

A Rejoinder to Eiji Murashima

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ABSTRACT—Professor Murashima’s comments show how different interpretations are possible from the same documents. I continue to argue that the sources, though far from clear, show that the principal spark of conflict was military conscription, and that the issues over the coronation ceremony occurred later.

I did not intend my article to become a debate with Professor Murashima, but rather to serve as an invitation to fellow scholars to engage the evidence to determine the dating of and reasons for Srivichai’s first arrest.¹ Nonetheless, I see two main differences between Murashima’s argument and mine. Firstly, Murashima differentiates Srivichai’s first conflict from his first arrest, arguing that Srivichai’s troubles began with the *rachaaphisek* incident in 1910-1911. Secondly, although Murashima agrees with me that Srivichai was first arrested because of the ordination incident circa 1915, he attributes the primary cause to a violation of the 1913 Ordination Act; Murashima disagrees with me over the relevance of the Military Conscription Act. The crux of Murashima’s argument against mine is threefold, centering on: 1. the dating of the *rachaaphisek* coronation ceremonies; 2. the chronology of charges and punishments described in the Sangha Council and *sangharaja*’s findings; and 3. the apparent absence of references to military conscription in the Sangha Council’s finding.

Murashima is somewhat disingenuous regarding the dating of the *rachaaphisek* ceremony. He makes no effort to refute my argument that the term *rachaaphisek* refers not only to King Rama VI’s 1910 ascension and 1911 coronation ceremonies, but also refers to his coronation anniversary of 2 December 1918. I agree ascension anniversaries (*chatmongkol*) were held through 1916. However Murashima ignores my main point, namely that the 1918 coronation anniversary was more grandiose and was referred to as *rachaaphisek*, thereby opening up the possibility—and even likelihood—that the *rachaaphisek* ceremony mentioned in the Sangha Council’s findings refers to the 1918 anniversary celebration.

Reconciling the account of the Sangha Council with the dating of the individual events poses problems for all scholars, including Murashima and myself.² The Sangha Council was presented with a list of eight charges against Srivichai; however the

¹ Because my article focused on Srivichai’s first arrest, I will not comment on Professor Murashima’s explanation for the cause of his 1935-1936 detention in Bangkok.

² The BT 28 July 1920 account presents a complete translation of the Sangha Council and *sangharaja* reports.

chronology of individual charges and their relationship to specific punishments are ambiguous. The Sangha Council divided the eight charges into two groups of five and three charges respectively. They viewed the first five as charges for which Srivichai had already been punished, writing “Phra Sri Vijai has admitted charges Nos. 1 to 5. But he has already been punished, and there is no need to give a new decision” (BT 28 July 1920). Accordingly, they concentrated their attention on the final three charges.

Murashima appears to have focused on the *sangharaja*’s remark that “the punishment should not be made at one time for all the offences lumped together,” evidently referring to Srivichai’s removal from administrative office and his extended period of confinement under temple arrest at Wat Phrathat Haripunchai (BT 28 July 1920).³ Because the coronation charge is the fourth in the order of these first five charges, Murashima assumes the coronation incident took place before his extended temple confinement, dismissing the possibility that the coronation in question was an anniversary celebration. If we accept Murashima’s view that *rachaaphisek* refers to the original coronation of 1910-1911 and is the fourth incident in the sequential ordering of the charges, we should conclude that the ordination and first arrest took place circa 1908-1910. We would then face the question: what law had Srivichai violated then to justify his arrest? However, Murashima agrees that there was no law in effect that would justify arresting Srivichai at that time.

Unlike the vast majority of Srivichai’s biographers who have assumed the first incident occurred around 1908 to 1910, Murashima agrees with me that Srivichai was first arrested circa 1915. However, rather than considering the possibility that the *rachaaphisek* in question took place in 1918, Murashima engages in contortionist logic by differentiating a first conflict from a first arrest. He inverts the longstanding chronology which has invariably begun with Srivichai’s controversial ordination, arguing that the *rachaaphisek* incident happened first and was only later followed by the ordination ceremony. However, none of Srivichai’s biographers have ever suggested that the coronation issue marked the beginning of Srivichai’s problems; indeed this incident is not even mentioned in the BT correspondent’s account (7 June 1920). I am making no such radical re-ordering of events. I accept the prevailing consensus, namely the ordination ceremony came first and the *rachaaphisek* incident occurred later; I am simply changing the dating of the ordination ceremony from the period of Rama V to the period of Rama VI.

Furthermore, in prioritizing the *rachaaphisek* incident, Murashima is engaging in an anachronistic reading of the present back into the past, implying that Srivichai had committed *lèse majesté* with resonances paralleling modern-day Thailand. To begin to

³ Murashima and I actually appear to be referring to different arrests. By first arrest I am referring to the first time Srivichai was arrested and summoned to appear before the monastic heads of Lii district and Lamphun province respectively. Srivichai was detained under multiple temple arrests prior to his investigation in Bangkok in 1920. Professor Murashima is evidently referring to the later extended period of Srivichai’s confinement at Wat Phrathat Haripunchai, which he dates as occurring in 1915-1917; he apparently views it as Srivichai’s first arrest. As yet no hard evidence verifies the dates of his Haripunchai detention. We only know that Srivichai had been demoted and his Haripunchai detention had ended by 1919 [2462] (e.g. BT 7 June 1920).

support this argument, at a minimum Murashima should provide evidence regarding upcountry participation in Rama VI's coronation in 1910-1911 as I have for the 1918 celebration. Given Siamese-Lanna relations at the beginning of Rama VI's reign—to say nothing of tensions within the Siamese court itself—I find it unlikely the Siamese court sought to force the Lanna regions to demonstrate loyalty to the Siamese king. The *sangharaja* himself defended Srivichai, noting: “If the observance was made compulsory, that would be a mistake for it would mean no honour to the King” (see my article footnote no. 50).

My solution to this apparent conundrum in the chronology and attendant punishment/s is to highlight the *sangharaja*'s own words writing “all five offences, We think, have not been committed all at the same time.” He continues: “truth to say, it seems that the suspicion of the officials was that Phra Sri Vijai was a ‘*phi bun*,’ but as they could not make any definite charge on that score, they found other alleged offences to put together to afford some reason for punishing him, and to get him put in confinement” (BT 28 July 1920). Thus the coronation charge was likely one of those tacked on post facto and not one for which explicit grounds were found to punish Srivichai.

Murashima considers the Ordination Act of 1913 to be the legal justification of Srivichai's arrest and denies the relevance of the Military Conscription Act, arguing that if draft evasion was important, it should be explicitly listed among the eight charges. However, modern historians typically place texts in contexts, studying them not only for presences, but also absences. The Siamese *sangharaja* and Sangha Council were aware of the importance of maintaining a distinction between the sacred and secular realms. The Military Conscription Act provoked broader controversy because it was shifting the balance of power between the state and the monastic order, forcing both the king and the *sangharaja* to issue public statements on the importance of national defense (see Bowie 2014: 724-725). Nonetheless, in his ruling, the *sangharaja* repeatedly noted that if civil officials were issuing orders rather than monastic officials, “it could not be counted that he was in the wrong” (BT 28 July 1920; my article footnote no. 50). As a secular law, one would not expect to find it explicitly listed among the charges against Srivichai.⁴

Although I first drew attention to the 1913 Ordination Act in my 2014 article, I do not believe it can be considered as the primary reason for Srivichai's arrest. I agree with Murashima that many northern monks were beginning to follow Siamese practices voluntarily. However, the 1913 Ordination Act could not provide a legal basis for his arrest because the 1902 Sangha Act was not yet enforced in the north (see my article footnote no. 33).⁵ In pointing to the Military Conscription Act, I am not arguing Srivichai was deliberately ordaining “monks so that they might escape military service.” I am arguing secular authorities were concerned that youths were seeking ordination in order to avoid military conscription at a time in Thai history when the government was

⁴ Nonetheless, as noted in my article, both Consul Wood and Phra Wimolayaanamuni make the connection with the military.

⁵ Murashima states that the 1913 Ordination Act went into effect in the north on 9 August 1913, but I have not been able to confirm that dating. Furthermore, Murashima ignores the reasons for punishing ordainers includes ordaining *khon dong haam* (Clause No. 12).

concerned to establish a trained standing army.⁶ The Sangha Council's own report notes: “**civil officials** called a meeting in Amphur Lii to acquaint them with the regulations for the control of the priests and the **civil law** affecting them” (BT 28 July 1920, emphasis added). With which civil law that affected control of the monastic order were civil officials so concerned if not the Military Conscription Act?

Neither Murashima's nor my arguments fit all the snippets of evidence neatly. However, I subscribe to the principle of Occam's Razor, namely the simplest explanation is usually the best one. Until further evidence becomes available, my argument regarding the role of the Military Conscription Act fits the available evidence more simply and more completely. I join with Professor Murashima in his confidence that hitherto unexplored archives will continue to yield puzzle pieces that will further enhance our understanding of Srivichai's consequential life.

⁶ Murashima has mistranslated “*baj anuyaat*” in the first charge against Srivichai as “appointment letter of preceptor.” It is more accurately translated as the “permission document” or “license.” This document was not a letter appointing an individual monk as a preceptor, but rather the official authorization giving permission for ordination ceremonies to proceed. This authorization was supposed to have been issued by the “Kromakarn and Nai Amphur,” both secular officials (BT 7 June 1920).