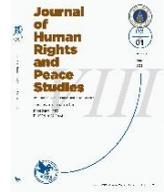




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### ARTICLE REVIEW

## Buddhist Majoritarian Nationalism in Thailand: Ideological Contestation, Narratives, and Activism

Sombatpoonsiri, J. (2022). *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, (52), 1-25.

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Buddhist Nationalism has become an ideology and movement that dominates and intimidates socio-political life in Thailand. This situation displays a unifying character who is aggressive and sensitive to differences. The character also means the readiness to fight against anyone who is not in harmony with the concept of one Buddhist religion and one nation (Tonsakulrungruang, 2021, p.

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<sup>1</sup> James Reinaldo Rumpia graduated from the Master of Art in Human Rights International Program, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand. The focus of his study and writing is on issues of human rights, the environment, and law. Another activity is the president of the Indonesian Student Association in Thailand (2019-2020). James is also active as the Head of the Indonesian Institutional Center in the Overseas Indonesia Student's Association Alliance (2019-2020) and active in the Center for Public Policy and Human Rights Studies, University of Lampung, Indonesia. At the same time, he manages and fosters colleagues from the Legal Aid Institute-Islamic Student Association, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia.

84). In the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Janjira Sombatpoonsiri writes an article that discusses how Buddhist Nationalism came to power in Thailand. The article published in 2022 under the title "Buddhist Majoritarian Nationalism in Thailand: Ideology, Contestation, Narratives, and Activism" focuses on narratives that influence the activism of Thailand Buddhist Nationalist Groups such as the Buddhist Federation of Thailand (BFT). This article explains through a dissection of the component of Buddhist Nationalism. The first two components relate to the threat: the imagination of the subservience of the political elite to Muslims and the influence of Muslim minority policies; Buddhism must be the core of national identity. The third component is more related to promoting the movement's aspirations to unite religion and politics based on Buddhism (p. 1).

The article describes three main sections: what is Buddhist Majoritarian Nationalism; Royal Buddhist Nationalism and Political Conflict of Buddhist Majoritarian Nationalism; and Ecosystem, Narrative, and Activism from Buddhist Majoritarian Nationalism. The article carefully defines Buddhist Nationalism from the point of view of historical development and contestation, institutions, state-religious relations, and the views of southern Muslim minorities. As a historical example, the article borrowed McCargo's search on the Monastic Community and the Sangha in the eighteenth century of the King Mongkut era (p. 2).

In the majority-based state-religion relation, the majority ideology is beyond defining Thai citizenship and nationality and Buddhist claims regarding the official religion and national identity.<sup>2</sup> The first concern is Buddhist-minority voices, and this role also means accommodating or taking over space that the Kingdom does not overcome. Second, Buddhist Nationalism identifies the worst version of the enemy of Buddhism as minority cultures, namely Muslims. In particular, Muslims are assumed to threaten the local way of life or 'Withee Thongthin' (p. 4). The article also stated that the difference between Thailand's Buddhist Nationalism and Myanmar and Sri Lanka lies in the proximity of the political regime. The royalist elites maintained a distance from Buddhist Nationalism (p. 5).

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<sup>2</sup>The power of Religious Nationalism starts by influencing: defining legal citizenship, describing the nation, giving a privileged position to many actors and political visions in shaping public policy, winning electoral support, and building the country (Grzymala-busse, 2020, p. 1).

This article also shows that Royal Buddhism is embedded in Thai kings' abilities and figures rooted in the concept of "King Morals" (dhammaracha) through Buddhist texts, mentioned from King Mongkut to King Bhumibol (p. 6). Politically, the Kingdom exemplified consolidating Buddhism against the Communists, and when communism was defeated, the consolidation ended (p. 7). One of the compelling cases in recent years is the aftermath of the amendments to the Sangha Act, which blocked the reign of Monk Somdet Chuang at the Dhammakaya temple (p. 9). Another tension is that the state and Kingdom did not support Buddhism related to the insecurity of southern Buddhists (p. 9). The article also confirms that this assumption came from socio-economic injustice (p. 10).

This article also emphasizes that the movement is based on thoughts that Thai elites are subservient to Muslims' growing policy influence. The narrative consists of the political strengthening of Muslims, demographic dominance, threats of violence by Muslims, and the Muslim Economy and Culture being a nuisance to the Buddhist Community. In the context of the movement, the Buddhist Nationalist focus seems to remain struggling on two main issues: Buddhism's protection and the strengthening of Muslim influence.

The article has also mentioned that critical reading of this issue reveals that the state and Kingdom protect religion when it is in harmony with Royal Nationalism. This article offers a framework and method for dismantling Nationalism that develops in multi-dimensional society by opening up space for various narratives. One of the most important values of this article is the revelatory analysis of narratives and activities (online, offline) of the Buddhist nationalist movements.

## References

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