is best to abolish it. Some, however, disagree. For example, Phra Thep Wisutthikawi maintains that it does not really matter whether or not *Samaṇasatti* is abolished, as it is not the objective of ordination in the first place; however, it is more prudent to keep it, because it has more advantages (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Phra Suthithammanuwat shares the view that it is better to have *Samaṇasatti* than to have none at all. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages. If it is abolished, it will be replaced by another system not unlike it, because a system must be put in place to reward people with significant religious and social contributions. Monks are human and thus need to be motivated in some way to work hard. In this sense, *Samaṇasatti* will never totally disappear (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview). Besides, Professor Chamnong Thongprasert who once supported the abolition approach now maintains that the approach will be too extreme, for the system does not cause any significant damage. Monks like Luang Pho Buddhadasa, for example, do not attach themselves to *Samaṇasatti* (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview).

So, changing *Samaṇasatti* to a different system would amount to the same thing. *Samaṇasatti* would remain as an “improved” or “new” version of itself. According to the research by Phra Maha Wichian Saisi (2000, 190), a number of academics maintain that a system that could replace *Samaṇasatti* should be an ethical one modeled on the practice in the Buddha’s time. Appointments will be made on the basis of excellence through a committee. Such view may be tantamount to abolishing *Samaṇasatti*, but it also suggests that it be replaced by another “system”

whose essence is not far removed from the existing model. It is still designed to honor monks, although it may be called by a different name. The difference in the “improved” version may simply be its new name. This view is similar to that of Phra Thep Wisutthikawi who holds that the noble titles may have already been abolished, but in reality they still exist. A new form was introduced using ranks instead; the real change was only in its name. The name “*Samaṇasatti*,” on the other hand, remains unchanged (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Similarly, Phra Suthithammanuwat comments that if *Samaṇasatti* is abolished, something with a different name will take its place. Positions and levels will still remain (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

2. Improving the *Samaṇasatti* system: This alternative may be more realistic and more likely to be implemented. Improvement will be made to minimize disadvantages or problems. Phra Phaisan Wisalo, a famous Buddhist scholar today, comments that if we cannot abolish *Samaṇasatti*, it is better to improve it.

The guidelines for improvement are several and will be discussed here.

(a) Separate *Samaṇasatti* from *Saṅgha* administrative positions:

The first suggestion made by Phra Phaisan Wisalo is to separate *Samaṇasatti* from *Saṅgha* administrative positions (Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 58).

The objective of the separation, in the view of Phra Phaisan Wisalo, is to reduce the role of the state and to have greater freedom in *Saṅgha* administration and governance. He maintains that the state today does not take as much interest in religion as it used to in former times. Its patronage is designed for its own good. It is not an individual who seeks to make merit or attain *Nibbāna*. The state is only an impersonal mechanical apparatus; consequently, when it comes to the supervision of the *Saṅgha* administration, it is unlikely to be for the good of religion (Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 57).

Nevertheless, the separation of *Samaṇasatti* from administrative positions is quite commendable but difficult to implement in its entirety. *Samaṇasatti* is an element of the *Saṅgha* administration whose structure is associated with administrative positions. The highest *Samaṇasatti*

title is the Supreme Patriarch with inherently administrative duties. It is, therefore, not possible to separate *Samaṇasatti* at this level from administrative positions. If separation is attempted, it will adversely affect the efficiency of administrative functions, because *Samaṇasatti* is a mechanism that facilitates the following of orders, thus contributing to efficient administrative work, as discussed earlier.

(b) Incorporate *Samaṇasatti* into the *Saṅgha* administrative structure: It has been suggested that *Samaṇasatti* titles be incorporated into administrative positions in the same way as the title of the Supreme Patriarch, which is both a *Samaṇasatti* title and as an administrative position. Assistant Professor Dr. Channarong Bunnun views that if one cannot abolish *Samaṇasatti*, one solution may be to turn *Samaṇasatti* titles into administrative ones (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

The advantage of this method is to reduce the number of positions that have given rise to delusion and attachment. However, a host of problems may ensue. For instance, when the number of positions is reduced, there may be greater desire and competition for the positions. Another problem is similar to that found in the separation proposal, i.e. a decline in the efficiency of the administrative machinery. In addition, monks who have no administrative positions contribute to the growth of the religion in other ways, such as dissemination, will not be recognized or rewarded.

(c) Improve the procedure for the consideration of *Samaṇasatti*: This proposal is significant and more likely to be implemented than the separation or incorporation approaches, for it does not affect the *Samaṇasatti* structure as a whole. In other words, it does not affect the *Samaṇasatti* system and does not have as many negative effects as the separation or incorporation approaches. Improving the procedure can be done in two ways:

The first is by changing the authorities who consider *Samaṇasatti*. Phra Phaisan Wisalo suggests that people in various sectors, including social organizations, participate in the consideration of *Samaṇasatti* in order to reduce the state's role and to prevent monks' monopoly of it (Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 58, 61).

Despite being a good method, Phra Phaisan's proposal may be problematic. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi makes an interesting observation that

to bring people from outside to consider *Samaṇasatti* titles for monks may be problematic, as it allows influential people to interfere with and exploit the situation, giving rise to favoritism and causing greater confusion than ever before. Monks may have self-interests, but the extent of their interests is still less than that of laypeople (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

The second is by changing the criteria for the qualifications of monks entitled for *Samaṇasatti*. This can alleviate the problem associated with *Samaṇasatti* consideration and ensure a fairer and more comprehensive distribution to monks in various fields. The consideration should include seniority and qualification, thus minimizing competition and lobbying while boosting the morale of monks who dedicate themselves to religious and social works. The proposed criterion change is feasible if the authorities understand the reasons behind it and the likely benefits that may follow.

3. Inculcating proper values: One of the problems concerning *Samaṇasatti* is caused by inappropriate values. Too much importance is attached to honors or positions. Some monks entertain the view that *Samaṇasatti* elevates their status and brings fame and material benefits with it. This, surely, is not what the *Samaṇasatti* system is intended for. Training or education by various means to instill monks with proper values, ethical conducts, and knowledge will help reduce the extent of the problem. Dr. Amnaj Buasiri suggests that monks review their value to better appreciate the notion of “receiving the honors graciously conferred by the monarch with a clear proof of contributions and good work” (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

4. Controlling and monitoring the conducts and works of monks with *Samaṇasatti*. As *Samaṇasatti* is created to honor and give morale to virtuous monks, as well as to promote greater religious and social contributions, efforts should be made to control and monitor the conducts and works of monks with *Samaṇasatti*. This will help ensure and justify the intent of the *Samaṇasatti* system. With strong and effective control and monitoring mechanisms in place, the *Samaṇasatti* problem will be minimized.

2. Suggested practice

In light of the situation of *Samaṇasatti* today, the following approaches are suggested for both monks and laypeople concerned with improving the system:

1) Monks who are conferred *Samaṇasatti* should take good care in conducting themselves respectably and making further contributions accordingly (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

2) Monks who are conferred *Samaṇasatti* should take care that their *Samaṇasatti* titles not cause adverse effects (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). In other words, monks with *Samaṇasatti* should be mindful not to be carried away by their titles, become attached to it, and seek inappropriate interests from it. Monks should not become attached to ranks and positions. Once they receive *Samaṇasatti*, they should not become attached to all the attention, honors and gifts that come with it (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview). They should not place too much importance on *Samaṇasatti* and should keep their Kilesa to the minimum (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

Phra Thammakittiwong (Thongdi Suratecho), Member of the Royal Institute, a well-known academic Thera of the Thai *Saṅgha*, provides an analogy with elephants that are given titles. Monks with *Samaṇasatti* should conduct themselves like titled elephants. The latter may receive much honor for their part in the battle, but they never show delight or pleasure in those titles or honors given by humans. They remain cool or indifferent. To be more exact, they steadfastly retain their elephant status and take no more pleasure in those honors than they do in bananas, sugar-canes, bamboo shoots, or grass – their staple food. Titles do not change what they are, i.e. elephants. Likewise, *Samaṇasatti* can not change monks to be something they are not (Phra Thammakittiwong [Thongdi Suratecho], 1993, 45).

3) Those lay or religious people who are/used to be disciples of monks granted with *Samaṇasatti* must make it their duty to ensure that their teachers do not get carried away or deluded by the titles and accompanying privileges (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

4) Monks with *Samaṇasatti* who command respect from the public are in a position to make considerable social and religious contributions if they conduct themselves according to Buddhist teachings, blame people who deserve to be blamed, and commending those who deserve commendation, and making proper use of the seven principles of Purisadhamma (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview).

5) Additional *Samaṇasatti* should be granted to monks in other fields. Although administrative and public works (construction of religious sites) are given much attention in the consideration of *Samaṇasatti*, they are not as outstanding as the social work that has been carried out by monks such as Phra Athonprachanat (Alongkot). Due consideration should also be given to monks dedicated to *Kammaṭṭhāna* meditation practice (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

6. Information should be disseminated to the general public and monks to promote knowledge and understanding about the objectives of *Samaṇasatti* and discourage inappropriate conducts in this matter (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

7. Laypeople or the public may not know much about *Samaṇasatti* and may not have an issue with it. However, they should learn how not to encourage monks to strive for it (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

8. Monks and laypeople should view the *Samaṇasatti* issue with a wider perspective and avoid focusing only on the negative aspects of it. This will promote the use of *Samaṇasatti* in a positive manner, benefiting Buddhism and society as a whole, while minimizing adverse effects and problems (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

Conclusion

The above discussion deals with the advantages and disadvantages of *Samaṇasatti* and various comments/criticisms of the topic. It is difficult to come to any conclusive decision whether the advantages outweigh and disadvantages or vice versa. It is only fair to say that the advantages seem to be fewer, or at least no more than the disadvantages. Besides,

it is difficult to see how the problem should be completely solved by its abolition. Abolition is less likely to happen and has some major disadvantages. Perhaps, a more realistic approach is to improve the *Samañasatti* system by making it fairer and by promoting better understanding among the monks about the true objective of *Samañasatti* to ensure that they do not unduly get carried away by it.

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The Buddha's Intention to Establish the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha*

*Natchapapha Wasinghon**

Introduction

One of the significant factors that give rise to the conflict on *Bhikkhuni* ordination in present-day Thai society is the different beliefs and understanding about the Buddha's real intention to establish the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* in Buddhism, both among its opponents and advocates. Those who oppose to the ordination often maintain that the Buddha did not really intend to ordain *Bhikkhuni* in the first place. Their presence in the Buddha's lifetime was due to certain circumstances or external factors that eventually led the Buddha to permit their ordination. The advocates, on the other hand, generally insist that it was the Buddha's real intention to establish *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* in the religion in the same way as he did the *Bhikkhu* counterpart. Such divergence of views is not simply a matter of religious principles that legitimately demand proper investigation, but it also affects how the *Bhikkhuni* issue will be resolved. If society does not regard *Bhikkhuni* as something that the Buddha intended to establish, devout Buddhists may not want to see the *Bhikkhuni* ordination revived. Naturally, the intention of the founder carries a significant weight in considering whether or not *Bhikkhuni* ordination should exist. On the other hand, if society believes otherwise, the attitude towards the issue may be different. Therefore, for the sake of academic clarity and fairness to all parties concerned, it is

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important to arrive at a clear perspective on the matter, especially regarding the Buddha's intention.

1. Conflicts about the Buddha's intention to establish *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha*

For the sake of a better understanding, it is best to return to the time when *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* was first established and consider the source of the difference in viewpoints. According to *Bhikkhuni Khandhaka*, in the fifth year after the Buddha's Enlightenment during which he was in the midst of propagating his teachings, he returned to Kapilavastu to teach Dhamma to his royal father, King Suddhodana, and other relatives. As a result, his father attained Arahantship (*Arahattaphala*), and several of his relatives joined monkhood. After his father's death, Queen Mahapajapati visited the Buddha who was staying at Nigrodharam in the city of Kapilavastu. The queen was his aunt who nurtured him after his mother died seven days after giving birth to him. She expressed her wish to be ordained and live a religious life in the Buddha's school, saying "Please allow a woman to leave home and live a monastic life, practicing Dhamma-Vinaya as you the Buddha have proclaimed." The Buddha replied in the negative, saying "Don't, Gotami! Do not take delight in the path of a woman leaving home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) as I have proclaimed (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/402/313).

According to the Pali Canon or *Tipitaka*, she made her request three times, each time being refused by the Buddha. She was heart-broken and returned home. Later on, the Buddha travelled to the town of Vesali and stayed at a lodge in the Great Forest. There, he taught Dhamma to his relatives of Sakya and Koliya clans who subsequently joined the monkhood. On that occasion, Queen Mahapajapati and about 500 other female novices and apprentices who were wives of the Buddha's relatives and never gave up on their intention to be ordained, had their heads shaved and put on the same kind of robes as the Buddha. They followed him on foot to Vesali but did not dare to come near his residence. Ven. Ananda found the queen weeping at the entrance and made an enquiry. After he learnt about the cause, he went back to the Buddha and made a plea on her behalf three times. The Buddha replied in the negative just as he had done earlier to

Queen Mahapajapati, saying, “Don’t, Ananda! Do not take delight in the path of a woman leaving home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) as I have proclaimed” (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/402/315).

Ven. Ananda wondered whether the Buddha’s refusal of the request might be based on the assumption that women do not have the ability to attain Dhamma and ventured to ask, “Is it possible for a woman, who has left home to lead a religious life following Dhamma-Vinaya as proclaimed by the Buddha, to attain *Sotāpatti-phala*, *Sakadāgāmi-phala*, *Anāgāmi-phala*, and *Arahatta-phala* (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/402/315)? The Buddha replied, “Ananda, it is possible for a woman, who has left home to lead a religious life following Dhamma-Vinaya as proclaimed by the Buddha, to attain *Sotāpatti-phala*, *Sakadāgāmi-phala*, *Anāgāmi-phala*, and *Arahatta-phala* (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/402/316).

Having heard thus, Ven. Ananda requested once more the Buddha’s permission for Mahapajapati’s ordination, saying “If it is possible for a woman, who has left home to lead a religious life following Dhamma-Vinaya as proclaimed by the Buddha, to attain *Sotāpatti-phala*, *Sakadāgāmi-phala*, *Anāgāmi-phala*, and *Arahatta-phala*, would you permit Queen Mahapajapati, who is your aunt, has taken good care of you, fed you with milk, and after your mother died breastfed you, and who requested your permission for a woman leaving home to lead a religious life following Dhamma-Vinaya as proclaimed by the Buddha, to do so (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/402/316)? Finally, the Buddha agreed to Mahapajapati’s ordination. In *Tipitaka*, mention is made of the Buddha giving instructions for her to follow, which are known as *Garudhamma* 8:

1. A *Bhikkhuni* who has been ordained for a hundred years must prostrate before, rise to welcome, salute with joined palms, and do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

2. A *Bhikkhuni* must not spend the rainy season in retreat in a residence where there are no monks. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

3. A *Bhikkhuni* shall desire to do two things: every half month ask the monks about the Vinaya rules (Uposatha), and receive their advice. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

4. A *Bhikkhuni* who spends the rainy season in retreat shall invite both orders of the *Saṅgha* to advise her on three matters, namely what was seen, what was heard, and what was suspected. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

5. A *Bhikkhuni* who has broken any of the Garudhamma shall undergo penance before both orders of the *Saṅgha*. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

6. A *Bhikkhuni* shall seek opportunity for ordination under both orders of the *Saṅgha* for a female novice (*Sikkhamānā*) who has completed training of six Dhamma rules for two years. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

7. A *Bhikkhuni* must not scold or revile a *Bhikku* in any way. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life.

8. Starting today, a *Bhikkhuni* is forbidden from teaching a *Bhikku*, but not vice versa. This Dhamma the *Bhikkhuni* must uphold, respect, worship and not violate throughout her life (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/403/317).

Ven. Ananda brought the message to Mahapajapati who readily accepted the conditions, saying “Ven. Ananda, I accept the eight Garudhammas and will observe them the rest of my life, just like a young woman or young man who likes to dress well, who, after they have bathed and are given garlands of flowers, will carry them over their heads” (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/403/319).

According to the *Tipitaka*, after the ordination permission was given to Mahapajapati and other royal female family members, the Buddha discussed with Ven. Ananda about its possible effects on Buddhism in the

future and about the significance of the 8 *Garudhammarules*. The Buddha stated, “Ananda, if no woman leaves her home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) as I have proclaimed, *Brahmacariya* (holy life) will last for a long time and the true Dhamma will last for 1,000 years. Now that a woman has left home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) as I have proclaimed, *Brahmacariya* will not last for a long time and the true Dhamma will last for only 500 years. Ananda, *Dhammavinaya* which includes women who have left home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) will not last long just as a family that has many women but few men is vulnerable to attacks by bandits. Ananda, *Dhamma-vinaya* which includes women who have left home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) will not last long, just as wheat-rich fields that have pests descend upon them will have their life shortened. Ananda, *Dhamma-vinaya* which includes women who have left home to live the life of a monastic (*Pabbajita*) will not last long, just as sugar plantations that have aphids descend upon them in abundance will be short-lived. Ananda, I issued *Garudhamma* 8 for all *Bhikkhuni* who must not break them all their lives just like a person who sets up a barrier around a big pond to prevent water from flowing in (and out) (*Bhikkhuni* [in Thai] 7/403/320).

Those who oppose *Bhikkhuni* ordination, however, argue that it was not really the Buddha's intention. The existence of *Bhikkhuni* was merely a result of external circumstances or conditions. Evidently, such is the common understanding of Thai society, as voiced by one of the monks of the highest *Saṅgha* order, His Holiness Supreme Patriarch Krommaluang Chinaworasiriwat, that “One should truly consider the Buddha's intention from the beginning. Queen Mahapajapati had greatly assisted the Buddha in so many ways. When she came to ask for permission to be ordained, it would be easily granted, as it should, as a gesture of gratitude – as a personal favor. He must have known whether in the future *Bhikkhuni* or *Sāmanerī* could benefit or harm the religion. With great benevolent grace, he forbade her several times. However, he also saw that she could keep *Garudhamma* 8 the rest of her life and therefore gave his permission. Then, he told Ven. Ananda that, with *Bhikkhuni* in the *Dhamma-vinaya*, *Brahmacariya* will not last long. With no *Bhikkhuni* in ordination *Brahmacariya* will last for

a long time. This statement by the Buddha indicates that he did not favor the existence of *Bhikkhuni* or *Sāmanerī* (Referenced in Manop Nakkannian, 2002: 177-178).

This is in line with the view of Phra Phromwachirayan, a member of the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council, who gave an interview concerning this issue that “the Buddha did not wish to have women ordained. It was recorded in history that Queen Mahapajapati sought ordination three times and her request was declined even on the third occasion. It was not until Ven. Ananda asked whether women could not attain the Dhamma and the Buddha replied in the positive that Ven. Ananda pleaded on her behalf, citing all the care she has given him during his childhood after the his mother’s death. Only then did the Buddha agree for her to be ordained (Referenced in Jairat Udomsree, 2002: 76).

The above views show that a part of Thai society believes that *Bhikkhuni* was certainly not the Buddha’s intention. As such views come from the *Saṅgha* which is considered to be the true source or the center of knowledge on Buddhism, most people who are their followers naturally share the conviction. Thus, it may be said that the belief about *Bhikkhuni* not being the Buddha’s intended order is fairly widespread. Yet, in the midst of such belief, the advocates of the *Bhikkhuni* order may not agree. They maintain that the Buddha intended to establish *Bhikkhuni* just as he did with *Bhikkhu*. It is not quite correct, therefore, to hold an opposing view which is not only irrational but also goes against a number of facts. Chatsuman Kabilasing argues that “the fact that the Buddha hesitated to permit women to be ordained and live a life of a *Bhikkhuni* led to the interpretation that he did not really intend to have *Bhikkhuni* in the *Saṅgha*. He finally agreed to it because of Ven. Ananda’s plea. Such a conclusion is an affront to the Buddha’s intelligence. We must not forget that the Buddha was *Sammāsambuddha* (the Fully Enlightened One) who could see through everything. He was free from influence from other people’s thoughts. (He did not give his permission straight away because [the author]...) He had other factors to consider; once he realized that all the obstacles could be overcome, he gave his permission for women to be ordained” (Chatsuman Kabilasing, 1992: 43-44).

Similarly, Suwanna Satha-Anand argues that the fact that the Buddha did not give an immediate permission for female ordination or showed certain hesitation in doing so cannot be taken to mean that he was not willing or did not intend to have *Bhikkhuni* ordination. It is more likely that he was giving some thought on possible repercussions to the *Bhikkhuni* themselves and to Buddhism. On this topic, Suwanna said “What does it mean when after some hesitation the Buddha gave his permission? It could only mean that he considered ordination an important means to enlightenment; otherwise, he would not have come up with the ordination process. It can also be taken up further that if he viewed ordination as an important part of the practice of Dhamma, he would never want to deny this opportunity to half of the humanity. The hesitation occurred for cultural and social reasons as to how this might affect society and the family at large. At that time the propagation of Buddhism had only just begun for 5-6 years. It was important for him that this issue be socially accepted. Therefore, female ordination was a matter of considerable importance. In my opinion, the hesitation was caused by these circumstances (Referenced in Montree Suebduang, 2008: 327).

Evidently the divergence of views on the part of the opponents and advocates of *Bhikkhuni* ordination is a result of different interpretations of the event. It can be said that this is so because there is no clear statement by the Buddha in Buddhist texts, or in particular in the *Tipitaka*, whether or not this was his intention. The argument has been a result of interpretation mostly based on circumstantial evidence, as can be seen above. However, since this is a significant issue, it is important, therefore, to pursue the matter further.

2. The Buddha's intention to establish the order of Bhikkhuni

Since there is no clear-cut conclusion on the establishment of the *Bhikkhuni* order in the Buddha's time, in an attempt to clarify the issue, the author thinks it important to consider three issues that have given rise to doubts about the Buddha's intention. They are (1) the meaning and implication of the fact that the Buddha did not grant his permission readily; (2) the meaning and true implication of *Garudhamma* 8; and (3) the proof of the Buddha's intention regarding *Bhikkhuni*, the details of which are as follows:

2.1 The meaning and implication of the fact that the Buddha did not grant his permission readily

One of the most important reasons cited against the intended establishment of the *Bhikkhuni* order was that the Buddha did not grant his permission straight away when Queen Mahapajapati made her request. She requested three times, and each time it was refused. Only when Ven. Ananda requested on her behalf did the Buddha agree to let her and her followers be ordained. Based on this evidence, it is concluded that the Buddha did not intend to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order.

On the basis of the studies, the author thinks that the fact that the Buddha did not grant the permission readily does not provide sufficient grounds to conclude that he did not intend to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order. As a general principle, the time taken to make a decision on any matter is not a conclusive indicator of the decision maker's willingness. A decision is usually made in a certain context or under a set of circumstances. With regard to the establishment of the *Bhikkhuni* order, in the author's view, the most likely reason is that the Buddha wanted to assess how the society at large and his *Bhikkhu* circle would react to the event and to ensure proper recognition of the *Bhikkhuni*. One could even say that the permission was not granted immediately but was delayed. Many stories have been told to the effect that the delayed permission was a strategy employed to ensure the sustainability of the *Bhikkhuni* in the *Saṅgha* and in the society at the time. In a sense, it can be argued that the Buddha tried to lessen possible adverse effects on Buddhism in general. It is equally important to understand the social conditions in the Buddha's time, for it will help us better appreciate his act.

Buddhism came into existence in India in the dominantly Brahman context in which human differences were accentuated in the forms of castes (*Vanna*). People were classified into *Khattaya*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Vessa*, and *Sudda*. Each caste was predetermined by the Gods; therefore, one's status must be forever maintained and cannot be changed (Lecturers of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2007: 7).

There have been academic explanations that the caste system was designed to solve social problems by the Aryans who migrated into *Jambūdīpa* or present-day India then populated by the Dravidians. The caste system made it possible for the Aryans to legitimately establish themselves as superior. At the same time, it was used as a tool to keep their pure blood or to prevent cross-breeding with other ethnic groups. To ensure strict observance, it was referred to as being designed by God. Whether this was real or merely a rhetorical discourse created by the Aryans for their own specific purposes, the caste system has been practiced from the Brahman time to the present day. Buddhism came into being amidst such beliefs and was bound to be influenced by them to a greater or lesser extent. The belief in the caste system must have had some bearing on the issue of *Bhikkhuni* as well as on the status of women. In the spirit in which humans were considered different and were classified into castes, gender was another determinant that society had used to differentiate people. In other words, under the caste system, women of every caste were clearly inferior to men.

Even before the Buddha's time, back in the early Vedic period (800-300 years before the Buddhist Era), women's status was not so different from that of men (compared to later times). Women enjoyed a number of rights, including the right to study the Vedas. There was a record that some Vedic verses were composed by women. For example, *Rig Veda* 5.28 was composed by Visvara, *Rig, Veda* 1.179 by Lopamudra, *Rig Veda* 10.39-40 by Gosha, and 8.80.1-7 by Apala (referenced in Suwimon Prakopwaithayakit, 1978: 8-9). Even in the late Vedic period there were a number of distinguished female sages, e.g. Maitreyi, wife of Yajnavalkya, who was a "Brahamavadini" (referenced in Watsana Ai-rarat, 1979: 2). That women could compose hymns or played the role of a sage indicates that they were not barred from education. Generally speaking, education provided a basis for other opportunities. Nevertheless, this might not entirely guarantee or prove the status of women in those days, as a person's status in society depended on a complex combination of conditions. Be that as it may, at least it could be said that the status of women in that period was not so low compared to later times.

Later in the early Brahmanic period (300-100 years before the Buddhist Era), women were subjected to a much lower status. Such decline could be linked to the phenomenon of the popularity of having male offspring and the emphasis on qualities that desirable women should have. This was the period in which the Brahmans exerted great social influence. Whatever they believed or advised was adopted and followed. They were believed to have the power to communicate with gods. With regard to the notion of having male offspring, the *Taittiriya Samhita* mention is made of the three kinds of debt that a person is required to pay off: (1) debt to the rishi to be paid off by being pure and studying the Vedas, (2) debt to the gods to be paid off by performing ceremonious rites, and (3) debt to the ancestors to be paid off by producing a son (referenced in Maejee Kritsana Raksachom, 2007: 16). Additional explanations were given that if a family did not have a son, the father would go to *Putta* Hell when he passes away. Having a son, then, brought great luck, preventing the father from going to Hell. A son also played an important role in performing religious rituals for the souls of his parents upon their deaths to go to Heaven. In the family system at that time, the man was the nexus or head of the family. He owned everything in the family. Family names and heritages followed the male lineage. The point is that a family could equally produce male and female offspring. In such a belief system, having a daughter would be considered bad luck. In the Brahmanic scripture, it was clearly mentioned that “to have no son is such a bad luck. A woman who cannot bear a son is a disaster” (referenced in Maejee Kritsana Raksachom, 2007: 16). The disaster brought about by a woman both as a child-bearer and as the born originated from such a belief.

A daughter, though unexpected, once born was then expected by society to become something and perform certain tasks. Such expectations were made on the assumption that she was born with congenital faults. She was thus expected to exist for other people who were endowed with greater human dignity and worth, i.e. men. From birth to death, her function was to serve men at every stage of life. The only way she could improve her status was to get married and produce a son. The society at the time also demanded that a woman about to enter wedlock be a virgin. Virginity, it

was argued, would lead to the success and purity of the ceremonies for her husband and future children. To ensure this eventuality, the practice and the tradition were started whereby women must get married at a very young age. This practice is clearly stated in *Mānava-Dhammasattha* that a 30-year-old man may marry a 12-year-old girl that he loves, while a man of 24 may marry his beloved girl of 8. If a man, who is unmarried, cannot perform his religious duties, he may marry at once. (Referenced in Preecha Changkhwanyuen, 1999: 23-31[29])

As a consequence, women in that period lacked educational opportunity and knowledge. Many rights were denied to them. The quality of life plunged utterly; they became helpless and had to depend on men for practically every affair. A woman was the property of her owner, not a person with her own will. Chatsuman Kabilasing talked about this with reference to *Manu-Dhammasattha* or the Law of Manu (*Manava-Dhammasattha*), “When young, women were under parental care; when married, they were under their husbands’ care; and when old, they were under their children’s care” (Chatsuman Kabilasing, 1992: 42). As a result of the lack of educational opportunity, they were unable to escape the whirlpool in which they found themselves inferior in every aspect of life, whether personally, socially, or economically. Suwimon Prakopwaithayakit gives an interesting account of the effect of the lack of educational opportunity on women at that time as follows: “The deprivation of educational opportunity marks the most important point that saw women blindly subjected to social rules without any objection as well as losing all the inheritance rights. This made their life poorer and poorer” (Suwimon Prakopwaithayakit, 1978: 22-29).

Of course, marriage could elevate women’s status to a certain extent, as women were still desirable and existed for the benefit of others. However, in a society in which being male was something to be desired, even when a woman was useful to a man, she was supposed to seek out her husband and was responsible for the dowry. Once married, she had to move to his house, be a good wife, produce sons and diligently wait on him and his parents. The elevated status simply means she was no longer single – a socially undesirable existence. If she could produce a male offspring, she was considered lucky, because then she could escape being abandoned. A

man had a legitimate right to abandon a childless wife. Marriage in no way could guarantee her independence or equality. No matter whatever status she occupied, the society expected her to be inferior to a man.

The lack of education not only took away a woman's ability to depend on herself or determine her own life but also gave rise to several negative aspects about her identity. Her fate became increasingly worse. For example, mention was made in the scriptures in this period that "women, *Sudda*, dogs and crows are falsehoods, sins, and darkness. They cannot control their own minds or take care of their own properties..." (Suwimon Prakopwaithayakit, 1978: 22-23) and "by nature women do not have true love for any man and are ready to cheat on their husbands who take good care of them. Women take pleasure in jewelry, are lustful, resentful, fraudulent, and evil." (Referenced in Chatsuman Kabilasing, 1999: 14-22[22]).

Although Buddhism is known for its teachings that go against Brahmanism in many ways, it came into being in the midst of the Brahman context and was likely to bear some Brahman influence. Buddhists at that time also found themselves in the same situation. For instance, King Pasendikosala who converted from Brahmanism to Buddhism favored having a son over a daughter. Once, the king learnt that Queen Mallikadevi bore a daughter but felt no joy. At the time he was conversing with the Buddha who knew what happened and comforted him by pointing out the value of women. Although what the Buddha said was not too dissimilar from the Brahman concept, it was given from a positive perspective very different from the social belief popularly held at the time. He said to King Pasendikosala thus, "...In truth some girls can be better-off. You had better nurture your child. There are women who are intelligent and moral, who take good care of their husbands' parents and god, and who are loyal to their husbands. Men born from such women will naturally be brave and great. The sons of such good wives can rule the country (*Samyuttanikāya Sagāthavagga* [Thai] 15/127/150).

The life history of Ven. Ilidāsī-therī before she became *Bhikkhuni* is another piece of evidence that clearly reflects the status of women under the Brahman culture. The story was told in the *Therī* Hymn that originally

she was the daughter of a millionaire in the city of Ujjennī. She married three times before her ordination. The first marriage was arranged by her father to an equally rich young man who later divorced her. Her father made the second arrangement for her to marry a man from the Brahman caste; again the marriage did not last. The third time, she was married to a beggar who subsequently annulled the marriage. More importantly here, this shows how much power the father wielded over the life of the daughter. He made her marry three times. Another point is that there was no life for a divorced woman. To be born in a rich family did not guarantee an independent life. She had to marry even a beggar. Ilidāsī's description of how she lived with each husband gave a clear picture of the status of women at the time. For example, "I must pay respect to my husbands' parents every morning and night. I prostrated myself at their feet as I was taught. When I met their sisters or brothers, elder or younger, even for the first time, I had to show them that I was afraid. I gave them my seat, prepared rice, water, and snacks for them, brought them food and drink myself, and provided them with appropriate gifts. I had to get up at the appropriate time, enter my husband's abode, wash my hands and feet near the entrance, put my hands together to show him my respect, prepare a comb, facial powder, eye drops, and mirror for him. I dressed him as a servant was supposed to do, cooked, washed all the utensils, took care of him just as a mother would look after her only child, did all the duties required of me, left all the pride behind, worked diligently, and did not stay idle" (*Khuddakanikāya Therī Gāthā* [Thai] 26/402-431/622-626).

Thus, women's status and role in the society during the Buddha's time were clearly inferior and subordinate to men's. The Buddha did not grant permission to women's request for ordination easily or immediately, not because he did not want to have *Bhikkhuni*; it would go against the basic tenets of Buddhist teachings in many ways, which will be discussed later. It is more likely that he was considering a number of social determinants that were not favorable to the presence of *Bhikkhuni* who would enjoy the same status or dignity as their male counterparts. In terms of social psychology, starting a new value or concept that goes against social conventions is most likely to face stiff opposition. In a society in which women were held inferior

to men, *Bhikkhuni* ordination would be tantamount to promoting the status of women to equal that of men. In such a situation, the Buddha's assessment might be that a prompt permission would constitute an abrupt break with social norms. The delayed permission could be considered a strategy the Buddha employed to reduce social displeasure to a certain degree.

2.2 Meaning and implication of *Garudhamma* 8

Not only did a seemingly reluctant permission for *Bhikkhuni* ordination cause uncertainty as to the Buddha's intention, but *Garudhamma* 8 which the Buddha required Queen Mahapajapati and other *Bhikkhuni* to strictly observe is also another contentious issue. The contents of the eight rules could be interpreted as discriminatory against women. To state even further, the *Garudhamma* rules have been cited as an instrument designed to do away with the *Bhikkhuni* order altogether. They could become conditions too oppressive for women to continue a life of *Bhikkhuni*. The Buddha's agreement to have women ordained with such severe prejudiced conditions could imply his lack of real intention. The presence of the *Bhikkhuni* order would last for a period of time and would be bound to disappear with the progress of time. In other words, there was no real intention on the part of the Buddha to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order. Is such an allegation substantiated? In this regard, it may be appropriate to look at the aforementioned *Garudhamma* 8.

After careful studies, the author finds that the above allegation or assumption is valid to a certain extent, but to conclude that the Buddha had no real intention to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order and resorted to the *Garudhamma* rules to do away with *Bhikkhuni* is not entirely justified. The contents of *Garudhamma* 8 might indicate that *Bhikkhuni* were put in a position very subordinate to and dependent on the *Bhikkhu* counterpart even though both orders lived a similar monastic life. *Garudhamma* rules no. 2-6 reflect an inherent discrepancy of power structure. However, if one considers the issue in the socio-cultural context of the time, one may get a better understanding. The creation of the *Garudhamma* rules was designed to accommodate the socio-cultural values of the time and cause as little social friction as possible without adverse effects on Buddhism. In another perspective, *Garudhamma* rules no. 2-6 were intended to facilitate

the atmosphere in which *Bhikkhuni* and *Bhikkhu* could lend each other a helping hand. The *Bhikkhu* might appear to hold greater power, but this was simply because they were there first and therefore more experienced to provide advice to the *Bhikkhuni* just as elder brothers would do to younger sisters. In addition, the greater power enjoyed by the *Bhikkhu* in the rules was mandated under the Buddhist framework of wisdom which did not allow the *Bhikkhu* to exercise their power indiscriminately.

Yet, if one considers the issue objectively, despite the intended inter-dependent nature of *Garudhamma* no. 2-6, some rules are clearly discriminatory, especially Rule No. 1 (a *Bhikkhuni* must show her respect to a *Bhikkhu* first), Rule No. 7 (a *Bhikkhuni* must not scold or revile a *Bhikkhu* in any way), and Rule No. 8 (a *Bhikkhuni* is forbidden to teach a *Bhikkhu*), for they apply only unilaterally and put the *Bhikkhu* in a higher position. However, on closer perusal, Rules no. 7 and 8, despite their discriminatory content, relate to unimportant subjects. A *Bhikkhuni* must not scold or revile a *Bhikkhu*. A person who leads a monastic life is not supposed to commit such inappropriate acts as scolding. A *Bhikkhuni* is forbidden to teach a *Bhikkhu*. This could be considered a task beyond the *Bhikkhuni*'s call of duty. The *Bhikkhu* were in bigger numbers and were there before the *Bhikkhuni*. On the other hand, while the *Bhikkhu* were able to teach the *Bhikkhuni*, the Buddha laid down a number of conditions for them. To ensure proper teaching, a *Bhikkhu* must possess the following qualities:

1. He is virtuous, restrained in accordance with the fundamental rules of the Order (*Pāṭimokkha*), consummate in his behavior and sphere of activity, seeing danger in the slightest faults, observing and studying disciplinary rules.

2. He is a man of great learning, retaining and storing what he has learnt. He has absorbed whatever teachings are admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. He has proclaimed a holy life complete in meaning and expression, perfect and pure, able to retain, express, discuss what he has learnt, and penetrate his views.

3. He is expert in *Pāṭimokkha* of both Orders, able to explain accurately, competently, and properly both in his discourse and in subsidiary points.

4. He speaks well and with a good voice.

5. He is liked by most *Bhikkhuni*.

6. He is able to teach *Bhikkhuni*.

7. He has never violated the *Garudhamma* rules practiced by the women who wear robes in ordination and dedicate their lives to the Buddha.

8. He has been in the monkhood for 20 or more years.

O, *Bhikkhu*, I give permission to a monk endowed with such 8 qualities to teach *Bhikkhuni*.

(*Mahāvibhaṅga*, [Thai] 2/145/321)

However, it is difficult to understand how *Garudhamma* no. 1 (a *Bhikkhuni* must show her respect to a *Bhikkhu* first) is not discriminatory, as paying respect is a tool or sign that society uses as an important means to show the level or status of an individual. To clarify this point further, the author will give a detailed explanation in the following.

Garudhamma Rule no. 1 says that a *Bhikkhuni* must show her respect to a *Bhikkhu* first without regard to the years in monkhood he has spent. In the conceptual framework in which paying respect to someone is an acknowledgment of that person's ethical value, being the person to pay respect first implies his/her lower status. So, the rule that requires a *Bhikkhuni* to pay respect to a *Bhikkhu* first is equivalent to the notion that the former has a lower ethical value than the latter. Such consideration is not appropriate, for it does not correspond to the general rule of the practice of paying respect. It seems highly unlikely that being a *Bhikkhu* or a male monastic will always constitute his superiority to a *Bhikkhuni* or female monastic. Gender is not a condition of a person's ethics, nor is any external form of humanity an indicator of the ethical level. However, to make possible a practice of paying respect to each other without recourse to ethical proof or certification before such act, society in general has come up with some reasonable practical criteria that can be related to ethical level of the person concerned. Such criteria include seniority, qualifications, or birth status. In other words, an older person is supposed to have more experience or have accumulated more virtues than a younger one. A person with more

qualifications is supposed to have greater wisdom or more knowledge than a less qualified individual. A person born of a higher status is supposed to come from a family that has made more social contributions than that of a lower status. Yet, it is not possible to explain how a *Bhikkhu* is ethically superior to a *Bhikkhuni*, because gender by itself is only a physical indication of what a person can do in his/her life, e.g. a woman can give birth to a child, while a man cannot. Gender, therefore, is not an ethical reason in itself. To require a *Bhikkhuni* to pay homage or respect to *Bhikkhu* first, in essence, is unreasonable with regard to the general principles of respect paying.

In general, it is believed that a pure person will not do something impure. The Buddha is a pure Great Teacher. Is it possible that he established such impure or unjust things as the sexually oppressive *Garudhamma* Rule no.1? In the *Tipitaka* there is evidence that the Buddha established the eight *Garudhamma* rules, including Rule no. 1. He told Ven. Ananda to impart the message to Queen Mahapajapati about his permission for her ordination on the *Garudhamma* conditionality, saying “Ananda, if Queen Mahapajapati accepts the eight *Garudhamma* rules, the acceptance will constitute her ordination...” (*Bhikkhuni vibhaṅga*, (Thai) 7/503/316).

Besides, there is evidence that Queen Mahapajapati requested that *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni* pay respect to each other in accordance with the number of monastic years they spent, but the Buddha declined. About this issue, he said to Ven. Ananda: “Ananda, I am in no position, nor is this an opportunity, to permit paying homage, rising to greet, or giving due respect to women. Ananda, even those who follow other religions do not pay homage, rise to greet, or give due respect to women. So, why should I permit doing so (*Bhikkhuni vibhaṅga*, (Thai) 7/505/322)?

At the same time, the Buddha said further that any *Bhikkhu* who violated the instructions would be considered as having committed an ecclesiastical offence, thus: “O, *Bhikkhu*, a *Bhikkhu* shall not pay homage, rise to greet, or pay due respect to women. Anyone who does so commits an ecclesiastical offence (*Bhikkhuni vibhaṅga*, [Thai] 7/505/322).

The above evidence shows that the Buddha evidently set the *Garudhamma* rules. In general, when a person sets something prejudicial

he is said to have a prejudiced view. Can this principle be applied to the Buddha? In the author's view, the matter cannot be concluded in that simple manner. If one considers the constraints that the Buddha came up against in his time, one will understand why he decided that way. In the case of *Garudhamma* Rule no. 1, the author believes that it was established not on the basis of Dhamma but on the basis of cultural consideration. Paying respect has something directly to do with cultural practice. The issue at hand has an especially high social implication at stake. Respect paying is part of a way of life. An expression made by a person is a statement for or against the social norm. It is a received fact that culture mirrors the belief of a society at large. If one wants to do something acceptable to most people, one has to go along with them. Anything that goes against the social norms is most likely to face opposition. In the Buddha's time, society put men above women. People were accustomed to seeing women pay respect to men. If the Buddha had decreed the respect paying rule for *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni* in a way that was different from the social norms, it would not have produced a positive effect on the acceptance of *Bhikkhu* or Buddhism as a whole.

From the social psychological perspective, the rules about *Bhikkhuni* paying respect to *Bhikkhu* first could be interpreted as a social confirmation or a continuation of the low status of women. However, if one puts the matter in the social context of the time and in the context of the newly established Buddhism, one can see that women ecclesiastics were constrained by a great number of rules. The practice of paying respect between male and female ecclesiastics deeply touched the social and psychological chords. The rule about *Bhikkhuni* paying respect to *Bhikkhu* first did not truly reflect the world view of Buddhism. The rule, apparently influenced by the Brahman culture, should be viewed as the best possible option available then. The fact that the Buddha established the female monastic order carrying the same dignity as the male counterpart must have been a rather strange phenomenon at the time. More importantly, the phenomenon was something of a challenge to or a defiance of the belief in women's status. Certain rules set for female ecclesiastics were designed to comply with some existing beliefs, like that about *Bhikkhuni* paying respect

to *Bhikkhu* first. This could be considered a compromise or even a willingness to retreat one step. In a sense, *Bhikkhuni* ordination was a cultural progress or revolution. Therefore, *Garudhamma* Rule no. 1 requiring *Bhikkhuni* to pay respect to *Bhikkhu* first could be seen as principally intended to win social acceptance, even though its essence might go somewhat against the Buddhist principles. In Buddhism, there are no teachings that say that men and women are different in essence or by nature. The religion believes in Kamma or action, not gender. So, the rule does not reflect superiority on any party's status or value; rather, it is a way of mutual dependence in the social context of the time. It can be said, therefore, that the Buddha did not establish the rule out of prejudice – rather, he did so with a view to ensuring the existence and continuation of *Bhikkhuni* in a culturally-bound society. If the Buddha intended to see *Bhikkhuni* continued, it is a clear proof that *Bhikkhuni* was his intention.

If one considers the contents of *Garudhamma* on the basis of pure principles, especially on human nature as proclaimed by Buddhism, without taking into account the socio-cultural context of the Buddha's time, the eight *Garudhamma* rules are not fair to women. If humanity was equal, the rules should not suggest otherwise. The Buddha should not be held accountable for such injustice. It was rather the people in those times that lacked wisdom to create a just society. The Buddha came into being in such a limited world. He had to devise ways and means that would enable his disciples and religion to survive and continue. Making compromises by accommodating certain socio-cultural values was inevitable. The eight *Garudhamma* rules were a product of the circumstances. In such a case, they should not be raised as evidence that women were inferior to men. What is more important is the Buddha's intention to ensure the existence of *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* and its continuation in a very difficult situation during his time.

2.3 Proof of the Buddha's intention to establish the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha*

Based on the studies undertaken, the author finds that there are a number of arguments to prove the Buddha's intention to establish the

Bhikkhuni Saṅgha in his time. First, the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* is something that always accompanies the Buddha, because it is a custom or nature of every Buddha, past, present, or future, to have four assemblies of Buddhists (*Buddhaparisā*): *Bhikkhu*, *Bhikkhuni*, *Upāsaka* (male lay Buddhists), and *Upāsikā* (female followers). In other words, when there is a Buddha, there are four assemblies of Buddhists. As *Bhikkhuni* are part of *Buddhaparisā*, an important element in Buddhist ecclesiastical orders, they are always with the Buddha. When such is the case, it is reasonable to conclude that it was the Buddha's intention to establish the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* in his religion. As *Bhikkhuni* are part of every Buddha's appearance, and *Samaṇa* Gotama is a Buddha, it is natural that they must accompany him. In other words, the current Buddha wanted to establish the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha* in his religion just as other Buddhas had done before him. This argument can be found in *Buddhavaṃsa* Scripture in the *Tipitaka*. The scripture mentions *Bhikkhuni*, especially two distinguished female disciples (*Aggasāvikā*), for each Buddha as follows:

Dīpaṃkara Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Nandā-therī and Ven. Sunandā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/25/595). Koṇḍañña Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Tissā-therī and Ven. Upatissā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/31/600). Maṃkara Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Sīravā-therī and Ven. Asokā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/24/606). Sumana Buddha had Ven. Soṇā-therī and Ven. Upasoṇā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/27/611). Revata Buddha had Ven. Bhaddā-therī and Ven. Subhaddā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/22/617). Sobhita Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Nakulā-therī and Ven. Sujādā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/22/622). Anomadassī Buddha had Ven. Sundarā-therī and Ven. Sumanā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/23/627). Paduma Buddha had Ven. Rādhā-therī and Ven. Surādhā-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/22/632). Nārada Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Uttarā-therī and Ven. Phaggunī-therī as *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/24/638). Padumuttara Buddha had Ven. Amitā-therī and Ven. Asamā-

therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/25/644). Sumedha Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Rāmā-therī and Ven. Surāmā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/24/649). Sujāta Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Nāgā-therī and Ven. Nāgasamānā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/26/654). Piyadassī Buddha had Ven. Sujātā-therī and Ven. Dhammādinna-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/21/659). Atthadassī Buddha had Ven. Dhammā-therī and Ven. Sudhammā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/20/664). Dhammadassī Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Khemā-therī and Ven. Saccaṇāmā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/19/669). Siddhattha Buddha had Ven. Sīvalā-therī and Ven. Surāmā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/19/674). Tissa Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Phusā-therī and Ven. Sudattā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/22/679). Pussa Buddha had Ven. Cālā-therī and Ven. Upacālā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/20/684). Vipassī Buddha had Ven. Candā-therī and Ven. Candamittā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/30/689). Sikhī Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Sakhilā-therī and Ven. Padumā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/21/694). Vessabhū Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Rāmā-therī and Ven. Samālā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/21/705). Kukakusandha Buddha was accompanied by Ven. Sāmā-therī and Ven. Campānāmā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/21/705). Konāgamana Buddha had Ven. Samuddā-therī and Ven. Uttarā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/23/710). Kassapa Buddha had Ven. Anulā-therī and Ven. Uruvelā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/39/716), and the current Buddha, Gotama Buddha, had Ven. Khemā-therī and Ven. Upalavannā-therīas *Aggasāvikā* (*Khuddakanikāya Buddhavaṃsa* [Thai] 33/18/720).

The above examples could be used to testify that *Bhikkhuni* have existed alongside Buddhism all along. Thus, it is natural to infer that the Buddha intended to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order in the same tradition as

all the Buddhas. If the current Gotama Buddha had no intention to do so, he would be different from the other Buddhas. This would be against all reasons and against the custom or nature of the Buddhas. Women constitute about half of humanity. In the author's view, it is rather hard to imagine that the current Gotama Buddha would reject them. It is fair to say, therefore, that the belief that the Buddha had no intention to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order goes against the historical information concerning the Buddhas and clearly against the Buddhas' character or nature with regard to compassion for all humanity without discrimination.

Another more recent piece of evidence in favor of the Buddha's intention regarding *Bhikkhunis* concerned the current Buddha. Soon after his Enlightenment, Māra invited the Buddha to enter into Nibbāna. This was supposedly the best time for the Buddha to do. It was Māra's view that the Buddha had achieved what he had set out to do, i.e. to attain Enlightenment. The Buddha turned down the invitation, for his task was not simply to attain Enlightenment and overcome all suffering for himself. He wanted to bring enlightenment to the four *Buddhāparisā* as well. On the subject of *Buddhāparisā* in particular, he said to Māra thus: "Māra, the sinful one, I will not go into Nibbāna for now as long as my female disciples are not yet truly wise, well-advised, courageous, learned, and equipped with Dhamma, as long as they have not practiced and followed Dhamma as is due to them, proper to them, as long as they study with their teachers but cannot promptly tell, show, set, determine, reveal, or classify what they learn, as long as they are still unable to explain Dhamma and every happening in a proper and legitimate manner" (*Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga* [Thai] 10/168/114).

The Buddha told Māra thus even before any *Bhikkhuni* was created. This means that the Buddha knew in advance that there would be *Bhikkhuni*. Analyzing the speech further, one can clearly see that he planned to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order with a list of action plans to strengthen them. It is rather impossible to interpret this as anything other than the Buddha's intention to see the order established. If there was a plan to have the *Bhikkhuni* order, it means that *Bhikkhuni* was something he had in mind.

It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that he intended to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order. This is further reinforced when Māra later returned to remind him of his statement or promise about entering into Nibbāna now that he had fulfilled all the conditions. Here Māra raised the issue of *Bhikkhuni* as the ultimate condition, and the Buddha complied and decided to leave the world for Nibbāna three months from then. This is what Māra said to the Buddha: “O the Enlightened One, now that the *Bhikkhuni* who are your *Sāvika* are truly wise, well-advised, courageous, learned, and equipped with Dhamma, and they have practiced and followed Dhamma as is due to them, proper to them, and they have studied with their teachers and can promptly tell, show, set, determine, reveal, or classify what they learn, and they are now able to explain Dhamma and every happening in a proper and legitimate manner, O, the Blessed One, please enter into Nibbāna now. This is the time for you to do so” (*Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga* [Thai] 10/168/114).

Not only does the Buddha's statement about the conditions for Nibbāna to Māra have significant implications on his intention to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order, but it also reflects the importance of *Bhikkhuni* to him. The Buddha must have attached great importance to *Bhikkhuni*. He mentioned what he planned to do with them, treating it as a critical agenda or mission on the basis of which to decide whether to continue to live or enter into Nibbāna. How much importance should be placed on this fact is something Buddhists should ponder upon, as well as decide why the Buddha had done so, and how, as his disciples, they should react.

The last evidence concerning the Buddha's intention about *Bhikkhuni* is related to the Buddhist principles. As a whole, it is evident that *Bhikkhuni* is something that the Buddha had in mind and certainly wanted to establish. It is well known that the aim of Buddhism is to liberate humanity from suffering. According to the Buddhist teaching, in order to escape from suffering, a person needs to undergo self-training or self-development to the required level. Leading a monastic life is a mode of being that the Buddha created as a condition for such a person to undergo training. Although Buddhism treats everyone, lay and cleric, as capable of attaining the highest aim of Nibbāna, the monastic life constitutes a

condition more favorable for reaching the objective than does the lay life. The *Tipitika* clearly regards the monastic life as being of greater value than a lay one: “Living a lay life is uncomfortable. It is a path full of dusts. A monastic life provides a clear path. It is not easy for a lay person to live a virtuous life as pure as a polished conch” (*Majjhimanikāya Uparipañāsaga*, [Thai] 14/13/19). It comes to reason, therefore, that the Buddha wanted humanity, male and female, to lead a monastic life as *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni*, and do away with all the suffering. That is the aim or mission of Buddhism.

3. Conclusion

The Buddha’s intention with regard to the *Bhikkhuni* Saṅgha is an important issue not only as a part of the history of Buddhism but also as a decisive factor for or against the attempt to revive *Bhikkhuni* ordination in the Thai society. It is, therefore, important to come to a proper understanding. After careful studies, the author thinks it only reasonable to conclude that the Buddha intended to establish the *Bhikkhuni* Saṅgha in Buddhism. In other words, the establishment of the *Bhikkhuni* order was due to no other factor than the Buddha’s intention to do so. The act of creating the order by the Buddha himself was proof enough of the creator’s intention. The omniscient (*Subhāṇṇū*) and free nature of the Buddha put him above any pressure imposed on him. The notion that the *Bhikkhuni* order was created out of other conditions than his intention is untenable in the face of important evidences. First, the *Bhikkhuni* Saṅgha has always accompanied the Buddha, i.e. in Buddhism, it is the custom and nature of every Buddha to have *Bhikkhuni* Saṅgha. It is, thus, reasonable to conclude that the current Buddha also had the intention to establish the order. Second, there was a statement made by the Buddha to Māra about not entering into Nibbāna when no *Bhikkhuni* had been established yet. He told Māra that he could not go into Nibbāna until *Bhikkhuni* were sufficiently strong. This constitutes evidence that the presence of *Bhikkhuni* was in his mind and that he planned to eventually establish the order in Buddhism. Finally, the aims of Buddhism are to free humanity from all suffering and to provide a way of life for that purpose through a monastic or virtuous life. This reinforces the argument for the existence of *Bhikkhuni* rather than against

it. The fact that the Buddha did not permit *Bhikkhuni* ordination when it was first requested, or set *Garudhamma* 8 as conditions, in no way implies that he did not intend to establish the *Bhikkhuni* order, but rather because he considered the possibility and scenario of it being accepted and its effect on Buddhism. The issue was primarily related to the social context at the time.

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Mae Chi (Buddhist Nuns): Problems and Opportunities of Access to Higher Education Organized by Thai Sangkha¹

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1. Preamble

Over the last ten years or so, opportunities for higher education have become more available to female ascetics. In 1999, Mahapajapati Buddhist College, in cooperation with Mahamakut Buddhist University, launched a bachelor's degree program for Buddhist nuns. It is the first Buddhist College created primarily for Buddhist nuns and women in general.² In addition, Ven. Mae Chi Sansanee Sthirasuta, the founder of Sathira

¹ The research team wishes to thank Ven. Phrakru Palat Suvadhanavajiragun (Sawai JotiKo), former director of the Buddhist Institute (2011), and Ven. Phramaha Suthit Abhakaro, Director of the Buddhist Institute for the research grant and support. It is thankful to the Bikkhu and *Mae Chi* for making it possible for the team to interview Dr. Martin Seeger. Thanks also go to the Research Committee of the Association of Southeast Asian Studies in the United Kingdom (ASEASUK) for funding this research. The team also wishes to record its appreciation to Justin McDaniel for the kind advice as well as to Associate Professor Phra Sigambhirayarn (Somjin Sammapañño), Assistant Professor Dr. Prasudhidhamanuvatra (Thiap Siriñano), Professor Dr. Watchara Ngamchitharoen for kindly reading the work and offering suggestions for improvement.

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² *Mae Chi* Khunying Kanitha Wichiancharoen and the Foundation of Thai Nun Institutions under Her Majesty the Queen's Royal Patronage, in conjunction with the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women, initiated the project under the patronage of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara the Supreme Patriarch. Mahapajapati Buddhist College is a division of Mahamakut Buddhist University.

Thammasathan, set up a Master's Degree program in cooperation with Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University. Known as Savikasikkalai, the program was established in 2008 (Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University Announcement, 2008). As a matter of fact, education for Buddhist nuns has been available since 1990, albeit only at primary and secondary education levels. It was organized by Dhamma Chariniwiththaya School (School for Buddhist Nuns), a branch of the Thai Nun Institutions Group, at Paktho District, Ratchaburi Province, and taught by a group of nuns from the Institutions. The subjects taught included general education at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels under the non-formal education scheme, as well as Pariyatti, Dhamma, and Pali. The program was offered gratis to ordained young women as well as those who were not ordained but vowed to observe the *Sīla*.³ Another Mae Chi center at Sala Santisuk, Nakhon Chaisi District, Nakhon Pathom Province, has also opened a Pali education program to Buddhist nuns since 1978. In⁴ the meantime, the social image of the Buddhist nuns has improved. Ven. Phra Phaisan Wisalo provided an interesting insight:

In all likelihood, another group of women living in the monastery is *Mae Chinuns* who enjoy a greater role and status, partly because those who join the order come from the educated middle-class background and partly because the nuns themselves have been striving for greater self-development. This can be seen, for instance, in the establishment of self-regulating bodies (Thai Nun Institutions) and various activities to educate and train nuns in the learning of the Scriptures and practice of Dhamma (Mahapajapati Buddhist College). Undoubtedly, the success of the *Mae Chi* movement is due in greater part to the support of middle-class laywomen

³ *Mae Chi* Anamphai Bhasakchai, Director of Dhamma Chariniwiththaya School, Paktho District, Ratchaburi Province, 28 May 2012, interview.

⁴ *Mae Chi* Sunantha Rianglaem, *Mae Chi* center at Sala Santisuk, Nakhon Chaisi District, Nakhon Pathom Province; Pali ix, doctoral candidate, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 15 June 2012, interview.

whose attitude toward *Mae Chi* has become increasingly positive. (Phra Phaisan Wisalo, B.E. 2556 [2013]:191)

Furthermore, there was another phenomenon which came about as a result of the National Education Act, B.E. 2542 (1999) and Amendment (No. 2), B.E. 2544 (2001) by which Thai Buddhist nuns henceforth have the right to higher education at state universities from the first degree to the doctoral level. For the bachelor's degree programs offered by conventional universities, this may involve some kind of entrance competitive examination. For open universities, they can apply directly. Nevertheless, some subjects are not open to ascetic persons. Assistant Professor Channarong Boonnoon explained that: "Some subjects involve activities inappropriate to ascetic people."⁵ In addition, state universities offer special programs (weekends and evenings) in which *Mae Chi* could enroll. Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University has launched master's degree and doctoral programs for laypersons and *Mae Chi* since 1999. One year later, in 2000, it started an undergraduate program in Buddhism (*Abhidhamma*) for *Mae Chi* and laypersons.⁶ Meanwhile, Mahamakutrajavidyalaya University, the other Buddhist University, has provided the opportunity for Buddhist nuns to be enrolled in the bachelor's degree program since 1999, in the master's degree programs since 2002, and in the doctoral program since 2006.⁷ This indicates that there has been considerable change in higher education that allows greater access to *Mae Chi*. Some academics, both Thai and Western, have conducted studies on this topic; however, no in-depth study has been made on higher education for *Mae Chi* provided by the two Buddhist universities. Admittedly, the increased opportunities to *Mae Chi* will account for some significant changes, and therefore they warrant more serious studies by the academic world.

⁵ Assistant Professor Channarong Boonnoon, Chair, Department of Philosophy, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, 25 October 2012, interview.

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⁷ Graduate School, Mahamakut Buddhist University, Phutthamonthon District, Nakhon Pathom Province.

In 2007, Linberg Falk, an anthropologist, wrote about *Mae Chi* in a book on Buddhist female ascetics (Linberg Falk, Monica, 2007) that they were “not entitled to study at the Bachelor’s degree level at the two Buddhist universities in Thailand,” and that “there are few opportunities for them to attain higher education.”⁸ In the same work, she mentioned that the Buddhist universities tended to offer education for selected individuals, citing Mahamakutrajavidyalaya University as a case in point that allowed *Mae Chi* to be enrolled in the doctoral program on an individual basis (Lindberg Falk Monica, 2007: 201). She elaborated further that the Thai nuns “have been excluded from the Buddhist universities, with the exception of some courses that are open to them.”⁹ However, she mentioned only the opportunity for the first-degree education at Mahapajapati Buddhist College without referring to Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya or Mahamakut Buddhist Universities that have allowed nuns (and women in general) to study at every degree level.¹⁰

In her book *Bat Nao*, first published in 2010, Dhammananda Bhikkhuni wrote:

...At both Buddhist universities in Bangkok – Mahamakut Buddhist University and Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University – education had hitherto been available only to Buddhist monks and novices of the Dhammayuttika and Mahānikāya Sects. Even though financial support from the government comes from the taxes paid by the citizens of both sexes, Buddhist education provided by the two Buddhist

⁸ Lindberg Falk, *Making Fields of Merit*, p. 218.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁰ Faith Adiele wrote the following about *Mae Chi* education: “I know that *maechi* are often relegated to the *wat* ghetto, cooking and cleaning and serving monks to earn their keep. Religious study is generally not open to them, certainly not at the two Dhamma universities in Bangkok...” (Adiele, Faith, *Meeting Faith: An Inward Odyssey*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2004, p. 65). This book was published in 2004, five years after the Buddhist nuns were allowed to study at the doctoral level. It is possible that Faith Adiele did not touch upon the matter because it was written before the change and was not updated.

universities was catered only to Buddhist monks. Is this socially just and acceptable? *Isn't this a form of structural violence against the female sex at the state level?*¹¹

In her article, however, she did not touch upon the opportunities open to women that enabled them to have access to education at either Buddhist university or how both universities support Mahapajapati Buddhist College and Savikasikkalai which are organized and taught by Buddhist nuns. In her doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Minnesota in 2010, Kaoru Adachi wrote that “the lack of educational opportunity is another concern for the Buddhist nuns. While the government supports monk education at university level through two Buddhist universities, it provides no such support for *Mae Chi*. The repercussions of such lack of opportunity are serious” (Adachi, Kaoru, n.d.: 40). This statement seemed to have been concluded on insufficient and incomplete information.

In this paper the researchers will describe, analyze and assess the development of higher education offered by the Thai *saṅkha*, especially in terms of its potentiality and effectiveness from the past to the present. It will include the parts played by Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University and Mahamakut Buddhist University in light of the experience of *Mae Chi* nuns who have undergone education at various levels offered by the two universities, Abhidhamchotikavidyalai College, and the Pali studies program. It will also analyze the problems and opportunities of education access in terms of the *saṅkha* as providers and *Mae Chi* as recipients. With regard to *Mae Chi*, the researchers will not leave out the part that society plays in their lives, while also taking into account the roles of gender in education opportunities provided by the *saṅkha*. Gender difference is clearly seen when it comes to *Pariyatti* education, especially in

¹¹ Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, *Bat Nao* (Bangkok: Songsayam Co. Ltd., B.E. 2553 [2010], p. 57). The reference here comes from the article “Structural Violence against Thai Women.” She wrote that “this article was originally written in English and was presented to a conference on Thai Studies organized in U.S.A. in April, 2005. But I think that it might directly benefit the reader; so *Sekhiyadhamma* translated it into Thai” (Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, *Bat Nao*, p. 52).

Pali studies for monks and for *Mae Chi*, concerning *Niccabhadda* (monthly food allowance given by the state) (*Mae Chi* Nat-hathai, B.E. 2552 [2009]: 227-228). The government recognizes only Pali ix certification of the monks as equivalent to the bachelor's degree, but not so in the case of *Mae Chi*, nor does it provide budgetary support for their Pali education.¹² The research by Parichart Suwanbubpha talked about *Mae Chi* education a decade ago in this manner: "Although *Mae Chi* are Thai citizens entitled to the same rights and freedom as any other person under the Constitution, in reality certain education institutes will not allow them admission on the grounds that they are ascetics and therefore should not attend the same classes as laypersons, male or female" (Parichart Suwanbubpha, B.E. 2545 [1992]: 109). Montri Suepduang gave an interesting account of *Pariyattidhamma* education for the monks that *Mae Chi* nuns were not allowed to join as follows: "Education that is being provided by other *saṅgha* groups (not the ones offered by MCU and MBU) does not allow women sufficient opportunity to participate in. Women or *Mae Chi* cannot study *Pariyattidhamma* with monks and novices; nor are women allowed to teach *Pariyattidhamma*" (Montri Suepduang, B.E. 2551 [2008]: 212). However, the allegations of both Parichart Suwanbubpha and Montri Suepduang were not fully substantiated.

This is a qualitative research using the following methodology:

1. In-depth interviews of two groups of the population using open-ended questionnaire:

- 1.1 Education providers who play a role in the planning and education policy for ascetics and laypersons at both Buddhist universities: rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, rector of Mahamakut Buddhist University, deputy rectors for academic affairs, and other senior monks at various administrative levels. The objective in interviewing this group is to study their attitudes, viewpoints, and experiences in the administration, management, and implementation of education for female ascetics.

¹² Dr. Dhanyamas Netnoi, Pali ix, B.A. (Abhidhamma), Ph.D., faculty member of Mahamakut Buddhist University, 10 August 2011, interview.

1.2 Recipients of education consisting of *Mae Chi* students of Pali studies, *Abhidhamma* studies, and higher education at various levels. The researchers chose to conduct individual interviews because they wanted to collect biographical information about education experiences, focusing on obstacles and problems that they encountered in their studies, while encouraging them to share their views, attitudes and recommendations during the interviews.

A member of the research team (i.e. *Mae Chi* Kritsana Raksachom) was one of the first students who received the kind of education provided by the *sangha* from the master's degree to the doctoral level (in 1999 and 2002 respectively), and has been a faculty member of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University for the past four years. This fact ensures that she has had the experience as both an education recipient and provider, thus enabling the research team to review the data, make use of the existing network, create trust in the informants, and develop a set of open-ended questionnaire for *Mae Chi* in an effective and becoming manner. (At the same time, the team also needed to take in account any bias that might occur.)

2. Focus group: This involved group interviews of ten *Mae Chi* students¹³ of Pali studies, *Abhidhamma* studies and university education. The objective was to obtain information on attitudes, experiences and other personal feelings that would help the research team see the differences and similarities in their attitudes and experiences of education in a clearer manner. This would enable us not only to see more clearly the structural problems and assess the effectiveness of education provision but also to see what *Mae Chi* meant when they said that their social status and education provision had improved, including the positive and negative experiences that they underwent in their daily life (e.g. traveling by bus, gaining greater respect from the public, and interacting with the people in various ways). The researchers chose to use the focus group method with *Mae Chi* students of Pali studies, *Abhidhamma* studies and university education because it was a very effective way to collect and assess data. It involved a dynamic

¹³ Conducted at Wat Chanasongkhram, 16 July 2010, for 3 hours and 17 minutes.

interaction of *Mae Chi* members who agreed to join the focus group and intended to share their attitudes and experiences and compare notes as well as considering various recommendations. (However, it must be noted that the group does not represent all the nuns in the country.)

3. Quantitative data collection: In the initial phase the research team developed a set of questionnaires. When distributed, about 300 copies were returned. The purpose was quantitative data collection. Nevertheless, the questionnaire was distributed only at universities and Thai nun institutions. In other words, data were collected only from selected groups of *Mae Chi*. It was not possible, therefore, for the research team to come to a statistical conclusion on the basis of these 300 copies of returned questionnaire, because in a number of issues the respondents could not represent all Thai nuns in the country.¹⁴ However, the researchers made use of the opinions and recommendations expressed in the returned questionnaire, together with the information from interviews, to bring to light a set of structural problems and the extent of the effectiveness of education provision in a clearer manner. Therefore, although this questionnaire was not directly used for quantitative analysis, it was a very useful source of qualitative information for the research work.

One of the main objectives of the research was to analyze data collected from the interviews with education providers and recipients, as well as the views expressed in the returned questionnaire. The data was intended for comparing the experiences and attitudes and for assessing the potentiality and effectiveness of education provided by the *saṅgha* for Thai *Mae Chi*.

2. Provision of higher education by the Thai *saṅgha*

To better understand the present situation, it was necessary to study the historical context of education organized by the *saṅgha*. The research

¹⁴ The researchers intends to develop the questionnaire and, on the basis of this research experience, distribute it to a wider circle in the future in order to be able to come to a statistical conclusion.

team, therefore, studied the works of Ven. Phra *Bhramagunabhorn* (P.A. Payutto) in particular, because he had pursued this matter for an extended period of time, speaking about and providing interesting analyses of monk education. He was at one time also a high-level administrator at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University.

Prior to King Rama V's reign, the *saṅgha* was the primary provider of education, with the Wat acting as the seat of learning, a place for healing ailments, and a center for teaching Dhamma to people of all ages, male and female. Around 1889 (Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, B.E. 2540 [1997]: 3), Mahathat Withayalai College was created and later changed its name to Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya.¹⁵ In 1893, Mahamakutrajavidyalaya (Mahamakut Buddhist University) was created (Ministry of Education, B.E. 2536 [1993]: 526). Both Buddhist seats of learning were established by King Rama V, with the *saṅgha* acting as the provider of Pali and other modern sciences. The king also issued a law on Thai education in 1898, again with the *saṅgha* as the provider of education for the general public. This, indeed, was considered the first education act of the country. The act clearly spelled out monk education and the role of the *saṅgha* in the provision of public education. The act ended with a note specifying that Mahamakutrajavidyalaya would be a place for learning *Vinaya* and academic subjects, while Mahathat Withayalai would focus on law (Phra Rajavaramuni (Prayoon Dhammacitto), B.E. 2542 [1999]: 2-3). After the reign of King Rama V, Thai education has undergone considerable changes. The role of the Wat as educational center has diminished, and so has the role of the monks as imparters of knowledge.

Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto) explained that “after the death of King Rama V in 1910, the notion of national education has undergone a drastic change whereby monk education and public education were completely separated. The state has acted as the sole provider of public education or education for all, including all higher education. Modern

¹⁵ The name was changed to Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya on 13 September 1896. (Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, B.E. 2540 [1997]: 3)

education for monks and novices, which started more than a decade earlier, has come to a stop and disappeared” (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2529 [1986]: 36). It seemed as though the state attached less importance to monk education. There was no mention of Buddhism in the national education plan. He explained further in 1986 that “in all national education programs and plans since 1913, no mention has been made of monks, Wats, *Pariyattidhamma*, or *Buddhacakka* ever again (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2529 [1986]: 36). It was not until 1946 when the *saṅgha* of the Dhammayuttika Sect started to provide university education to monks and novices at Mahamakutrajavidyalaya (Mahamakut Buddhist University, B.E. 2536 [1993]). In 1947, the *saṅgha* of the Mahānikāya Sect followed suit (Mahamakut Buddhist University, B.E. 2540 [1997]: 22). Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto) commented that “such action, in line with King Rama V’s benevolent policy, was meant to bring back opportunity for higher education for children of farmers who did not have access to State universities which seemed to to for people with economic means in the most part and neglected those in the rural areas” (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), n.d.: 40-41).

Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto) mentioned in particular the year 1974 in which “not more than 6% of state university students were from farmer families. In view of the fact that the majority of the Thai population – 76-80% – lived in the rural areas, the state investment in education turned out to be designed for people who already enjoyed greater opportunity and advantage” (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2529 [1986]: 39). So, despite the government’s effort to provide university education, the rural society did not really enjoy its fruit. The renowned monk gave the following account of the number of students at Buddhist universities: “Between 1968 and 1973 at Mahamakutrajavidyalaya, about 99% of the student monks came from rural areas, 91% from farmers’ families, compared to state universities where they accounted for only 6% or 8%, while most students were children of government officials and businesspeople from urban areas” (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2529 [1986]: 44).

As a rule, people from the rural areas could not get access to university education provided by the government. Phra Debvedi (P.A. Payutto) mentioned that “people did not enjoy equal education opportunities.

People in the remote areas and the poor did not get access to state education and had to resort to the traditional channel of the Wat” (Phra Debvedi (P.A. Payutto), n.d.: 14). As a consequence, it was the task of the Wat to provide education for those who came to be ordained. Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto) added further that “actually it should not be not the duty of the *saṅgha* to provide education for the poor; it should be the government’s duty.” However, the *saṅgha* did what they could; certainly, the quality of its education could not be compared to that of the state. He commented that “it was not too bad, but it was not completely effective. Students from the rural areas that came to the *saṅgha* did not always receive the best possible education. It was incomplete. The state did not recognize such education; it was something that just happened as a by-product of the old way of doing things – the old role of the *saṅgha*” (Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto), n.d.: 43-44).

Besides, higher education managed by the *saṅgha* was not even included in the state education plan. It received a very small financial assistance from the Department of Religious Affairs. Chamnong Thongprasert described how such education was first managed: “In matters concerning classroom buildings, teaching staff and budgetary management, this aspect of education management was perhaps something new to the *saṅgha* who did not yet fully understand its complexity. They had little experience, thus giving a feeling that education did not go as smoothly” (Chamnong Thongprasert, B.E. 2532 [1989]: 17). This may be considered as a management problem. He referred to his own experience¹⁶ that “A budget of 60,000 baht a year was given by the Department of Religious Affairs. It was barely enough. All the administrative

¹⁶ Special Professor Chamnong Thongprasert was among the first batch of students in 1987. A Pali ix scholar, he received a fellowship from Asia Foundation to further his studies at Yale University, USA. He was an instructor at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University in 1954 and former Director of the Fine Arts Division, Art Officer level 8, between 1979-1980. Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University Council appointed him as a qualified person from 1997 to 2012. Currently, he is an advisor to the Rector, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, a member of the Royal Institute of Thailand, Logic Division, and a member of the Graduate School Committee.

work was carried out at the monks' individual *Kuṭi*. The work could not be done quickly. There was no central office. Classes were on and off" Chamnong Thongprasert, B.E. 2532 [1989]: 3-39). Also "at the beginning of the program, students attended class in the evenings. Otherwise, there would be no class, because during the day there were no teachers available. Learning and teaching were conducted under candlelights. There was no electricity then" Chamnong Thongprasert, B.E. 2532 [1989]: 21). Besides lacking monetary and human resources to manage and provide higher education, the saṅgha had to deal with another serious issue. At one time, the more developed the state education was, the less importance it attached to monk education, eventually leading to non-recognition of monk universities and Pali studies. Despite being aware that their education was not legally endorsed, monks and novices had little choice but to continue with it. As the number of monks and novices studying at Buddhist universities grew, the amount of financial support from the government became insufficient to cover growing expenses. It was minuscule compared to that given to State universities. Ven. Phra Bhramagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto) provided figures that reflect such unequal treatment: In 1973, Thammasat University with 8,500 students received 42,883,300.00 Baht from the national budget, averaging 5,045.00 Baht per head. In the same year, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya with 975 monk/novice students was given a budget of 600,000 baht (of which 150,000 baht was from the National Budget in the form of subsidy) coupled with some assistance from the Central Religious Property and Asia Foundation and general donations, averaging 615 baht per head" Phra Bhramagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2552 [2009]: 38-39) (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, 1986: 64-80). Therefore, Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto) concluded that "monk/novice education was directly sponsored in the most part by the general public who contributed as much or as often as they felt like it. It depended least on the state budget, whereas state education was supported by taxpayers' money exacted by the state on a regular basis" (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2529 [1986]: 109. Due to the fact that the government did not recognize the qualifications from both Buddhist universities, their graduates

could not pursue a master's degree in Thailand.¹⁷ Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto) gave insightful information on the monks' education qualifications thus: "If a monk completed his Pali 9 or earned his degree from a university not recognized by the state, he would continue his studies in India" (Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto), B.E. 2529 [1986]: 68). S.J. Tambiah wrote about the accreditation of Pali studies of monks and novices about 36 years ago that "monks or novices who completed their Pali iii could go on to study at Thammasat University. Sometime after World War II they were required to have at least Pali vi qualification. More recently, no Pali education, no matter at what level, could get them to continue any further studies" (Tambiah S.J., 1976: 294).

Both Buddhist universities tried to convince the government to recognize their degrees and status. In this connection, a group of senior monks and university administrators¹⁸ submitted a bill on Buddhist Universities in 1957. In that same year a military coup took place, leading to political change and instability. The bill itself met with much opposition from some people in high positions and was not taken up for consideration. The *saṅgha* continued to push forward until the year 1984 when the government passed an act recognizing the qualifications of graduates

¹⁷ Gosling said in 1980: "There is a certain irony in the fact that the secular universities in Thailand do not recognize degrees from the Buddhist Universities. Graduates from both Mahamakut and Mahachulalongkorn have no difficulty in finding places in post-graduate courses at Indian Universities and to a lesser extent at universities in Europe and the U.S.A. One Mahachulalongkorn undergraduate who had passed prayog nine was fairly recently allowed to transfer directly to an undergraduate course at Cambridge. But even on completing his Mahachulalongkorn B.A. he would not have been eligible to start an undergraduate course at any secular Thai university." (Gosling, David, 1980, "New Directions in Thai Buddhism", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 14. No. 3, p. 418). See Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "Buddhism and National Development: A Case Study of Buddhist Universities", p. 65.

¹⁸ Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (now Dhammananda Bhikkhuni) wrote in 1986: "The central problem regarding these Buddhist universities (which the monks themselves emphasize as the most urgent) is the need to be academically recognized by the government." (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "Buddhism and National Development: A Case Study of Buddhist Universities", p. 78).

of Buddhist studies. The act, however, gave recognition only to those who graduated with a bachelor's degree and in Pali studies (Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, B.E. 2540 [1997]: 62). It stated that "those who have graduated in Buddhist Studies under the *Pariyattidhamma* program in the Dhamma section and Sanam Luang Pali ix Section called "Pali ix scholars" shall use the abbreviation "Pali ix" (Act on Recognition of Qualifications of Graduates of Buddhist Studies B.E. 2527 [1984]). This marked the first step of achievement of the *saṅgha*, but it was not their actual aim. The recognition by the government at this stage focused only on the degree qualification, not the university. The state limited the *saṅgha* education to only the first degree level; the *saṅgha* could not provide graduate studies at a master's degree or doctoral levels. Between 1984 and 1996, monks who completed their study at a Buddhist university could not pursue higher studies in Thailand if they maintained their religious status. Phra Rajavaramuni (P.A. Payutto) pointed out the inequality of education when the state limited the kind of education provided by the *saṅgha* to the first-degree level only, saying "the *saṅgha*, the main pillar of Buddhism in Thailand at present (1986), could study only to a first-degree level. Those who aspire to higher education have to leave. This can be done in two ways: 1) leave the country, e.g. to India or 2) leave the Wat, i.e. leave the monkhood, and study as laypersons." Consequently, the *saṅgha* submitted another bill on Buddhist Universities in 1994, and the government passed the act in 1997 whereby both Buddhist universities each have an act of its own and receive subsidy from the government as their main source of income, as specified in Section 13 about "general subsidies granted by the government on a yearly basis."¹⁹

Two years later, in 1999, they admitted laypersons to study, including *Mae Chi*. An explanatory note to the Act stated that "such education institutions are established as universities to provide education, conduct research, promote and provide Buddhist academic services to monks, novices, and laypersons."²⁰ With the Act in place, both Buddhist universities

¹⁹ University Act, 1 October, B.E. 2540 (1997).

²⁰ University Act, 1 October, B.E. 2540 (1997).

are now put in a secure position as far as the budget is concerned. Student monks and novices have to pay the registration fees, as do *Mae Chi* nuns in the same amount. Laypersons, both male and female, pay full fees.

It could be seen that as a result of unequal treatment, the Buddhist Universities had been beset with inadequate and uncertain budgets for 50 years or so. They were able to continue their work thanks to the public donation given on an irregular basis. Another important point in this context was that such inequality in education was seen not only in economic terms but in the gender dimension as well. Prior to 1927, Thai women had no access to education at the Wat; only a small group of selected elite women, e.g. those at the royal court, were literate (Anek Nawikmun, B.E. 2547 [2004]: 28) (Terwiel, Barend Jan, 2012:102-104).

3. Inequality in higher education for Thai Mae Chi: a historical perspective

In this section, the research team will provide an overall picture of higher education and Pali studies, including Abhidhamma studies, at both Buddhist Universities after the passage of the University Act.

There is very little written record on Thai Buddhist nuns. It seemed as though historically women did not want to become *Mae Chi* when they were young. It was something they might do in their older years. Monsieur de La Loubère recorded in 1689 about *Mae Chi* in the Ayutthaya period that “Siamese women became ascetics when they were old. There seemed to be no young Buddhist nuns. *Mae Chi* nuns were not found in every Wat” (Simon de La Loubère, B.E. 2548 [2005]: 507). Another account by Nicholas Chervais, a Frenchman living in Thailand during the Ayutthaya period, talked about *Mae Chi* as follows:

Siamese women loved freedom more than to give themselves up to the convent like our nuns who were prepared to stay there for life. Thai nuns would become ascetics when they reached an age in which they were bored with all the worldly matter. Once they became nuns, very few would leave. Since they had to be in close contact with the monks a lot of times,

permission was given for them to become *Mae Chi* when they were more than 50 years old to avoid any criticism. They had to have their heads and eyebrows shaved just like a *Bhikkhu* and wore white robes. White was a polite color. The Siamese used it for mourning and for important ceremonies. These *Mae Chi* nuns did not stay in the monastic abodes. They left their family and stayed together in a group of 3-4 close to the Wat. They did not only give a religious vow and observe the *Vinaya* rules just as the monks did, but they also conducted themselves in the *Vinaya* as strictly as the monks in every way, including daily praying and chanting for a long time in the Uposatha hall. They spent most of their time serving the monks, taking care of food and other chores, and making merits. They visited the poor and the sick, helping others in every possible way, in the spirit of giving. They did not have their own home; they lived in the Wat. The activities of these old nuns focused mainly on practicing Dhamma or making merits by helping maintain Buddhism and serving the monks. (Nicholas Chervais, n.d.: 54)

The first activity ever recorded in the history of Thai *Mae Chi* occurred in King Rama V's reign. Mention was made of the study of *Abhidhamma*, lasting 7 year and 6 months, the course consisting of 9 steps. It was first launched in 1951 at Wat Rakhang Khositaram, Thonburi, Bangkok, (Abhidhamchotikavidyalaya. B.E. 2554 [2011]: 75). It was provided by the *saṅgha* of Mahānikāya Sect led by Phra Phimontham (At Asabhamahāthera).²¹ *Mae Chi* nuns were admitted to study together with the monks. In 1966, two *Mae Chi* graduated. From then to the present day (2011), the total number of *Mae Chi* graduates from the *Abhidhamma* program was 152. The average highest number of graduates

²¹ Former chief abbot of Wat Mahathat Yuwaratcharangsarit, former ecclesiastical minister of administrative bodies (under the *Saṅgha* Act B.E. 2484 [1941], former president of Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University Council on two separate occasions (1948-1961 and 1980-1989), his last ecclesiastical rank being Somdet Phra Buddhācāriya.

was 10 in 1995, while the rest saw about 7-9 graduates per year.²² In 1968, the *saṅgha* of Wat Mahathat Yuwaratransarit, Tha Phra-chan, Bangkok, of the Mahānikāya Sect, offered an *Abhidhamma* program in which the nuns studied together with the monks. The number of *Mae Chi* graduating from the *Abhidhamma* program from 1968 to 2011 was 250. The year 2011 saw the greatest number of *Mae Chi* graduates – 19. The rest saw 10 to 14 graduates (*Abhidhamma* Student Registration Division, n.d.). Since 1981 the *Abhidhamma* program has come under Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya, with 57 branches set up both in Bangkok and in the rural areas (Abhidhamchotikavidyalaya. B.E. 2554 [2011]: 75-76).

In 1963, Mahamakut Buddhist University, the *saṅgha* of the Dhammayuttika Sect, offered a Pali program consisting of nine steps to *Mae Chi*, using the same curriculum as that for the monks. The program could be taken both by *Mae Chi* and monks. Mahamakutrajavidyalaya was merely a place where testing and certification of Pali education were held for *Mae Chi*. It did not come under the supervision of the Pali Division of the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council as was the case with monk education. Therefore, *Mae Chi* did not take the same examination as the monks (Gosling David L., 1988: 126). The first batch of *Mae Chi* students was 12. No *Mae Chi* from the group completed Pali grade ix; Pali vi was the highest they could achieve.²³ In 1986,²⁴ only one *Mae Chi* completed Pali ix. It took

²² *Mae Chi* graduated in 1966; 3 in 1967; 3 in 1971; 2 in 1972; 4 in 1973; 9 in 1974; 9 in 1975; 6 in 1976; 1 in 1977; 3 in 1978; 1 in 1979; 4 in 1980; none in 1981; 1 in 1982; 2 in 1983; 4 in 1984; 5 in 1985; 1 in 1986; 1 in 1987; none in 1988; 4 in 1989; none in 1990; 5 in 1991; 5 in 1992; 6 in 1993; 5 in 1994; 10 in 1995; 7 in 1996; 9 in 1997; 3 in 1998; 5 in 1999; 4 in 2000; 1 in 2001; 4 in 2002; 5 in 2003; 4 in 2004; 3 in 2005; 7 in 2006; none in 2007; none in 2008; 2 in 2009; 1 in 2010; and 1 in 2011. The total number of *Mae Chi* graduates from 1966 to 2011 was 152 (Student Registration Division, Wat Rakhang Khositaram, Bangkok, 2011).

²³ *Mae Chi* Prathin Khwan-On, President of Thai Nun Institutions 2012, one of the graduates of the first Pali class, head of Thai Nun Institution at Paktho, Ratchaburi Province, 25 May 2012, interview.

²⁴ *Mae Chi* Somsī Charupheng, the first Thai nun to complete Pali ix, Wat Chanasongkhram, 17 December 2012, interview. Mahamakut Buddhist University, printed material).

23 years before any nun could reach this level. From 1963 to 2011, at most two *Mae Chi* nuns graduated with Pali ix a year. In 49 years, the number of *Mae Chi* with Pali ix in Thailand was 20.²⁵

Mahamakutrajaavidyalaya certified Pali education of *Mae Chi* nuns by granting them certificates and honorary fans in the tradition of the *Saṅgha*. An announcement by Mahamakut Buddhist University said that the program would “use the curriculum and achievement measurement criteria of *Pariyattidhamma* in the Sanam Luang Pali Section *mutatis mutandis*” (Mahamakut Buddhist University, B.E. 2543 [2000]). The granting of certificates and honorary fans was made in different ways. For completion of Pali iii, vi and ix, the nuns would receive both certificates and honorary fans. Those with Pali iii and vi would receive them from His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch, while those with Pali ix would receive from Her Royal Highness Princess Soamsawali. Her Royal Highness conferred the honorary fans to the Pali ix graduates for the first time in the history of *Mae Chi* education in 1986 at Education Council Building, Mahamakutrajaavidyalaya.²⁶ Those who completed Pali i-ii, iv, v, vi, vii, and viii would receive only certificates from His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch or his representative.

Although *Mae Chi* received the same kind of Pali education as monks and novices, discrepancy still existed. The latter group with Pali ix qualifications received a monthly allowance from the government via the Department of Religious Affairs then or the Office of National Buddhism today. This was not the case for *Mae Chi* with the same qualifications because Pali education for *Mae Chi* was not the responsibility of the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council; rather, it was provided by Mahamakutrajaavidyalaya. Monk education was recognized by the B.E. 2527 [1984] Act. Section 3 said

²⁵ 1 *Mae Chi* completed Pali ix in 1986; 1 in 1990; 1 in 1995; 2 in 1996; 2 in 1997; 2 in 1998; 1 in 1999; none in 2000; 1 in 2001; 1 in 2002; 2 in 2003; 1 in 2004; none in 2005; 1 in 2006; 1 in 2007; 1 in 2008; none in 2009 and 2010; and 2 in 2011. (Registration Division, Mahamakut Buddhist University, printed material).

²⁶ Dr. *Mae Chi* Duangphorn Khamhomkul, the second Thai nun with Pali ix, faculty member, Mahapajapati Buddhist College (*Mae Chi* College), Pakthongchai District, Nakhon Ratchaima Province.

that “Buddhist subjects refer to the knowledge which monks and novices are required to study under the Pariyattidhamma program in the Dhamma section and Sanam Luang Pali Section” (Act on Recognition of Qualifications of Graduates of Buddhist Studies B.E. 2527 [1984]). By the time the Act was passed, *Mae Chi* nuns had already formed the Foundation of Thai Nun Institutions.²⁷ Still, no support was forthcoming for them to study at either Buddhist University.

Thammasat University was established on 27 June 1934 (<http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/>, accessed on 17 May 2012). Professor Dr. Watchara Ngamchitcharoen explained the reason why there was no Buddhist nun student at the university: “There is no rule or regulation forbidding them to study at Thammasat University. The fact was that none applied. This might be due to the Thai traditional belief that ascetics should not get involved with worldly learning. Also, Thailand might look at *Mae Chi* as someone in between a layperson and an ascetic. As a consequence, no *Mae Chi* applied for admission. In 1985, there were monks studying in master’s degree programs at Chulalongkorn University and Mahidol University, but there was no *Mae Chi* studying at Thammsat University. In 1997, when Thammasat opened a program in Buddhist Studies, one *Mae Chi* applied. From 1997 to 2011 there were 11 *Mae Chi* students, one of whom was about to be the first to graduate.”²⁸ In addition, Thammasat was a traditional university in that students were required to sit in a competitive examination, and the university would select the qualified candidates on the basis of their scores. It was different from an open university which required no competitive examination. Most *Mae Chi* viewed themselves as ascetics and would rather devote themselves to the study of Dhamma and *Vipassanā*. Some *Mae Chi* might decide to study at an open university, i.e. Ramkhamhaeng University ([http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramkhamhaeng University](http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramkhamhaeng_University) accessed

²⁷ Foundation of Thai Nun Institutions was created on 28 August 1969.

²⁸ Professor Dr. Watchara Ngamchitcharoen, faculty member of the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Pali ix, B.A. in Buddhist Studies, M.A. in philosophy (University of Delhi, India), Ph.D. in Philosophy (Chulalongkorn University), 22 May 2012 at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya, interview.

on 17 May 2012). The year 1977 saw its first *Mae Chi* graduate – *Mae Chi* Udomsi Choket. Five years later, in 1982, *Mae Chi* Sisalap Upamai and *Mae Chi* Yuphin Duangchan went to the same university. *Mae Chi* Sisalap Uppamairecounted that “...at the beginning my Wat did not allow me to study at Ramkhamhaeng University on the grounds thatI had taken up an ascetic life and should not attend a university in the worldly setting. However, once I did, the Wat did not raise any objection and let me study until I graduated. A *Mae Chi* from Wat Paknam was the first to study at Ramkhamhaeng University.”²⁹ Sukhothaithammathirat University, established 1978, was also an open university ([http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukhothaithammathirat University](http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukhothaithammathirat_University) accessed on 17 May 2012). This was another university that *Mae Chi* nuns chose to study at. They chose these two universities because the fees were not too high and they were easy to access. Any religious person could attend. There was no limit to the student admission. Students had to do a lot of self-study. Private universities, likewise, had no restriction for *Mae Chi* to study. The research team was not able to check the number of *Mae Chi* students enrolled at the above two universities or at private universities, as they prefixed their names with Miss according to their national ID cards when they applied for admission.

4. Access to university education by Thai Buddhist Nuns

After the passage of the Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya Act and Mahamakutrajavidyalaya Act in 1997, *Mae Chi* education had constantly improved, especially over the last ten years. *Mae Chi* nuns could now study to the doctoral level. All this was due to a more secure position of monk education. In other words, the two Buddhist universities were accredited and had legal statuses. According toBuddhist University Acts of 1997, the universities were designed to be seats of learning and research, with the objectives of providing education, conducting research, promoting and

²⁹ *Mae Chi* Sisalap Uppamai, Wat Paknam Phasicharoen, Pali iv, visiting instructor of Mahapajapati Buddhist College, Member of Thai Nun Institution Committee, Advisor to Deputy Director for Administration of Thai Nun Institutions, 14 June 2012, interview.

providing Buddhism-related services to monks, novices and laypeople.³⁰ As a result, in 1999 Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University began to admit *Mae Chi* and laypersons to the master's degree program. There were four *Mae Chi* nuns in the first batch; three graduated.³¹ Of the three Buddhist nuns, two eventually completed their doctorate, one at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University and the other at University of Delhi, India. Both became instructors at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University and Mahapajapati Buddhist College.³² In 2000, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University established a doctoral program, although it did not admit laypersons and *Mae Chi* to study at the first degree programs until 2005. The reason for the delay was that the University Administration finished amending its rules and regulations for the graduate level earlier than it did with the undergraduate level.³³ From its first admission in 1999 to 2011, there had been one *Mae Chi* doctoral graduate, 13 master's degree graduates,³⁴ and 8 first-degree graduates.³⁵

Besides, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University recognized all *Abhidhamma* programs hitherto taught but not yet certified by the Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University Council. The Council announced the accreditation of *Abhidhamma* studies in 2003 as follows: "The certificate of Majjhimābhiddammika-Eka is equivalent to that of upper secondary education, and the certificate of *Abhidhamma Panditais* equivalent to a bachelor's degree" (Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 2003).

Mahamakut Buddhist University, on the other hand, first admitted *Mae Chi* to the undergraduate program in 1999, to the master's degree

³⁰ Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University Act and Mahamakutrajavidyalaya University Act.

³¹ Printed material, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 1999.

³² Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 4 August 2010, interview.

³³ Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 4 August 2010, interview.

³⁴ Records, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University.

³⁵ Records, Faculty of Buddhist Studies, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University.

program in 2002, and to the doctoral program in 2006.³⁶ There were 43 *Mae Chi* graduates with a bachelor's degree, 29 with a master's degree, and one with a doctorate.³⁷ The numbers of *Mae Chi* graduates from both Buddhist universities were different. Presumably, the Foundation of Thai Nun Institutions had its office located in the compounds of Mahamakut Buddhist University, so the nuns became more familiar with this university from the very beginning since 1969.³⁸ Pali studies had never been recognized since the course began in 1963. In 2000, the University announced its recognition of Pali studies taken by *Mae Chi* as a university certificate to be in line with those of the monks. Those with Pali v could continue to study at the undergraduate level, while those with Pali ix could pursue a master's degree program at either Buddhist University, as well as applying for a master's degree program at any other public university.³⁹ The announcement read: "The University Council has decided to approve Pali studies from level 1-2 to 9 held at Mahamakut Buddhist University with an abbreviated name of "P.S." based on the curriculum and achievement measurement criteria of *Pariyattidhamma* in the Sanam Luang Pali Section *mutatis mutandis* and to recognize their qualifications as equivalent to those of the Sanam Luang Pali counterpart" (Mahamakut Buddhist University, B.E. 2543 [2000]). The University announced its support of the Pali studies program for *Mae Chi*, using the same standard as monk education in every way, with the abbreviated "P.S.", short for Pali Studies.

Thus, both Buddhist Universities had clearly shown where they stood with regard to *Mae Chi* education. Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University recognized the qualifications of *Abhidhamma* graduates who could now apply for a master's degree program, while Mahamakut

³⁶ Phrakhrū Palat Sampiphadhanaviriyačarya, Dean, Graduate School, Mahamakut Buddhist University, 12 August 2011, interview.

³⁷ Records, Graduate School, Mahamakut Buddhist University, 2011.

³⁸ Foundation of Thai Nun Institutions, originally located at MBU Building, Wat Bowonniwetwihan, Bangkok, in 2005, was later moved to Mahamakut Buddhist University, Salaya Sub-district, Putthamonthon District, Nakhon Pathom Province.

³⁹ Phrakhrū Sutadharmakovid, Head of Student Development Division, Mahamakut Buddhist University, interview.

Buddhist University recognized *Mae Chi* qualifications of Pali ix as equivalent to a bachelor's degree and eligible for a master's degree pursuit at either Buddhist University.⁴⁰ The research team interviewed high-level administrators of both Buddhist Universities and were told that they wanted to promote education for *Mae Chi* and other laywomen so that they are well versed enough in Dhamma to teach and bring worldly and spiritual benefits to society. In light of the attempts over the past 50 years or so, both Universities seemed to take a long time before they finally admitted *Mae Chi* nuns to their programs. The interviews provided similar explanation in that no university law had been passed to allow them to do so, that there was no budget set for the purpose, and that they did not come under the supervision of the government. They received some limited funding from the Department of Religious Affairs and from the general public. Their management, therefore, was on a slippery slope and rather random. There was no clear direction, and there were not enough classrooms. In this connection, MCU Rector Professor Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dhammacitto) explained succinctly that "there was neither a legal act for the Buddhist Universities nor enough budget."⁴¹ Phra Sudhidhamanuvatra (Thiap Siriñano) added that "the Buddhist Universities managed their education on the basis of public donation. The *Saṅgha* did not have much money for such management or for necessary expenses."⁴²

⁴⁰ A high-level administrator from Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University said that "We think that we will promote *Mae Chi* education status. Mahamakut Buddhist University offers Pali studies for *Mae Chi*, while Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University provides *Abhidhamma* education for them, which the law has now made possible." (Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 4 August 2011, interview).

⁴¹ Professor Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn, Rector of Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, Member of the Royal Institute of Thailand, abbot of Wat Prayunwongsawat, Bangkok, 3 August 2010, interview; Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 4 August 2010, interview.

⁴² Assistant Professor Dr. Phra Sudhidhamanuvatra, Dean of Faculty of Buddhist Studies, Assistant Abbot of Wat Phrachetuphonwimankhlaram, Bangkok, 3 August 2010, interview.

5. Challenges of teaching students of different sexes

Before 1969, a group of *Saṅgha* that managed higher education had attempted to propose a Buddhist University bill. Unfortunately, some senior monks from both Dhammayuttika and Mahānikāya Sects did not agree with the idea and so did not support the bill, afraid that the traditional Pali studies for the monks might suffer and that it might deter people from learning Pali. Monks that studied at a Buddhist university where knowledge both of the world and of Dhamma were taught would leave the monkhood to live a secular life. Above all, they were concerned with the purity of the student monks. At that time, some senior monks and politicians shared a similar view that monks should study only Pali and *Dhamma-Vinaya*.⁴³ Thus, the University Acts were instrumental to expanding education to cover laypersons. Phra Dharmakosajarn (Prayoon Dhammacitto) addressed his concern to a House Committee that “if only monks were admitted and if their number declined, what could we do? Therefore, we should admit lay students as well.”⁴⁴ Phrakhru Palat Suvadhanavajiragun (Sawai JotiKo) talked about separate classrooms: “The House Committee agreed in principle but instructed that in practice classrooms should be kept separate to avoid any problems of sexual morality and chastity” (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, n.d.: 70). “One should not overlook the question whether or not it becomes the status of monkhood. The administrators of both Universities are well aware of the issue and have made it a policy to have separate classrooms.”⁴⁵ Phra Sigambhirayarn (Somcint Sammapañño) explained the situation as follows:

at that time society did not want women to study in the same place as monks. If they wanted to learn, they must learn in a separate classroom. There was some criticism from senior

⁴³ Phra Sudhivaraṇṇa (Narong Cittasobhaṇo), Deputy Rector, Nakhon Ratchasima Campus, 28 September 2011, interview.

⁴⁴ Professor Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn, Rector of Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 3 August 2010, interview.

⁴⁵ Phrakhru Palat Suvadhanavajiragun (Sawai JotiKo), Deputy Rector for International Affairs, 18 August 2011, interview.

administrators that we did not have enough rooms already. If we had to provide separate teaching in separate classes, the room shortage would become worse. As it was, we did not have enough instructors. Separate classrooms would surely pose more problems.⁴⁶

After all the changes that have taken place in education management, at the undergraduate and master's degree levels monks and laypersons now study in separate classrooms, but they share the same classroom at the doctoral level. The reason for allowing doctoral students to study together is that they have reached an acceptable maturity. Besides, university administrators now regard the presence of women at a Buddhist university as something quite normal. In almost every Wat in Thailand, it is women who usually come to make merits and perform various religious ceremonies. Instructors, too, include monks, laymen and laywomen. There is an explanation about allowing laywomen to teach. Monks would have to pay greater attention to their learning and conducts; they have to transcend the gender issue and learn to keep their minds intact.⁴⁷ Mahamakut Buddhist University not only accepted *Mae Chi* as students but also create a college specially designed for them. It is called Mahapajapati Buddhist College which admits women with grade-12 qualifications to study at the Faculty of Religion and Philosophy and Faculty of Education (Teaching Buddhism and Teaching English programs) for a bachelor's degree. Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University also plans to create a college for *Mae Chi* students within the campus at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya, Wangnoi District, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. At the same time it supports Sathira Thammassathan, a nunnery in Bangkok, in establishing a master's degree program called "Sāvika Sikkhalai"⁴⁸ to all students, whether *Mae Chi*, laymen and laywomen. It receives donation from the general public for the construction of college buildings.

⁴⁶ Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 4 August 2010, interview.

⁴⁷ Phra Sudhidhamanuvatra, Dean of Graduate School, 3 August 2010, interview.

⁴⁸ Phra Dharmakosajarn, Rector of Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, 3 August 2010, interview.

6. *Mae Chi* learning experience

Over the past 10 years or so, the image of *Mae Chi* has become more positive, mainly because they enjoy better and higher education and are an important force in the dissemination of Buddhism in the *Paryatti* and *Paṭṭatti* areas. In the past their schooling was rather limited, and their activities were confined mainly to Dhamma practice and work in the Wat. In the past, they would hardly be asked to teach morality outside the Wat except at some special places such as at the *Mae Chi* Center of Sala Santisuk, Nakhon Chaisi District, Nakhon Pathom Province. But even such occasions were rare. Since 1999, however, an increasing number of *Mae Chi* nuns have attained university education. One *Mae Chi* nun reported thus: “In the past the head of the *Mae Chi* would not allow us to learn anything outside. We were told to stay inside the Wat, to practice Dhamma. Nowadays, more opportunity is available. We can learn as much as we aspire to. We can learn anything that we want to. *Mae Chi* education has come a long way”⁴⁹ When they are educated and have conducted themselves within the framework of the teachings of the Buddha, they have become more accepted as the teachers of Dhamma and have played a greater role in the teaching of ethics to young people. One *Mae Chi* nun said: “*Mae Chi* who teach ethics and morality at schools in the urban and rural communities are respected as highly as monks and novices.”⁵⁰ This was in line with the interview given by another *Mae Chi* that “during summer training or morality training, *Mae Chi* nuns would be given an honor and asked to teach as well.”⁵¹ Another said that “in the past we did not have much opportunity to teach morality, but today more opportunity is available, and monks and novices accept us more readily. They even ask us to teach Pali to novices, something that rarely occurred in the past. In more recent time, *Mae Chi* nuns are better educated and are given more opportunity to teach. They are accepted both by monks, novices and laypersons.”⁵² Besides laypersons, the *Saṅgha*

⁴⁹ *Mae Chi* No. 1, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵⁰ *Mae Chi* No. 2, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵¹ *Mae Chi* No. 3, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵² *Mae Chi* No. 4, 16 July 2010, interview.

have come to recognize their ability. Some Wats allow them to teach Pali to monks and novices on a regular basis, e.g. at the learning center at Wat Mahathat Yuwaratcharangsarit, Bangkok. One of the *Mae Chi* Pali teachers there said that “I taught Pali at the center from 1993 to 2011. More monks and novices gave me due respect.”⁵³ At Abhidhamchotikavidyalai College, there were 8 *Mae Chi* teachers of *Abhidhamma* out of 31 monk and lay teaching members. The students, both ascetic and lay, showed them due respect. One *Mae Chi* teacher said during the interview that “the students were more interested in the subject matter than the sex of the teachers.”⁵⁴ Another who taught at Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University from 2008 to present (2012) said that “Monk graduate students, both at the master and doctoral levels, appreciate and focus on the knowledge of the teachers. So, teaching has not met with any obstacles.”⁵⁵ There were two *Mae Chi* teachers at Mahapajapati Buddhist College (Nun College) under the supervision of Mahamakut Buddhist University. One who taught there for three years talked about her experience as follows:

...in recent years I saw more educated and able *Mae Chi* teach at Buddhist universities, and their abilities are recognized by both monks and laypersons. Besides, the new generation of monks and novices tend to pay more attention to the qualifications of the teachers. As a rule, at a Buddhist university there are a number of lay instructors. So, it is not a surprise that there are *Mae Chi* teachers at a Buddhist university.⁵⁶

With regard to Pali studies, the learning environment in which *Mae Chi* study side by side with monks and novices was cordial and easy-going. In an interview with a *Mae Chi* nun from the countryside, one learnt that “in the rural areas there are a lot of Pali classes, e.g. in Ratchaburi Province. Monks and novices always lend a helping hand. Teachers are good. Monk and novice students are ready to cooperate. The atmosphere is

⁵³ *Mae Chi* No. 5, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵⁴ *Mae Chi* No. 6, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵⁵ *Mae Chi* No. 7, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵⁶ *Mae Chi* No. 8, 16 July 2010, interview.

friendly. Everyone pays respect to each other throughout the course.”⁵⁷ In Bangkok, some of the popular Pali learning centers include Wat Mahathat Yuwaratcharangsarit, Wat Sam Phraya, Wat Chanasongkhram, and Wat Rakhang Khositaram. One *Mae Chi* related her experience: “We learnt Pali viii and ix at Wat Sam Phraya. It was a happy learning experience. Monks and novices were friendly. After the course was over, we remain friends and continue to support one another.”⁵⁸ Between 1963-1985, the only Pali learning center that the *Saṅgha* allowed *Mae Chi* nuns to study in was in Bangkok. After *Mae Chi* Somsri Charupheng became the first nun to complete Pali ix in Thailand, there was a lot of enthusiasm among the Buddhist nuns to study Pali.⁵⁹ Soon after, every Pali learning center in the rural areas allowed *Mae Chi* to study.⁶⁰ A greater interest in learning also meant greater burdens, i.e. more expenses, on the part of the learners. Some depended on their parents for the upkeep, while others were supported by their lay friends. One *Mae Chi* nun said during the interview that “master’s and doctoral studies were supported by laypersons.”⁶¹ Some worked to earn money from teaching at the Wat, while receiving a monthly allowance from the Foundation. The money was used to pay for the course. It could be said that education opportunity was something that brought greater pride to the nuns’ families who no longer needed to be too concerned about the ascetic life of their daughters. They gave *Mae Chi* greater blessings, seeing how their religious life brought them not only the knowledge of the world but also Dhamma. In a sense, in becoming a *Mae Chi*, a woman has made it possible for her family, especially her parents, to “hold on to the end of her white robe [and go to Heaven].” This saying is reminiscent to one commonly made about parents of an ordained monk who, it is believed, will be able to go to Heaven simply by “holding on to the end of the saffron robe.” *Mae Chi* nuns conduct themselves just as monks do when receiving things from laypersons: “When her parents bring her food, *Mae Chi* will

⁵⁷ *Mae Chi* No. 9, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵⁸ *Mae Chi* No. 10, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁵⁹ *Mae Chi* No. 11, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶⁰ *Mae Chi* No. 12, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶¹ *Mae Chi* No. 13, 16 July 2010, interview.

extend her hands to receive it just as a monk does and will bless them when the meal is over.”⁶²

Although the Wat allowed *Mae Chi* to study Pali with the monks, they were beset with another problem – accommodation. Some Wat may be able to accommodate them, while others have no such facility. Wat in Bangkok that serve as learning centers and at the same time provide accommodation for *Mae Chi* are Wat Mahathat Yuwaratcharangsarit Ratchaworamahawihan, Wat Chanasongkhram Ratchaworamahawihan, Wat Paknam Phasicharoen, Wat Rakhang Khositaram Woramahawihan, Wat Phleng Wipatsana, and Wat Soithong. Wat that provide accommodation but do not serve as learning centers are Wat Samphanthawongsaworawihan, Wat Parinayok, Wat Amphawan, Wat Boromniwat Ratchaworawihan, Wat Somnat Worawihan, Wat Mathantikaram, Wat Phawanaphiratarom, Wat Ratchasittharam Ratchaworawihan, Wat Chaomun, and Wat Awutwikasitarom. Not every Wat in Bangkok offer lodging to *Mae Chi* nuns, thus making life difficult for them. Their *Kuṭi* or lodging may be located in a place unsuitable to women, e.g. close to the toilet or crematorium, or in a place where a lot of people are seen coming and going. On the contrary, some Wat provide not only comfortable lodging but also a good school for *Mae Chi*. Some provide only lodging but no classroom, while others are teaching centers without accommodation. One *Mae Chi* said during the interview: “The first time I came to study, life was very difficult. Sometimes we found a place to live but no place to study. This was in 1993. It slowed down our study, and we were not getting any younger.”⁶³ In the rural areas, some Wat have lodging for *Mae Chi*; others do not. Some nuns were lucky to be accommodated at the Wat and be provided with textbooks.⁶⁴ Those living in the Wat with the support of the abbot do not feel that they suffered any disadvantage. Some Wat in the rural areas that offer *Abhidhamma* courses allow their *Mae Chi* students to accept offerings at funeral rites or other religious ceremonies

⁶² *Mae Chi* No. 14, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶³ *Mae Chi* No. 15, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶⁴ *Mae Chi* No. 16, 16 July 2010, interview.

held in the Wat.⁶⁵ Besides, some abbots encourage nuns to complete the *Abhidhamma* course and further their studies. Some nuns are provided with every kind of amenities and live a comfortable life without any problems. Some abbots do not consider gender an issue. “In some Wat the abbots assigned the nuns to teach. Practically all these nuns were graduates of the *Abhidhamma* or Pali studies.”⁶⁶ However, not every Wat promotes *Abhidhamma* or Pali studies; it all depends on the abbot’s policy. This applies also to the permission for the nuns to reside in the Wat.

7. Funding for *Mae Chi* education

While there have been more positive changes in recent years, it cannot be denied that Thai Buddhist nuns still face a lot of learning obstacles. According to the interviews, the main obstacles lie in the funding. It is a common knowledge that *Mae Chi* are not universally recognized as ascetics whether in Thailand or abroad. As a result, Thai society has neglected them in many ways and not given them due respect. It cannot be denied that in several big Wat, the Buddhist nuns have to cook for the monks, clean, and take care of general chores. One *Mae Chi* said, “...we had to prepare food in the evening for the next day’s breakfast. It was our responsibility.”⁶⁷ Some Wat accept *Mae Chi* as cooks who prepare food for monks and novices. If they came to learn Pali and pursue higher studies, they would be rejected. Even if they were allowed to stay in the Wat, they still faced problems with food. In an interview, a *Mae Chi* university student remarked that “if we helped in the kitchen, we would not be able to study. Kitchen work starts at five o’clock; by the time we finish washing-up, it would be one o’clock in the afternoon. University education usually starts in the morning. If we do not help with the cooking, we have to buy or own food. We would not dare to eat in the kitchen.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Mae Chi* No. 17, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶⁶ *Mae Chi* No. 18, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶⁷ *Mae Chi* No. 19, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁶⁸ *Mae Chi* No. 20, 16 July 2010, interview.

It is a well-received fact that Thai Buddhist nuns enjoy little social capital. Nevertheless, there are educational fundings available. This funding comes from various *Mae Chi* centers, the general public, the Wat in which they reside, or other educational institutes. The extent of the funding would depend on the economic situation of the donor. One *Mae Chi* nun said that “There were people who supported secular education of *Mae Chi* on a semester-by-semester basis.”⁶⁹ Some abbots promote *Mae Chi* education as a policy, and the nuns are able to pass different levels of Pali examination. The Wat would provide financial rewards for the nuns – 1,000 baht for each level – the same amount awarded to the successful monk/novice.⁷⁰ When a *Mae Chi* passes Pali ix, the Wat where she resides would award her 10,000 Baht. More prosperous Wat might raise the amount to 30,000 Baht. In addition, the Pali and Dhamma Graduates Association of Thailand at Wat Sam Phraya give an award of 3,000 Baht and Wat Phra Dhammakaya 7,000 Baht to each successful candidate. Both institutes organize and celebrate the event in honor of the recipient monks, novices, and nuns. In the case of the Pali and Dhamma Graduates Association of Thailand at Wat Sam Phraya and Wat Phra Dhammakaya, the recipients, whether monks/novices or nuns, receive the same amount of funding. Some Wat where the nuns reside also celebrate the event; several senior monks also offer more financial awards. On the other hand, *Mae Chi* nuns in some Wat do not receive any award when they pass the Pali tests. According to one nun, “the Wat never gave an educational funding or award.”⁷¹ An administrator of a Wat with nun residents said in the interview: “*Mae Chi* education is something we wish to have. It is the same with education for monks and novices. Once they enter the ascetic world, they need to study. The Wat offers education in Dhamma and Pali studies and wants to encourage the nuns to go on to university.”⁷² This corresponded with the statement by a *Mae Chi* nun who completed her Pali ix at Wat Paknam: “...after the

⁶⁹ *Mae Chi* No. 21, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁷⁰ *Mae Chi* No. 22, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁷¹ *Mae Chi* No. 23, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁷² Somdet Phramaha Rajamangalacarya (Chuang Varapañño), abbot of Wat Paknam Phasicharoen, 26 September 2010, interview.

completion of Pali ix, Somdet Phramaha Rajamangalacarya (Chuang Varapañño) offered an educational grant of 50,000 baht, and the Association of Luang Pho Paknam's Followers another 5,000 baht."⁷³ Again, "the Wat supports *Mae Chi* education by offering grants to *Mae Chi* nuns who pass the Pali and Dhamma studies each year. The amount of the grants is the same as that given to monks and novices."⁷⁴ However, some Wat are not financially equipped, and accordingly they "do not have any policy on awarding grants to *Mae Chi* nuns."⁷⁵

Abhidhamchotikavidyalai College, on the other hand, supports *Mae Chi* nuns with good scholastic achievements by providing textbooks, although no financial support is given. Savikasikkalai, however, offers two scholarships for *Mae Chi* nuns at a master's degree level to the completion of their studies, each worth 27,500 Baht per semester, and two scholarships at the undergraduate level to the completion of their studies, each worth 12,300 Baht. The number of scholarships varies according to the number of requests submitted to the committee of Sathira Thammasathan. In 2008, there were three *Mae Chi* students at Savikasikkalai Sathira Thammasathan in the master's degree program; one received a scholarship from Sathira Thammasathan.⁷⁶ The granting of scholarships by Savikasikkalai is made on a case-by-case basis; not every request is granted. In the case of Mahamakut Buddhist University, scholarships are given to monks, novices and nuns who study at the University at the undergraduate (1,000 Baht) and master's degree levels (3,000 Baht). Meanwhile, Mahapajapati Buddhist College, an undergraduate institution for *Mae Chi* nuns under the patronage of His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch, has available the Foundation of Mahapajapati Buddhist CollegeFund, H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri

⁷³ Dr. Mae ChiDuangphorn Khamhomkul, permanent faculty member, Mahapajapati Buddhist College, second Pali ix graduate in Thailand, 18 December, interview.

⁷⁴ Phra Dharmasudhi (Peer Sujato), chief abbot of Wat Mahathat YuwanratcharangsaritRatchaworamahawihan, Bangkok, 17 December 2012, interview.

⁷⁵ Phra Srivajramuni (Vajra thitamedho), Assistant Abbot, Wat Chanasongkhram Ratchaworamahawihan, Pali studies supervisor, 18 December 2012, interview.

⁷⁶ *Mae Chi* Kanchana Triamthanachok, Sathira Thammasathan, doctoral student, MahachulalongkonrajavidyalayaUniversity, 10 August 2011, interview.

Sirindhorn's Scholarships, and other grants donated by the public through the Foundation. The condition that the Foundation has set for *Mae Chi* nuns or laywomento be eligible for the fund is that they must follow the rule of chanting and praying on a regular basis.

With regard to the management of Pali studies by Mahamakut Buddhist University, between 2008 and 2010 the University was allocated "200,000 Baht from the national budget and 100,000 Baht in 2011. These budgets were allocated to the project for the maintenance of arts and culture (Pali studies) in the University's budgetary plan. They were meant for managing *Mae Chi* education."⁷⁷ Thammasat University offers a master's degree program in Buddhist studies that is attended by a number of *Mae Chi* and monk students. There is a fund for monks called the Fund for Buddha Image Making, 60 Years of Thammasat. The fund was established from the remaining money after the completion of the Buddha Image to celebrate the 60 thanniversary of Thammasat. It was intended only for student monks and novices of the university. *Mae Chi* nuns and laywomen may receive grants from the Bhikkhuni Voramai Kabilsingh Fund and occasionally from other private funds, such as the Royal Sports Club Fund. The persons eligible for these grants are student monks, student nuns, and lay students. There is no particular budget intended for *Mae Chi* nuns in the University plan, but grants are available for every student who passes the preliminary thesis requirements – each worth 8,000 Baht. At the same time, the university allocated budgets for various projects; for instance, in 2010, a budget of 100,000 Baht was allocated to hiring students as teaching assistants. In 2011, the instructors earmarked a fund of 10,000 Baht for their students. Two nuns were given the grant of 5,000 Baht each. Apart from these funds, *Mae Chi* nuns could receive assistance from other private sources that senior students obtained for their junior peers. Thammasat University tuition fees must be paid in full by monks and nuns alike. There is no exception. In some cases, followers of certain nuns might provide tuition fees for them. The nuns might also obtain grants from other senior monks. For instance, *Mae Chi* Nathahathai Chatthinnawat, a student

⁷⁷ Phrakhru Sutadharmakovid, 14 June 2011, interview.

in the master's degree program in Women Studies, received a scholarship from Somdet Phramaha Rajamangalacarya (Chuang Varapañño) Fund, the senior monk being the abbot of Wat Paknam Phasicharoen, Bangkok.⁷⁸ For Wat Mahathat Yuwaratcharangsarit, the Mahatatwitthayalai Foundation and Sisanphet Foundation have offered financial awards to *Mae Chi* nuns who pass Pali studies examination since 1989. In addition, the Wat also offers financial awards to *Mae Chi* nuns who pass Dhamma studies examination at each level.⁷⁹ Wat Yai Chaimongkhon, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, provides educational support to *Mae Chi* nuns to study in master's degree and doctoral programs after their completion of Pali ix.⁸⁰ Also, *Mae Chi* nuns who study at Sala Santisuk Center, where Pali studies are taught, receive subsidies from the fund of the former landowner who donated the land for the construction of the center. This fund was under the care of Mahamakutrajavidyalaya Foundation which provided financial support for *Mae Chi*. This center has received much support from the public nearby in the form of money and pre-packaged food.⁸¹

8. Conclusion⁸²

As has been discussed above, over the past ten years or so, Thai Buddhist nuns have been given more opportunity and greater support for higher education provided by the *Saṅgha*. Most of the nuns interviewed, who had a positive educational experience, reported that greater access to university education was open to them: "In more recent times, there have

⁷⁸ Assistant Professor Dr. Montri Suepduang, Chair of Master's Degree Program in Buddhist Studies, Department of Philosophy, Thammasat University, 13 August 2010, interview.

⁷⁹ Memorandum, Phra Rajasiddhimuni, Assistant Abbot, Wat Mahathat Yuwaratcharangsarit Ratchaworamahawihan, 7 August 2011, interview.

⁸⁰ *Mae Chi* Somkuan Thongdee, Wat Yai Chaimongkhon, Pali ix, 8 April 2012, interview.

⁸¹ *Mae Chi* No. 24, 5 August, interview.

⁸² Some of the findings in this research support the work of Professors Steven Collins and Justin McDaniel (2010): "*Buddhist 'nuns' (mae chi) and the teaching of Pali in contemporary Thailand*" *Modern Asian Studies* 44,6, pp. 1371-1408. While they focused on the perspective and experience of *Mae Chi* teachers, we are more concerned with the educational experience of *Mae Chi* students and education providers.

been more opportunity for *Mae Chi*, making it possible for a younger generation of nuns to get better access to learning.” One nun reported her experience: “People began to see that *Mae Chi* nuns are able and knowledgeable. The public and society accord us the same respect as monks and novices enjoy. Monks and novices, too, have accepted us as their peers.”⁸³ Another reported that “Education has contributed to the change in the public view on women. When we visit our family members, we are given a warm welcome. They prepare food for us and offer it in the same way as they would do to the monks. We give them blessings. They treat us like monks. They consider us as ascetics. When we go home, they will hardly let us do anything ourselves. We have to be very composed.”⁸⁴ Indeed, “in (some) communities the image of *Mae Chi* has considerably improved.”⁸⁵ Such views were in line with Phra Sigambhirayarn’s definition of *Mae Chi* as follows: “*Mae Chi* is an *Anāgārika* which means more than a *Pabbajita*, because a *Pabbajita* is a monk or novice, but an *Anāgārika* has a wider meaning; it means an ascetic.”⁸⁶ This shows that education has made *Mae Chi*’s role, in the eyes of the public, resemble that of the monk. Again, one needs to emphasize that the difference between monks and nuns remain in different local traditions and customs. Furthermore, technological advancement has brought greater educational opportunity to the Thai nuns, as educational materials have become more available and within easy reach. Over the past ten years or so, they have enjoyed greater support, e.g. in the form of grants and scholarships, as mentioned above. However, it cannot be denied that there is no complete equality between ascetics of different sexes, as monks still enjoy greater financial and other material supports, including lodgings, availability of grants and scholarships, and recognition of achievement in Pali studies. Therefore, one still hears about the report that “most nuns have to pay for the utilities and other expenses themselves.

⁸³ *Mae Chi* No. 26, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁸⁴ *Mae Chi* No. 27, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁸⁵ *Mae Chi* No. 28, 5 August 2010, interview.

⁸⁶ Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, MahachulalongkonrajavidyalayaUniversity, Assistant Abbot, Wat Pakham Phasicharoen, Bangkok, 8 August 2011, interview.

Sometimes, they have to leave the religious life to obtain the necessary money before they can return.”⁸⁷ Treatments at hospitals and on the public transport are also points of contention. (The treatments vary. Sometimes they have to pay; sometimes they do not.)

At the same time, both Buddhist Universities are able and willing to support *Mae Chi* with regard to admission, places of study, and grants/scholarships. A problem remains, however: the number of the *Mae Chi* candidates is still small, possibly because of the age issue. In the Thai tradition, men enter monkhood when they are still young, first as novices and as monks when they are 20. This is a matter of traditional practice as well as economic necessity. Children from poorer families that do not have much money still choose monkhood as the way to attain education. Therefore, boys can enter the *saṅgha* education system at an early age. On the other hand, there are few nuns who could do so. “There are very few nuns young enough to study at the undergraduate level and pursue further studies at the master’s degree level. Most tend to be much older.”⁸⁸ Another important reason is that nuns’ access to education also depends on the policy of individual abbots. Some Wat support *Mae Chi* education, while others do not. So, this study wishes to make two recommendations to promote a greater number of *Mae Chi* nuns to obtain access to university education provided by the *saṅgha*. These two recommendations should be implemented side by side as they lend support to each other as follows:

1. To create a new set of values and tradition: This is not meant for women only but for society at large. Attempts should be made to disseminate cases of *Mae Chi* nuns to show that a life of female ascetics can be beautiful. A system of ordination of young nuns should be put in place. (The *Mae Chi* ordination by Sathira Thammasathan is a good model and has proven to be quite successful.) This could be done parallel to the boy ordination

⁸⁷ *Mae Chi* No. 29, 5 August 2010, interview.

⁸⁸ Associate Professor Dr. Phra Sigambhirayarn, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, MahachulalongkonrajavidyalayaUniversity, Assistant Abbot, Wat Pakham Phasicharoen, Bangkok, 8 August 2011, interview.

system. Such practice should encourage more girls to study Dhamma and pursue higher learning. The objective of this recommendation is to provide a good image at a personal level as a basis for a good image at institutional level. (The promotion of the image of *Mae Chi* institutions should be made and publicized in such a way that Buddhist nuns do not simply observe the Eight Precepts but the 75 rules of *Sekhiyavatta* as well.)

2. To set up an infrastructure whereby girls who intend to pursue higher learning but lack necessary resources can do so through ordination. Publicity should be launched. Data should be kept at the central administration to facilitate coordination between the Wat, education institute, and funding agency in an effort to find suitable abodes for *Mae Chi* nuns. At present, data on education opportunity are not effectively managed, as the system is mostly conducted by word of mouth. In addition, emphasis should be made to “feed” the nuns with educational potentials who intend to pursue higher education. A system should be put in place to facilitate *Mae Chi* education.

Besides coordination and policy formulation at the institutional level, there is also an issue of recognition of the legal status of *Mae Chi*. Argument has been made concerning the lack of legality of the ascetic status of *Mae Chi* in that it has clearly and definitely led to several problems encountered by them. It has been argued that “if there is a law in place, the *Mae Chi* status will improve. Education will also improve with more social acceptance.”⁸⁹ Another supporting argument is that the legal recognition will help “*Mae Chi* to stand on their feet with a greater sense of security and confidence so that they can proceed further by themselves,”⁹⁰ thus freeing them from the ambiguity as to their ascetic status. Besides, opportunity should be made available for them to teach in public or private school as well as learning centers of various Wat after they have completed their education. A nun stated that “no opportunity is given for *Mae*

⁸⁹ Phra Theppariyattivimol, Rector, Mahamakut Buddhist University, 13 August 2010, interview.

⁹⁰ Phra Theppariyattivimol, Rector, Mahamakut Buddhist University, 13 August 2010, interview.

Chi to apply their knowledge to the good of society or learning centers. This seems to be the domain of the monk. The nuns will do the manual work as usual.”⁹¹ Phra Suthivararañāṇa (Phramaha Narong Cittasobhaṇo) mentioned that “the development of *Mae Chi* could be made by changing the name to “Master Chi” with a clear status. They should be equipped with education and training equal to those of the monks. They should be given the opportunity to be part of religious education and to help propagate Buddhism to young people at various education institutes and to the general public” (Channarong Boonnoon, B.E. 2551 [2008: 80]). Meanwhile, a large number of the nuns are not really interested to enter the education system because they feel they are too old or because “they are ordained to get away from *Dukkha*, not to get educated.”⁹²

When students of both sexes first studied at a Buddhist university, the initial reaction was not positive for fear that it would cause sexual impropriety. Based on its experience, the research team found that such co-education is beneficial to the learning process and classroom dynamics. With regard to bhikkhuni ordination, most nuns do not feel that it would help women to get access to education. One nun said that “it does not seem to have anything to do with education here.”⁹³ Another nun who represented many of her colleagues said that “For me, to be a nun is enough. *Mae Chi* practice does not in any way stop us from attaining the fruits of *Magga* or *Nibbana*.”⁹⁴ Therefore, most nuns do not feel compelled to demand the presence of bhikkhuni or their revival.⁹⁵ This paper shows that, historically speaking, the lack of equality in the access to higher education provided by the *saṅgha* is not merely an issue of sex inequality but rather an inequality between people with good economic status and the socially disadvantaged.

⁹¹ *Mae Chi* No. 30, from the questionnaire.

⁹² *Mae Chi* No. 31, from the questionnaire.

⁹³ *Mae Chi* No. 32, 16 July 2010, interview.

⁹⁴ *Mae Chi* No. 33, 5 August 2010, interview.

⁹⁵ cf. Gosling, David L., “The Changing Roles of Thailand’s Lay Nuns (*Mae Chi*)”, p. 136.

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