

## THE EDUCATION OF THE THAI SANGHA: CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION EFFORTS

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### ABSTRACT

The Thai clergy has played a key role in education from ancient times right up to the present. During the Sukhothai period until the reign of King Rama V, the clergy has played an important role in providing education with the support from the state. During that period, Thais' education were mostly conducted within the temple's wall where monks assumed the role of teachers. The teaching and learning process was carried out in a more or less casual manner and was aimed to enable students to be able to read and write. Those who were educated from the temple were considered as valuable civilians who had the required knowledge that the state greatly needed in order to recruit them into the civil service. When Thailand's political landscape transitioned to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the state took it upon itself to manage education for the general civilians, while allowing the clergy to only be responsible for dhamma studies for monks. As a result, the clergy faced problems in the management of learning that was inconsistent with changes in the social landscape by forcing monks and novices to study dharma based on traditional values. However, education based on traditional dharma teachings did not inspire confidence among the monks and novices and strived to study on more realistic worldly subjects. It eventually prompted the state to cooperate with the clergy to re-organize the education system with the enactment of various Education Acts. As a result, a positive change began to emerge on the clergy's education system.

## Introduction

Education is an extremely important process in the development of its population which will be able to adapt them to the changes in the era of globalization. The management of education should be dynamically adapted to suit the economic, social, political, and cultural needs of each country, which will effectively create progress for its society and the nation.<sup>1</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> National Education Plan (2002-2016) focuses on human development as its main goal, as it realizes the importance of human development and the quality of people based on the reasoning that a country's population are the causes, factors, and outcomes of a country's development. Its main objectives is to develop a human being to be physically, intellectually, mentally and socially complete. It should be a society of wisdom and learning, comprising of having a broad vision, far-sightedness, good intentions, and self-discipline. Always yearning for knowledge and ready to learn at all times, all of which are factors that will be the foundation for helping individuals to be able to realize happiness and prosperity, both for oneself and for the greater public.<sup>2</sup>

The present education management aims to improve the quality of education in order to achieve the objective of developing youth to be knowledgeable, thoughtful, skilled, capable, possess good behavior, socially responsible, and good health, so as to be able to apply their knowledge and experiences for the betterment of oneself and society as a whole. According to Section 8 (2) of the Education Act, B.E. 2542, requires that society be involved in education management which includes families, communities, communal organizations, local administrative organizations, private organizations, professional organizations, religious institutions, business and social enterprises, and other social institutions.<sup>3</sup> The openness in the educational management of institutions according to the Education Act, B.E. 2542, agrees to include the education provided by the clergy. In the past, the Thai education system originated from temples, where it was considered a crucial educational premise that contributed towards developing the nation's citizens to possess the required knowledge, competence, morality, and ethics, to be able to have a career and live a peaceful life.<sup>4</sup>

The clergy had set up an educational curriculum for first year ordained youngsters whereby they must study to become novice dharma scholars, known as the Nawakaphum class. In the subsequent years, if the monks possess faith to continue their studies on the principles of Buddhism, they will progress to intermediate and advance dharma scholars, known as the Matchimaphum and Theraphum curriculum respectively. In these three levels, His Holiness Somdej Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phra Yachirayan Warorot classified selected teachings from the Tipitaka, from the most simple and advanced to the most difficult teachings which has been the main educational core of the Sangha for a long time. As for those who wished to become more profound in dharma, there was also the Pali language course which consisted of Level 3-9 theology courses. Graduates from these courses would have the ability to translate Buddhist scriptures. Those who are able to pass Level 3-4 must first pass the novice dharma scholar exams, those who will be qualified to take the Level 5-6 exam must first pass the intermediate dharma scholar exams, while Level 7-9 requires a qualification of passing the advance dharma scholar exams. This Sangha's educational level has long been established

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Academic Affairs, Ministry of Education, *The National Education Act, B.E. 2542, and The Analysis of its Essence*, (Bangkok: Religious Affairs Publishing House, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Sukhon Purivat, *The Design of Teaching*, (Bangkok: Ramkhamhaeng University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Boonsaud Utsa, "Satisfaction Towards the Management of Education The Opinions of Parents of Students," *Pitchayarat Journal 1* (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Intha Siriwan, "A Study of the Guidelines for the Development of Education of the Clergy," *Journal of Education, An Introduction*2 (2017).

since ancient times. Buddhist monks who have studied along this curriculum will possess the necessary knowledge and can then apply and disseminate the Lord Buddha's teachings correctly with backup evidence that can be referenced from the Tripitaka. Prominent and well-known monks that are proficient in the Pali language include His Holiness Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and His Holiness Panyananda Bhikkhu, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The Thai clergy have played an important role in educational management from the past to the present even though society has changed significantly through the years. At present, education management has become much more segregated, which as a result, reduced the role of the clergy. This article will discuss the role of the clergy in educational management from the past to the present. It will attempt to demonstrate the thriving era of the clergy's educational management, as well as, the era of its reduced role, and the perseverance and improvement to the education management system of the clergy stemming from social stimuli, especially the effect it has on the learners and the current efforts to preserve the traditional teaching system of the clergy. Finally, the article will also present the efforts of the clergy who are attempting to solve the issues that affect the clergy-based education curriculum.

### **Clergy Education of the past**

Education in Buddhism is conducted in accordance with the *Trasikkha*, i.e. adhering to Buddhism as the main core, aiming to develop an understanding so as to be able to implement, maintain, and propagate the teachings of Buddhism which is a way of existence according to the principles of Dharma and Discipline. Later, it was split into *Kanthathura* and *Vipasanathura*, which emphasizes on theory and practice respectively. Studying *Kanthathura* utilizes the Tripitaka as the foundation and using the scriptures to explain the Tipitaka, has long been a tool throughout until the present. The study of this system is known as *Phra Pariyat Dhamma*.<sup>6</sup>

In the Sukhothai period, the state and the temples were united as the center of the community, where various state and temple activities employ teachings to the community in itself. Subjects that were taught consisted of the Pali and Thai languages, as well as, basic general subjects. The two main schooling locations consisted of temples and the palace. Temples were used to teach the common people and children of the nobles. The main teacher would consist of a monk who specialized in the Pali language. Learning the Pali language at that time was highly popular and could be found generally everywhere. Anyone who was proficient in dharma discipline would be considered as a learned man or philosopher. Another prominent schooling location was the royal institute, which was mostly dedicated to teaching royalty and children of government officials. Therefore, Buddhist temples were considered as the main centers of learnings since the Sukhothai period.

During the Ayutthaya period, general education was still centered in the area of the temple. The general population would take their children to the monks for their studies. The monks would also readily accept the children as they need disciples to serve them. The disciples are then educated in religion and learn to read and write Thai and Pali accordingly. This customary practice resulted in temples becoming centers of learning where monks would assume the role of teachers, in which they would train and teach their students to the best of their abilities. Schools at that time were different from schools in the present era. There were

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<sup>5</sup> Arun Vejsuwan, *The Role of Buddhist Promulgators in Thai Society*, (Bangkok: Phrae Pittaya, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Phra Rajaworamuni (Prayoon Thammachitto), *The Clergy and the National Education Act*, (Bangkok: Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, 1955).

no specific building that was dedicated as a place to study. Monks would mostly conduct their teachings in convenient places that they can find, such as pavilions or their own dwelling cubicles. Teachings of the Phra Pariyat Dhamma for the clergy during the Ayutthaya period would be classified into three main categories; starting from the novice bar which concentrates on the learning of Sutra, Vinaya lessons for the intermediate bar, and philosophic aspects of the Lord Buddha's teachings (Abhidharma) for the advanced bar.<sup>7</sup>

Education of the clergy during the Thonburi period did progressed much or changed significantly in any way. Due to the loss of Ayutthaya to the Burmese forces caused much damage to the country. Several prominent philosophers lost their lives and were also forcibly taken to Burma. The most important issue to consider at that particular period was to restore the country as soon as possible, prepare for future Burmese attacks, and to source food to feed the starving and impoverished people. It was an urgent task above all and the general population were more concerned with living than the education of their children. But for nobles and officials, education was still considered as essential which can be seen from when King Rama II was still a child, in which his father, King Rama I, was still an ordinary civil servant serving under King Taksin, was sent off to study at the Phra Wanratthong School at the Bang Wa Yai Temple. Conditions at that time was not conducive for general villagers to receive an education.<sup>8</sup>

In the early Rattanakosin period, even though there were setting up of schools, but there were no objectives to separate the schools from the temples. In terms of general education, temples were still considered as a place to study with monks assuming the role of teachers. There were no specific places for teaching general subjects. Studying was not compulsory, and teachings would concentrate on what is being stated in the textbooks. Traditional teachings would focus more on literature and that conform to established patterns and traditions with no natural or scientific researches. The main purpose of such education management is to focus on providing students with the ability to read and write the Thai language fluently and proficiently and have a profound knowledge and understanding of the principles of Dharma and Discipline.<sup>9</sup>

### **The role of monks in educational management in the reign of King Rama V**

During the reign of King Rama V, His Royal Highness had a clear determination to preserve Buddhism. In terms of the education of the clergy, His Highness realized that in the past, the study of the Phra Pariyat Dhamma had always received patronage by past kings and high-ranking officials, as it was considered the duty of Thai kings. However, the education of the clergy during past eras did not have a clear systematic pattern which contrasted to the Phra Pariyat Dhamma examinations to test knowledge of the Lord Buddha's teachings, where it consisted of several strict and cumbersome procedures. It was clearly evident that it was self-contradictory. It was, therefore, His Royal Highness' idea to reform the clergy's education system to become more definitive.

His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, or King Rama V, also expressed his concern regarding the promotion of education of the clergy to have a more definitive format and

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<sup>7</sup> Phra Maha Suwan Suwanno, "The Sangha Administration System that Affects the Education Administration of the Clergy," *Mahamakut Graduate School Journal* 16 (2018): 183-193.

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Interior, *Prince Damrong Rajanupab and His Administrative Works*, (Bangkok: Local, Department of the Interior, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> Phra Maha Janya Suthiyano, *The Role of the Buddhist Institution and Educational Reform*, (Bangkok: Office of Education Policy and Planning, Office of the National Education Commission, 2006).

established the Sangha Higher Education Institution for the first time, namely, the Mahamakut Buddhist University and the Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University. in order to become an educational institution of higher teachings for both the Dhammayuttika Nikaya and Maha Nikaya orders. His Royal Highness personally supported these two educational institutions by granting his own properties and expenses for both colleges annually. In addition, His Royal Highness also promoted the study of Phra Pariyat Dharma by establishing schools in various temples throughout the kingdom and hold annual examinations of the Lord Buddha's teachings. In addition, His Royal Highness also supported nobles, civil servants, and monks, to set up Phra Pariyat Dhamma schools in both city and township temples.<sup>10</sup>

The educational awakening of the country began when King Mongkut, or King Rama IV, studied English and Western academia from American missionaries. Moreover, His Royal Highness was also determined for his son to receive a western education. This was considered as the beginning of the first formalized educational management system in which His Majesty set up a royal-sponsored school within the Grand Palace's grounds, in addition to, setting up of 4 more schools which was to be supervised by the Department of Home Affairs, namely 1) the Royal Military Academy at Suan Kularb Palace, 2) the Cartography School, 3) His Majesty's Royal Son's School, and 4) the Phra Pariyat Dharma School. Later on, the Phra Pariyat Dharma School was moved from the shack in front of Wat Phra Sri Rattana Satsadaram, which was used as a place to teach dharma, and relocated to Wat Mahathat in 1889, and renamed it, "Mahathat Wittayalai".<sup>11</sup> The establishment of various schools resulted in a huge expansion in education. As the schools proved to be highly popular among civil servants who enrolled their children and resulted in reduced efficiency. Therefore, during the reign of King Rama V, His Majesty graciously allowed the Suan Kularb Royal Academy to accept students to study Thai and English introductory subjects and qualify them to become civil servants. As for students who desired to become military officers, they were to be trained in specific military subjects. As there was a tremendous need for a large number of knowledgeable civilians to enter the civil service, His Majesty had to eventually change the Suan Kularb Royal Academy from a military officer school to a civilian school in order to train those who will be entering into the civil service. It was a basic guideline for solving problems in preparing civilians for the service of the country at that time due to the shortage of knowledgeable civil servants. Consequently, education was later expanded to the general public for the first time by the establishment of the Wat Mahannaparam School for the general public to have access to education. The establishment of a school for the people in the temple was in line with the royal initiative of King Rama V, who wanted monks to be equipped with knowledges of books and numbers so as to teach monks, novices, and temple disciples. It was decreed that there would be teachers teaching Thai literature and arithmetic in every monastery.<sup>12</sup>

The encouragement of monks to play an important role in education management allowed education to be dispersed thoroughly to various parts of the country. However, the construction of schools with a limited budget, prompted King Mongkut to realize that temples or religious institutions can be alternate organizations that can be responsible for providing education to the general citizens as well. This is due to the fact that since monks have long been responsible for teaching and educating villagers since ancient times, it is thus considered

<sup>10</sup> Phra Rajawaramuni (Prayoon Thammachitto), *The Clergy and the National Education Act*, (Bangkok : Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> Phra Brom Kunaporn (Por Aor Payutto). *"Kalanukrom" Buddhism in a Civilized World*, (Bangkok : Mahaphant Fiber Cement Public Company Limited, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Wuttichai Moonsilp, *Educational Reform During the Reign of King Rama V*, (Bangkok: The Social Science Association of Thailand, 1973).



as an center for learning for the general public where most of them would use the temple's pavilion as a teaching place. While some temples with good income, worshipers who are more well-off economically can contribute towards building a school within the temple's compound. It can be clearly seen that presently, there are several schools that are located within the temple's property. Therefore, centers of learning still remained within the temples. The part that is constantly changing is the establishment of a new curriculum for Thai citizens to be able to read and write and calculate numbers. The temples also managed this aspect by giving knowledgeable monks to assume the role of teachers.<sup>13</sup>

As the temple is considered as a place to educate villagers, monks, therefore, play an important role in both education and ethical matters. This means providing education so that the villagers can learn to be able to read and write and at the same time teach the virtues in accordance to ancient Buddhist scriptures as well. Therefore, when monks play an important role in both educating and moral concepts, the temple inevitably becomes the center of education and expanding to become the center of various other aspects, such as a welfare home, a nursing home, a lodging for traveler's, a meeting place for the surrounding villages. a venue to conduct social events, a place to mediate disputes, a center of arts and culture, a warehouse, and a center for community administration.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of education management for monks and novices, Somdej Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phraya Vajirayan Warorot had the idea to improve the teaching of Dharma and Vinaya to be in the Thai language for teaching monks and novices at the Bowonniwet Vihara Temple for the first time since taking charge of the administration of Bowonniwet Vihara Temple in 1892. His Holiness prescribed a curriculum for teaching monks and novices to learn Buddhism on topics like dharma principles, the Lord Buddha's history, dharma discipline, as well as, the ability to compose and edit dharma queries. When His Holiness saw that the teaching of Dharma and Vinaya in Thai yielded good results making monks and novices become more knowledgeable as it was not difficult to learn, he decided to expand this approach to other monks and novices as well. In 1945, when a new military conscription law began to take effect in Thailand, all monks were exempted, while exemption for novices was reserved for novices who were proficient in the Dharma. The government requested that the Sangha help determine the criteria for proficient novices. His Holiness, therefore, decreed a new curriculum to determine a novice's proficiency and later improved it into becoming the "Dharma Lord" for general beginner monks and novices (i.e. newly ordained). The curriculum received royal approval on March 27, 1911, and the first central examination was organized in October of the same year by using Bowonniwet Vihara Temple, Mahathat Temple, and Benchamabophit Temple, as the venues for the exams. Initially, the first examination consisted of 3 subjects, namely, Dharmaviphak in Nawakowat, composing and solving dharma riddles, and translation of the Magahi language specifically tales stated in the Dhammapadatthakathā. In 1912, His Holiness further made improvements to the curriculum so that it can be more accessible and suitable for general monks and novices. The curriculum was classified into 2 categories, namely, the normal course, studying the subject of Dharma, the history of the Lord Buddha, and the ability to correct Dharma queries. The advanced course, added the translation of the Dhammapadatthakathā, Pali grammar and relationships, and the disciplines that requires exams for both the normal and advanced learners. In 1913, His Holiness made another revision to the curriculum by adding the Kihi dharma category, for the benefit of a secular life should

<sup>13</sup> Phra Maha Janya Suthiyano, *The Role of the Buddhist Institution and Educational Reform*, (Bangkok: Office of Education Policy and Planning, Office of the National Education Commission, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Thanaphon Somwang, *The Sangha Institution and Thai Society : The Considerations of Por Aor Payutto* (2018).

the monks and novices need to retire from the clergy for some reason. It was called a third-class Dharma scholar. The new discipline proved very popular. In addition, during the reign of King Rama VI, the education of the clergies received tremendous improvement, bringing in different levels of Dharma scholars and becoming predecessors of the teachings as well, that is, the third-class Dharma scholars becoming predecessors for the primary level (Levels 1-2-3), second-class Dharma scholars as the predecessors for the secondary level (Levels 4-5-6), and the first-class Dharma scholars, the predecessors for the advanced level (Levels 7-8-9), collectively known as “Plien Tham”, abbreviated as P.T. as it appears in the present.<sup>15</sup>

It can be seen that during the reign of King Rama V and VI, the clergy played a huge role in the management of education, both in the form of educational management for the general public and for monks and novices. It can be considered as the period when the clergies' education in the form of Phra Phariyat Dharma flourished, where young monks and novices flocked from the countryside into the cities to receive educational opportunities. The reason that the clergy had been given such a significant role was due to the good relationship and perspective between the king and the clergy.

### **The clergy and the reduced role in education management for the people**

When King Chulalongkorn died in 1910, it marked the end of the reign of King Rama V. The idea of a standard nationalized education where the issue of education management of the temple and state must be separated. The state was unilaterally responsible for the general and higher education of the masses. improvements and changes were made with the establishment of several universities, colleges, and schools, throughout the whole country. Major developments were also made to the curriculums in accordance with modern technology. On the other hand, while modern academic education for monks and novices which began more than a decade ago was halted. The clergy were assigned to give up their roles in organizing education for the general public and was restricted to organize the study of the original Dharma teachings for only monks in the temples. The separation of educational management between the clergy and the state was a period of stagnation in the management of the clergy. Even prominent educational institutions, such as the Mahamakut Buddhist University and the Mahathat University, also known as the Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, witnessed a slow down in their education management roles. There were no further development projects. Every new projects and plans for national education since 1913 made no reference to the monks, temples, Phra Pariyat Dhamma, or the Buddhachakra.<sup>16</sup>

Carrying out education management of the clergy in the absence of dynamic leaders resulted in the stagnation of dharma studies where it did not comply with social changes. Consequently, the values among the youth, monks, and novices towards the study of dharma was greatly reduced. Monks and novices became insecure about the Phra Pariyat Dharma teachings and shifted their focus to studying general subjects (Somsak Bunpu, M.P.A.) In addition, the management of the clergy also lacked unity, for example, such as the Dharma and Pali Department of the Phra Pariyat Dharma was directly responsible by the clergy, while the adult studies directly reported to the Department of Non-Formal Education. This situation caused several problems, such as inefficiency in educational management, confusion among the students, as well as a conflict of different opinions between senior monks who were

<sup>15</sup> Phra Rajavaramuni (Prayut payutto), *Education of the Clergy: Problems That Are Waiting for a Solution*. (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation 1938).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

administrator for the clergy's education. They viewed that only the study of the Dharma and Pali of the Phra Pariyat Dharma was the only legitimate educational system for monks and novices which should be kept intact and unchanged. In addition, the senior monks did not agree with monks and novices turning to study modern academia as it will increase the number of them leaving the monkhood. While on the other hand, the new generation of monks view that, the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma scriptures should only preserve the essential contents, namely the dharma and vinaya. Improvements and changes should be made to the curriculum and teaching methods that are appropriate and suitable for the changing times, in particular, it should give monks and novices the opportunity to study modern academia as well so as to enhance their ability to practice religion effectively.

The management of the dharma studies lacks comprehensive supervision from the clergy. In general, the clergy are only responsible for examinations or evaluations and are not responsible for the management of education, which was shifted to become the burden of various schools which are located in the temple or localities. This resulted in the monks who used to manage local religious matter to lose their sense of purpose and a clear direction, as well as, the loss of capital and budget and the incentive for educational management. Even schools that greatly cared about the management of education could not conduct the studies well and some even had to stumble or give up. In regard to the inadequate provision of religious education services especially in the rural areas, the clergy would only look at education vertically with special interest given to the number of exam candidates for the highest order. This situation has caused significant problems to follow, for example, the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma scriptures not being widely spread throughout the many temples especially in the rural areas which does not even teach the lowest class. Monks and novices who want to study would flock from the countryside into cities and towns in search of a place to study. In terms of the curriculum, it was also found that the religious studies curriculum was dispersed, incomplete, and in many ways, scattered in an unsystematic manner, with no common axis whether in terms of policies, objectives, project plans, or administration, as well as a clear definitive curriculum.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Sangha's concern regarding the Clergy University on the study of Phra Pariyat Dharma**

The clergy's educational management were in a state of continual stagnation especially after the 1932 administrative change. The Sangha did not wish to see a continuous sluggishness and, therefore, initiated an educational improvement scheme of the clergy by adhering to the royal initiative of King Rama V as a stimulus. This can be seen from members of the Mahamakut Buddhist University, which consisted of His Holiness Somdej Phra Krom Luang Wachirayanawong Ongsakolmahasangkharinayok, who was the chairman of the board, which established an institution of higher learning of the clergy, known as the Mahamakut Rajavitayalai Education Council of the Buddhist University of Thailand on December 30, 1945, according to the order of the Mahamakut Rajavithi Education Council. Therefore, it was considered that the Mahamakut Rajavitayalai Education Council was the first higher education institution of the clergy which provided education in the form of a university. In other words, the Mahamakut Rajavitayalai Education Council was the first Buddhist or monastic university in Thailand.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Phra Maha Suwan Suwanno. "The Sangha Administration System that Affects the Education Administration of the Clergy," *Mahamakut Graduate School Journal* 16 (2018): 183-193.

<sup>18</sup> Mahamakut Buddhist University, *Statement on the Affairs of the Conditions of Education of Mahamakut Buddhist University under the Royal Patronage of His Majesty the King, between 1942-1971*, (Phra Nakhon: Buddha Upatham Printing, 1972), 1-2.



Monastic education under the Mahamakut Rajavitayalai Education Council went through a continuous improvement process, both in terms of the curriculum where it was adapted to meet the needs of monks and novices, as well as, paying attention to the concerns of the senior monks who were worried that novices who did not pay much attention to the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma scriptures, especially the Pali language. Improvement to the curriculum and subjects of the Mahamakut University Council with His Holiness Somdej Phra Krom Luang Wachirayanawong Ongsakolmahasangkharaparinayok as the chairman of the committee, was carried out in the form of preserving the study of the Lord Buddha's teachings especially the Pali language. This can be seen from specifying the qualifications of those who will study at Mahamakut Buddhist University, must have obtained a minimum qualification of a Level 4 dharma scholar or above. The minimum qualifications more or less helped lessened the Sangha Council's concerns about the reduced number of dharma learners. Therefore, it can be considered that the management of the clergy's university education was able to respond to the needs of both the students who wanted to have an educational institution that would be able to provide opportunities for study that will be able to make their lives progress to a certain extent, while at the same time, respond to the objective of the Sangha Council who desired to have monks and novices study the Phra Pariyat Dharma voluntarily.

However, even though the educational management of the Buddhist university was a good articulation between the learners and the Sangha Council, but the general consensus of the Sangha still adhered to the idea that "the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma, in particular, Dharma and Pali, is the only legitimate education system for monks and novices." Therefore, the education management by the Sangha was still considered as a coercion in forcing monks and novices to study only the Phra Pariyat Dharma in general. This was especially true in various temples in Bangkok and schools in other provinces. The atmosphere resulted in monks and novices feeling that they are forced to study on subjects that they did not want to and did not see the benefit that would lead towards their own prosperity. On the contrary, it prevented them from studying in an academic field that would benefit their own lives, and view that the teachers and abbots were oppressors who were subverts of benefits and hinder the development of what they truly deserve. Such a situation in which monks and novices view their teachers and abbots as enemies filled their minds with conflicts. Similarly, senior monks would look at these monks and novices with a sense of paranoia. Such a phenomena normally results in a reduced respect and obedience.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conservation efforts under a stimuli to improve education of the clergy**

In the midst of controlling the education by the teachers and abbots in various temples, educational management in both of the Buddhist universities, namely the Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University and Mahamakut Buddhist University, which have been in operation since 1889 and 1946 respectively, even in the beginning after the separation of education between the clergy and the state, the two Buddhist universities operated in a desolate and unsupervised manner from both the Sangha and the government. However, the faculty and staff were still determined and continued to work based on the royal wishes of King Rama V, which was used as a pretext that seemed to add weight in driving university education for the clergy. Although it took a tremendous amount of effort to push both Buddhist universities to receive state accreditation, which in the initial stages of the educational management most of the graduates from the two Buddhist universities would continue their studies abroad, such as in

<sup>19</sup> Phra Rajavaramuni (Prayut payutto), *Education of the Clergy: Problems That Are Waiting for a Solution*, (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation, 1938).

India, England, the United States, the Philippines, etc., according to each of their financial capabilities and scholarship sponsorship.<sup>20</sup>

The efforts of the two Buddhist universities to obtain state certification was a long and arduous process. However, their efforts finally paid off and they were certified and integrated into the Education Act. The official recognition of the Monastic University Education Act was considered a crucial turning point where the state has once again cooperated with the clergy. Consequently, after the enactment of the Act, the educational management of the two Buddhist universities gradually progressed accordingly, especially Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, which established a secondary level class known as the Pali Secondary School. The class required the learning of Pali, dharma, and general high school subjects, by accepting Grade 4 graduates. Later on, when the Pali Secondary School spread to several more provinces, it proved to be highly popular among monks and novices. The Sangha Education Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, redefined the school to become the Pali Extraordinary Education School. The collaboration also issued a Ministry regulation whereby joint examinations could also be conducted in the Grade 6 and Grade 9 levels, since 1957. Once the exam was passed, the student will also receive a certificate from the Ministry of Education. For this reason, the school proved to be highly popular among the monks and novices and was widely extended to various provinces. However, it also was a concern among the clergy as they were afraid that the study of Dharma and Pali would deteriorate because the monks and novices were too focused on worldly subjects. However, the clergy themselves still considered the necessity in the study of worldly subjects. For this reason, the Office of the Maekong Pali Sanam Luang<sup>21</sup> led by His Holiness Phra Dhamma Panyabodi (Somdej Phra Buddhakosachan Fuen Chutintharo), therefore, set up a committee to improve on the curriculum for the study of the Lord Buddha's teachings, which consisted of Pali, dharma, and other worldly subjects, collectively known as the Pali Studies and Introduction to General Education. The new curriculum was promulgated in 1964, and at the same time cancelled the regulations of the Sangha Education Council of the Pali Extraordinary Education School, and required monks and novices to study the new Dharma and Pali curriculum that the Sangha had organized. However, the results proved to be less popular among the students as most of them desired to obtain a certificate from the Ministry of Education. Consequently, the students reapplied as an adult student at the temple schools which was set up by the Ministry of Education's regulations. It resulted in a lot of confusion during that particular period. At the same time, a civilian representative filed a request for the Ministry of Education to reopen the joint examination.

However, the Department of Religious Affairs and various other related departments jointly agreed that a particular type of school should be set up to meet the needs of monks and novices, by allowing them to concurrently study both dharma and general education subjects without the need for a joint examination, but take an examination that is directly conducted by the Ministry of Education. According to the remarks of His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch Somdej Phra Ariyawongsakantayan Sakolmahasangkhaparinayok (Juan Uttayi Maha Thera) who mentioned that, "worldly education has progressed so much according to the changes of the world. Therefore, it is necessary to study the scriptures according to the changes of the world." It was, therefore, appropriate to establish an additional curriculum for learning of the

<sup>20</sup> Saithip Jittamas, *The Role of the Buddhist University in Thai Society, 1946-1983*. (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Buddhist Studies Division, *Strategic and Action Plans of the Educational Development of the Phra Pariyat Dharma School, General Education Department (2010 – 2019)*, (Nakhon Pathom: The National Buddhism Office, 2009).

scriptures, namely, the “Phra Pariyat Dharma Curriculum of the Department of General Education”, in order to give students the opportunity to put themselves for the benefit of both the secular and dharma world concurrently. Finally, the Ministry of Education announced a new regulation regarding the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School under the governance of the Department of General Education on July 20, 1971, and the Ministry of Education regulations concerning Phra Pariyat Dhamma School under the governance of the Department of General Education dated 1992 (currently it is using the regulations on Phra Pariyat Dhamma School, Department of General Education 2003, of the National Buddhism Office), with the aim of providing education in such schools to benefit the religious institution and the public. The main objectives was to provide the religious institution with a worthy heir who has a true understanding of Buddhist principles, is a person of good conduct, living ascetically, mature, able to maintain and inherit Buddhism for further prosperity. Should these monks and novices leave the monkhood to study in state educational institutions or enter government services, will be able to create benefits for the advancement of themselves and the country as well.<sup>22</sup>

### **Efforts of the clergy to adapt to the management of education**

The cooperation between the state and the clergy in the management of education has resulted in the progress of both Buddhist universities, the effects of which also expanded into the establishment of the Phra Pariyat Dhamma School, under the General Education Department. It was considered a mutual collaboration to develop education for monks and novice again. However, the education that was conserved under the unilateral supervision of the Sangha, which is the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma, was still plagued with the same problems where it was viewed as reaching a critical stage, with a saying that, “opening the world and closing the way of dharma”. The management of education on the study of the dharma scriptures was without improvements for a long time. Although this type of study was still necessary for the structure of the Sangha governance, as the clergy ruled under the Maha Thera system, promotions directly depended on qualifications of a dharma-Pali scholar. It was imperative that the clergy themselves maintain this educational system without any proper improvement. The increase of the clergy and the general subjects department, combined with the pre-existing Pali lessons, thus, making the basic education curriculum of the clergy being classified into 3 departments, namely the Ordinary Department, the Dharma Department, and the Pali Department. The newly ordained novices in several temples had to study all three departments at the same time, each of which requires time and effort to develop an understanding. To achieve a third-class Dharma scholar, according to the curriculum, requires at least a year of lessons, at least 2 years of Pali lessons, while general courses are scheduled according to general high schools, thus making it difficult to study all three departments at the same time in a single year, but it was required as it was part of the compulsory education curriculum. The focus usually depended on each individual temple school on which topic they wanted to concentrate on. If the school wanted to focus on general subjects, it would usually provide dhamma-Pali as a supplementary subject, where additional tutoring is provided at least 7-15 days before the final exams. If the school wanted to focus on dharma-Pali, it will enforce rules not to allow students to study general subjects until the completion of the prescribed Pali courses.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Chaiwat Atichato, “Religious Studies Management Strategy through Networking,” *Journal of Education, An Introduction*, 3 (2017).

Although the problems in the management of the studying of dharma teachings of the clergy have not been completely resolved, the clergy would at times apply the principle of equanimity to deal with the problems that arise, or in other words, accept the problem as it is. However, solving the problem is still something that those involved in the management of the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma scriptures, especially the Office of the Maekong Dharma Sanam Luang, the Office of the Maekong Pali Sanam Luang, and the National Office of Buddhism, were still trying to find ways to solve problems both in the short and long term. Most of the time, minor problems that were manageable were solved first, such as solving problems with regards to the lack of teachers and the motivation to teach, by setting up a teacher's account and providing meal allowances (nittayaphat). Although it was not much, but at least it showed the willingness to solve problems that are reasonably manageable. In terms of dealing with student issues, temples would usually try to motivate learners by awarding prizes and organizing activities to show kindness towards students who passed their exams.

In its ongoing effort to solve education management issues of the clergy, the Office of the Maekong Dharma Sanam Luang and the Office of the Maekong Pali Sanam Luang would collaborate with the National Buddhism Office, to organize an annual teachers' seminar with the objective to develop teachers to possess the necessary knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and techniques of modern teaching methods, as well as, to review their roles and duties so as to proceed in the same direction. The effort which seemed to be a great achievement for the clergy was the approval of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act, B.E. 2562 by the National Legislative Assembly. It had taken the Sangha a tremendous amount of effort and time in order to have the bill pushed through. This is in addition to the Education Act of both the Buddhist universities. This goes on to show that the efforts of the Sangha to push for the approval of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act, which started around 2014, through the initiatives of His Holiness Somdej Phra Wanrat (Junt Brummakutto), the chief dean of the Thammayut Sect, as well as, the director of the Sangha Council and abbot of Bowonniwet Ratchaworawihan Temple, is a continuing effort from several relevant parties since 2003. In this regard, the National Buddhism Office, together with the Sangha Council, had drafted a bill for the study of the Phra Pariyat Dharma scriptures by which the Sangha Council ordered the appointment of a committee which was chaired by Phra Brommuni. The committee consisted of 4 members from the Sangha Council, 6 distinguished monks, 3 members of the National Legislative Assembly, 2 representatives from the Council of State, 2 representatives from the Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University, Director of the National Buddhism Office and administrators, as well as, 7 relevant government officials, totaling 22 persons, who were empowered to prepare a draft of the bill, propose it to the Sangha Council for consideration, appoint sub-committees, and take other necessary actions.

The efforts were coordinated and executed in sequence, especially on December 24, 2018, the working group led by His Holiness Phra Rajvoramuni (Phon Apakaro), Deputy Dean of Region 6, and Vice President for Student Affairs at MCU, in his capacity as Vice-President of the Sub-Committee on the Draft of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act, and Police Lt. Col. Pongporn Brahmansane, Director of the National Buddhism Office, and the committee reported the progress of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act to the National Legislative Assembly Coordinating Committee (government whip) which was chaired by Mr. Suwapan Tanyuwattana and the National Legislative Council of the Extraordinary Affairs Committee (NLA whip) which was chaired by Mr. Pornpetch Wichitchonchai. The whip of both Houses agreed in principle and prepared to present it for consideration in the National Legislative Assembly accordingly.

Later, on January 10, 2019, at the No. 1-2 Reception Room, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Parliament Building 2, the working group attended a meeting to consider the Phra Pariyat

Dharma Education Act (to be considered by sections). When it was completed, it was then prepared to be considered through 3 readings by the National Legislature Assembly. On January 18, 2019, at the National Assembly building, all sections passed through its readings, through a total of 7 meetings. And on January 31, 2019, at 10:45 p.m., the National Assembly passed its approval of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act of the Thai Clergy.

The Act can be considered as an attempt by the clergy to reunite with the state to collaboratively solve the problem of education of the clergy that has been prolonged for a long time. The establishment of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act will undeniably help support and strengthen the clergy's educational administration system, both in terms of management stability and budget support from the government, as well as provide the appropriate rights that learners and teachers are entitled to, and become a stabilizing factor for Buddhism in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The clergy has played an important role in education from the past to the present. During the initial stages, the Thai clergy education was based on the Trisikkha principle as the basis for study. In the Sukhothai period, palaces, and temples were the main places of study, especially the temples which were the most commonly used center of the community. Most of the subjects studied was Pali. In the Ayutthaya period, it was a popular practice whereby common citizens would bring their children to be under the tutelage and service of the monks who would assume the role of a teacher and teach the children on how to read and write. During the Thonburi era, there was not much progress or changes in any way due to the loss of Ayutthaya which caused great damage to the country and the people were left with no education except for the children of nobles and civil servants who still had the opportunity to study because they considered education to be a necessity. During the early Rattanakosin period, several schools were established but they were still not separated from the temples as the majority of the teachers were still monks. Teachings were conducted in a leisurely manner. During the reign of King Rama V, education of the clergy progressed significantly. His Majesty King Chulalongkorn graciously set up a royal school within the Grand Palace which was to be supervised by Royal Page office as there was a large need for civilians with extensive knowledge to enter the civil service. His Majesty also assigned monks with knowledge of Thai literature and numerology to help teach students that their parents had left them to study in the temple. During this era, having knowledge was considered as respectable and should be glorified. Education was distributed to various townships and monks were promoted to play an important role in the management of education while still using temples as schools. The temple, was therefore, the center of every community in various dimensions. In terms of educational management for monks and novices, His Holiness Somdej Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phraya Vajirayan Warorot initiated improvements to the teaching of the Dharma and Vinaya into the Thai language, thereby facilitating the learning process of the monks and novices as it has become easier to understand. His Holiness also made improvements to the dharma course to become more suitable for general monks and novices, and facilitate their learnings. During the reign of King Rama VI, there were also efforts to bring in various levels of scholars to assume the role of theology predecessors.

The administration of education in the temples was separated from the state after the passing of King Chulalongkorn in 1910. The state was assigned to be responsible for the basic education of the common citizen, including higher level education. Progress and changes proceeded accordingly with the establishment of several universities, colleges, and schools, throughout the whole country. Meanwhile, the education for monks and novices stumbled and the clergy were therefore destined to turn back and focused their studies on the original



dhamma scriptures. It was a period of educational stagnation for the clergy. No modifications were made to reflect the changes that occurred. Monks and novices had no confidence in the Sangha's original education system, and therefore, turned towards studying general subjects. There was widespread disunity among the different parties whereby senior monks wanted the monks and novices to exclusively study dharma-Pali, while the new generation monks viewed that the study of the scriptures should be improved and changed in terms of the curriculum and methods that are appropriate to the changing times. In particular, monks and novices should also have the opportunity to study modern subjects as well.

Reforming of the clergy's education started with the royal initiative of King Rama V. It began with the drive to establish a higher education institution for the clergies, which was known as the Education Council of the Mahamakut Buddhist University of Thailand. There was continuous improvement where the curriculum was modified to meet the needs of monks and novices even some clergy still adhered to the idea that "only the study of the dharma and Pali are the only legitimate education system for monks and novices". Thus, there is still an atmosphere of compelling monks and novices to study only the dhamma. Both Buddhist universities succeeded in gaining the government's accreditation and acceptance to their status as a Thai Buddhist university. It was once again considered as a mutual collaboration between the state and the clergy towards the development of education. Thereafter, the educational management of the two Buddhist universities witnessed much progress, especially Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, which also established a secondary school, which was known as the Pali Secondary School. Several monks and novices enrolled to the new school to a point where the Sangha became fearful that the study of dharma and Pali education might deteriorate. Accordingly, the Office of the Maekong Pali Sanam Luang made a revision to the curriculum for studying of the teachings of the dharma scriptures and included Pali, dharma, and other worldly subjects, and was known as the Pali Studies for General Education. However, it attracted little attention as most of the novice monks were still interested in studying general education which will entitle them to receive an official education certificate from the Ministry of Education. Education of the clergy during each period became very confusing, in which the Department of Religious Affairs and the various relevant departments established a dedicated school to meet the needs of monks and novices by allowing both dharma subjects and general education to be taught concurrently and allowing the Ministry of Education to conduct the required examinations. This greatly affected the students who had to take several courses at the same time.

The Sangha who were responsible for the study of Phra Pariyat Dhamma tried to find ways to solve problems under the circumstances that provoked improvements in teaching and learning. However, they only managed to only fix minor issues, such as training to improve on teaching techniques for teachers, the provision of short term and long term meal allowances. As for the issue of students lacking interest in learning, various temples attempted to motivate students by awarding prizes and organizing activities to express kindness towards those who have passed their exams. Efforts of the Sangha to improve the learning of the Buddhist monks proved successful in 2019, with the promulgation of the Phra Pariyat Dharma Education Act, which was considered as a great policy achievement in the administration of the clergy's education.

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