

Meaning of the Dhamma: The codes of conduct of the modern nation's citizens

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Abstract

This study attempts to account for the nuance changes of laymen religious thought in modern Thailand. These changes reflect progressive shifting in the codes of conduct of the nation's citizens. Codes of conduct derived from the events of colonial and post-colonial eras raised an issue of contradictions between Buddhism and Marxism. Historically, the colonial era opened the door to the capitalist economic system, which raised pivotal questions about religious modernizing in Thai Buddhism. Post-colonial time, rather appeared modernist Buddhist in a new class structure than previous. The literal middle class, whose profession is journalist or civil servant, published commentaries of Marxist theory in *Aksornsarn Magazine*, 1949 – 1952. These articles are containers of the nuanced conflicts between traditional and new codes of conduct of national's citizens. The conflicts relied on bringing the understatement social status of the working class to the government's attention. Buddhism alone couldn't generate the formation of a society's economically working ethic. A society needs Marxist theory of dialectic materialism and historical materialism to infuse men's morals with the economic sense. The modernist Buddhists' analysis based on Marxist theory focused on paving the ways of understanding in the political situation at that time. Despite the fact that the Pridi-Aksornsarn group does get involved with the Communist party of Thailand, they could only support ideologies about justice for the working class. When Chinese merchants finished establishing the worker union, the magazine was already forced to stop and many writers went into exile. Modern Buddhism does concern what was the response to the dominant ideology of that time and prefer the materialistic ways of thinking. This is an intellectual phenomena empowered by the Marxism theories and innovative form of Buddhist-Marxist's literature expression is the other modality of modern Buddhism in Thailand.

Keywords: modern Buddhism, dhamma, religion, colonialism, postcolonialism, Marxism

1. Introduction

The Thai scholars of Theravada Buddhism posted an important question about indigenous people experiencing colonialism the same as Buddhism's encounter with modernity (Turner, 2018; Blackburn, 2010; McMahan, 2008; Lopez, 2002). Theravada Buddhist societies in this region include Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand. Among them, Buddhism in Thailand is the only one that has at least been corrupted by colonialism. Despite this fact, Theravada Buddhism in Thailand was still influenced by the colonizers while the essentialist Buddhists claimed to be historic descendants. In recent Thai studies, the semi-colonial discourse of Thailand was introduced to historiography for accounting the reluctant relationship with the West. Moreover, the post-colonial analysis is, as a theoretical framework, "the Asian gaze upon and relationship with the modern West" became a more useful principal analysis (Jackson, 2010: 37). As mentioned before, post-colonial analytic draws my attention upon the protagonist Buddhist institution, somehow called Buddhist modernism and challenges the existing synthetic thesis of Thai Modernism (Jackson, 2022). However postcolonial will be used as a viewpoint to this study of a new influence on Thai Buddhism. But the key analysis is the discourse of Buddhist Modernism (McMahan, 2008). This study suggests that the Thai Buddhist modernizing process can be clarified by studying responses to unfamiliar foreign ideologies from outside Thailand. Colonialism is not hostile to Thai Buddhism as a whole, but is a chance of advancement in Pali and dhamma studies instead. Buddhist modernism in this study means a religious discourse that "discourages blindly following authority and dogma, has little place for superstition, magic, image worship, and gods, and is largely compatible with the findings of modern scientific and liberal democratic values" (Ibid.: 5). By this framework the Buddhist Modernism in Thailand should be considered as a background principle in order to read Marxist's theory, the dialectic materialism and historical materialism, in novel forms. While modernist Buddhists were being a boisterous review of the social transformation under Capitalism, they were not politically violent and their review in publications have not been translated into practical movements. It's true that Marxism is an unfamiliar method of thinking to Buddhism that came from outside. Ideologically, Buddhism and Marxism are undoubtedly incompatible. Even so, political consequences in Thailand reflected subordination of radical and alien ideology. However, the conservative Buddhist's negative responses to Marxism can be described as an impact critique of the process of intellectual religious modernism, as well as reconciliations to theoretical methodology from modernist Buddhists also can be described as the same process.

This study proposes that the modernizing process of Buddhism in Thai cases must be corrected from obstruction by national historiography in vernacular Thai language. Rationalism outlook could be a problem too. Thai scholars have studied Buddhist modernism as a historic scheme (Pimrumpai Praimsmith, 1982; Saichon Wannarat [Sattayanurak], 1982; Srisuporn Chuangsakul, 1987; Patcharaporn Changkaew, 1987). These studies are likewise the influential Nidhi Eawsriwong's collected articles, the book was first published in 1980, *Pen and Sail: Narrative of Early Rattanakosin Literature and History*. Their academic hypotheses of Thai Buddhism in the modern era lead out the way for future readers in a serious deception about Buddhist modernism as a lineage progress from the mercantile's experiences since the late-Ayutthaya to early-Rattanakosin periods. The general confusion is that Siamese in early to middle of the nineteenth-century gradually developed religious perception into rationalism from merchandise experience, precisely, since late-Ayutthaya to early Rattanakosin. Court members and elitists who's well-educated and have good professions already had a moderate picture of the Buddha as a historic figure who lived in the past. Hence, Thai scholars incautiously integrate this perception with rationalism in general, as a result they could make later scholars of Thai Buddhism misperceive modernity of Buddhism in Thailand same as the establishing of Thammayut sect in 1824.

Since Buddhism's encounter with Colonial discourse of modernity, moral shiftings were hard to depict. For starters, we have to contain the ambivalent term of 'modernity' and the conditions of modernity have created morality. Charles Taylor's thematization of the sources of modernity are theistic domain, scientific naturalism and the tradition of rationalism, and Romantic expressivism (Taylor, 1989). Even though Taylor barely mentions Buddhism or Asian religions, his categorization still provides a valuable analysis of the relevant conditions under which Buddhism encountered western thought and cultural practice. These key elements of modernity are rooted in western historical periods and form life, they are essential to understanding the development of Buddhist modernism not only in the West but across the globe. The theistic domain includes traditional concepts of God, person, and ethical obligations based primarily in Christianity. The scientific naturalism and the tradition of rationalism rooted in the European Enlightenment. The last domain is Romantic expressivism, encompasses the literary, artistic, and philosophical movement that arose in part as a critique of increasing rationalization, mechanization, and desacralization of the Western world brought about by industrialization and the scientific revolution (McMahan, 2008: 10 – 11).

According to David L. McMahan (2008), Buddhist modernism must be considered as a process of two concepts — Buddhism and discourse of Modernity — they are expecting to

work together on scientific naturalism, romanticism and its successors, and western Monotheism. This process indicated that Buddhist and Buddhist sympathizers reinvented some new meanings of Buddhism and embedded them. On one hand, the modernizing process created tensions i.e., bargaining between traditional maintenance and modernity, overlapping among different localities, and challenging one another. On the other, Buddhist and Buddhist sympathizers attack modernity discourse by criticizing or manipulating those that were useful to Buddhism. Yet, this procedure didn't separate Buddhism into pre-modern or modern religion. This advancement implied two significant points. First Buddhism was evaluating its value among modernist discourse. Second, Buddhism was emphasizing its contribution to those discourse (Ibid., 61 – 62).

By making this point clearer, in this study Thai Buddhism will be treated as subject matter, Buddhist modernism and Marxism will be considered as challengers both also came along with modernity as well as Capitalism. Capitalism definitely created tensions on social development, especially on moral conducts. Buddhist and Buddhist modernism were both attacked discourse of capital accumulation Capitalism created. Not only them, but also Marxism that came along. Marxist sympathizers manipulated Thai citizens to caution against the danger that capitalism may create in Thai society.

Modern time advancement by the late nineteenth century struck social relativity between monastery and kingdom. Marxism was not yet a great impact by their imaginations. The religious institution or Buddhist sangha was not only a conveyer of dhamma per se, but also a conductor in a new role assigned by the kingdom (Reynolds, 1972: Ch. VII). Even though the first sangha act in 1902 was not a direct response of colonialism over religious policy but it's fair to say that sangha's new role as a state conductor in rural areas, — Northern and North Eastern — was bureaucratization of the sangha as one of the absolutist government agents. Therefore, the extension of the Dhammayut sect in Northeastern province was done by sending a reverend monk, Prasasanadilok (Auan Tisso, 1867 – 1956 B.E.) to Ubonrachatani province, Northeastern Thailand, and promoting him in a position of president of Esan province [*Jaokana Monton Esan*] in 1904 (Kamala Tiyavanich, 1997: 173 – 174). Subsequently, the official Buddhist ethic, such as courtesy, ascetical bureaucracy, proper robe wearing etc., dominated the provincial way of the forest monks' asceticism or the wandering monks. The moral sentiments of bureaucratic Buddhist were slowly developed by state subsidized educational institutions and had obvious public consequences in the following decade, which I shall discuss further. In the meantime, the core moral of official Buddhism which relied on nation religion and monarchy paving the way to become predominant on Northeastern regions. Hence the code

of conduct of good citizenship, including reverend monks, features honesty, honorable person, and loyalty to the nation.

State sponsorship on education either secular or religious fast forwarded Thai society to the next level as classes conflict. We can see that class separation in the late-nineteenth century Thailand was, on one hand, products of Chakri reformation to gain control of political and fiscal power in order to establish an absolutist state (Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, 2004: 66). And on the other hand, the political scheme included religion organization or authorized sangha, later became one of the bureaucratic divisions. Soon after, Buddhist monasteries across the country became educational institutions under the governance of the ministry of interior in order to feed manpower into the bureaucratic hierarchy system. And when the first sangha act was enacted on July 20, the revered monk Vajiranana was assigned as the first conductor of education and religion under Mahathera Samakom or the high priest society (Kanungnit Juntabutra, 1985: 25 – 29).

In the decade of 1910s to 1920s the modern bureaucracy offices opened for opportunities to the commoners to acquire knowledge and earn salaries. The citizens who took advantage of this social advancement as a civil servant raised the important question about loyalty and whether they should lay on the king or the nation (Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, 2004: 66). The social conflict as Matthew Copeland notes ‘contested nationalism,’ was a counter proposal with the Western way of thinking about patriotism from the bottom up, not merely from the top down. As far as we can see from this point, the center of nationalist thought was thinly running out of monarchy to the common goods because of the royal choice of council which led to the unfortunate bankruptcy arousing lower rank civil servants’ displeasures. In addition to maintaining the monarchy focal point of Thai nationalist sentiment, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910 – 25) organized “Wild Tiger Corps” (*kong sue pa*) in May of 1911 (Copeland, 1993: 33 – 35). By that time, a number of publishing houses of Thai, English, and Chinese languages were already excessive. State sponsors were *Chinnosayamwasasap*, *Phim Thai*, *Bangkok Times*, *Siam Observer*, and *Bangkok Daily Mail* (Ibid). Private businesses were *Dulwipakpojjanakit*, and *Siripojanapak*, etc. These newspapers played an important role of being government investigators and critics alongside with the proposal of democratization (Suvimol Roongcharoen, 2526: 7).

Over a decade before the overthrow of absolutist monarchy, a new class formation of Thai bureaucracy that was one of consequences of modern state reformation on one hand, and on the other hand came along with the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. The latter were accused of communist importers. They were directly connected with Sun Yat Sen, founder of

T'ung Meng Hui as a minor branch of Kuomintang party on Yaowarat road (Musashima & Vorasak Mahattanobol, Eds & Trans., 1996: 1 – 2). During the same period, in 1925, a number of potentially overseas' Chinese political movements in Siam has risen at a commensurate rate, coherent with the workers' uprising against capitalists in Shanghai. The coincidence in these events concerned the Thai government to prevent Chinese workers in Bangkok Dock from striking (Ibid: 3 – 4).

The Chinese proletariat brought a new point of view about Socialism ideology and relationship between citizens and state. One might say that the role of the state over its citizens under the capitalized society is different from the absolutist society. Says, people were no longer slaves and they deserved to gain their prosperities from salary they received fairly. State must prevent the citizens from oppression of the capitalists. Yet, the misunderstanding happened to Thai conservative rulers. Evidently, one of the royal literatures authored by King Vajiravudhi reflected ideals of trajectory of being good or bad citizenships. *Uttarakuru An Asiatic Wonderland*, an essay-like, written by the King himself, first published in the English journal, *Siam Observer* (Vajiravudhi, His Majesty King, 1929/1965). This political essay expresses the resistance against Socialism with Buddhist mythology. His Majesty the King attempted to replace the idealistic society by amplifying an old Siamese book called *Trai Bhumi Phra Ruang*, a quasi-religious treaty on the three regions (Ibid., 1). Uttarakuru was compared to *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More, a classic English poet. The descriptions are pretty much like satire, about a prosperous land in young people's imagination. Young people who need changes must do revolutionary acts (Ibid., 3 – 4). On the contrary, King Vajiravudhi described; the prosperity and livelihood could become true by following the protagonist codes of conduct of the nation's citizens without any revolutionary acts of Socialist politics. What's in their imagination has already existed in the Brahm-Buddhist mythology. It is called *Uttarakuru* (Ibid., 19 – 21).

The official Buddhist codes of conduct had become the most important aspect than any moral values. Socialistic idea of prosperity life invasion implicitly created these substances. By this time, the Buddhist institution was working alongside with the secular realm in order to protect the nation from political ideologies, such as Marxism. Moreover, during the World War I on 1914, Siam sent a chaplain alongside with militiamen to joined the war and to encourage them and to comfort them with dhamma. At first the chaplain was a temporary position then later on 1918 the army established chaplain department under King Vajiravudh's permission (Wajira Hampitak, 2014: 12 – 13). The military chaplains must have the dhamma degree from religious institutions, such as Mahamakut Buddhist University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, or from major monasteries who provide religious

education. This career must not be behind the ranks of lieutenant or colonel, and must have accreditation of bachelor degree, and the intermediate or the highest level of Buddhist dhamma degree (4 – 6 or 7 – 9 sentences) (Ibid., 10). This incident can be judge as a modernizing of Buddhist institution and a rise of the codes of conduct of nation's citizens. The bureaucratic Buddhism derived from dialectic relationship between the conventional moral conducts and the challenging ideology of Socialism. The foreign ideology was considered as a progressive yet a troublesome. But the developments of religious thinking in modern time Thailand are no doubt the product of this inconvenient process. Had the procedure of religious modernizing been continuing? Or had it been causing any other obvious developments in the following period? It is hard to answer this question frankly, because of the political fortune of Communist Party of Thailand had come to demise. Furthermore, Marxism as theoretical analysis is written out of component of Thai historical context, Buddhist historiography in particular. Even so, recently, Marxist thoughts have been used as a new framework for understanding Thai politics and society (Reynolds and Lysa, 1983: 77). This study attempts to show intellectual effects on religious thinking processes in modern time that parted away from conventional Thai Buddhist thinking, this study is called Buddhist modernism. The modernist laymen's Buddhist thought in Thailand after World War II, which was influenced by both colonialism and Marxism. This may be considered as a process of modernizing Buddhism in the late nineteenth century throughout the twentieth century. The dialectic relationship among those opposite ideologies generated religious values of the radical modernists Buddhist. They were concerned about the impacts of American imperialism and the Thai government religious policies under the influence. I shall argue further.

2. Buddhist Modernism: The Thai version

The topics of Buddhist modernizing in Thailand are always dictated by authority evidence. By that, it means primary sources that gave support to the most of academic presumptions under this topic were produced by the Royal family, high level priests, and noble men. At the beginning, Thai Buddhist apologetics involuntarily articulated scientific naturalism with their faith. In the nineteenth century, these two ideas — Thai Buddhism and modernity discourse — were not being reconciled in harmony but disrupting the indigenous Buddhists. The articulating Buddhist apologetic scripture of Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong — *Nangsu Sadaeng Kitchanukit (elaboration on major and minor matters)*, published in 1867, for example. This is a historic event that obliged them to show how Buddhists did in the first confrontation with Christianity defend their faith. Still, this epoch of spontaneous action will

be learned as Buddhist modernizing and historiography. Following the conservative Buddhists' faith and practice in the Chakri reformation period, including education, administration, and religion, began the process of Thai Buddhist Modernism. For example, King Vajiravudh (reign 1910 - 1925) and Vajiranana (1860 – 1921)'s schemes. It's true that the King Vajiravudh himself glorified the superiority of Buddhism, simultaneously he made profound encouraging principles about Jatti, Sasana, and Phramahakrasat (nation, religion, and king). The position of a characteristic of Buddhist nationalism, he also convinced the loyal Wild Tiger Corps of the new principles in order to unify them (Ling, 1979, 92 – 93). According to the lecture series known as *Thetsana Suapa (Sermon to Wild Tiger Corps)*, between 1914 – 1915), he asserted Theravada Buddhism into “a common element of the Thai imagined community” (Thongchai Winichakul, 2015: 90; Pathom Dakananan, 2008: 46 – 54). On the contrary, this study has a different opinion on the king who united solid ideologies of nation and religion to be solidity and aspired to reassemble scattered loyalties into its place. I argue in this circumstance which does rely on political scientist's analysis that in 1911 the Wild Tiger Corps did mean for internal royalist consolidation and an emblem of modernity in the world politics' gaze but far from religious nationalism (Anderson, 1978: 203 – 204). In this article, the process of social modernizing will be considered as a unit and efficiency of each categorization, the bureaucratic Buddhism and the modern Buddhism. Precisely, the elite and the middle class have different opinions about Buddhist thoughts that support different secular values.

The term Scientific rationalism was vaguely used to interpret the modern Buddhism as a whole over religious realm in the “New Siam,” as well as the general intellectual shifting was also pointed to the modernizing process in this particular time. Previous history scholars did loosely mark on the economy as a large condition on the change. Theoretically, this is a framework that is used in Marxist principle of analysis on economics change as the feudal society shifted into the capitalism after the Bowring treaty was signed in 1893 by a small group of people whom in charge. After the inauguration, scholars also assumed that capitalism made a great change on Thais' whirlpool of social lifestyles, and the consumerism might be corrupted religious ideologically realms. The capitalistic lifestyles led people into rationalizing disenchantment to the modern ways of thinking, they even devalued the ancient inheritance of religious mundane as an old and outdated one. While they were approaching wealth and prosperity accommodating, Buddhism as a dominant religious thinking retreated. This study proposes a different presumption. Capitalist development in this particular time did not fade away Buddhism faith, but rather back up Buddhist hierarchical institutions to become stronger (Gray, 1986) and develop themselves to be ready to put up a fight with hostility of Marxism.

The debates in Thai historical studies of Marxist theory pointed Marxist theoretical distortion and cultural iconoclast by radical publications (Reynolds and Lysa, 1983; Kasian Tejapira, 2001). This study attempts to continue these previous studies and proposes a new framework of studying Buddhist modernism as a long process that clearly appeared in the decades of 1950s – 1960s. The Thai Buddhist modernists used a scientific rationalism approach, in particular terms — dialectic materialism and historical materialism — to open more options of understanding the truth of Thai social formation. Epistemological notions of Marxism was the main reason behind this idea. It was particularly used against the dominated reality of social construction in previous times, the Buddhist mythology of Thai social structures. According to Craigs and Lysa:

The value of the book for Thai historians today [33 years later] — apart from it, arguable social formation analysis — lies in its broad sweep of history, its international context, and the way it links social, economics, and political relations in a manner that challenges acceptance of the Thai ruling class as beneficent, wise, and worthy of the people’s unquestioning obedience (Craigs and Lysa, 1983: 82).

The social evolution analysis after Sino-Soviet theory of Thai Buddhist-Marxist was being distorted, pointed out by the present time scholars that feudal society can’t fit in the theory per se (ibid.: 83). A combination of non-objective assumptions couldn’t reflect the reality of social formation in the past but posted a statement of opposition to the privileged upper class. Solving this problem, the term scientific rationalism must need a systematic empirical observation to clarify the modernizing process of Buddhism and Marxism in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The scientific rationalism in this sense is a using of ‘dialectic materialism’ as an approach of accounting theoretically social progressive formation as, primitive commune – slave society – feudal society – capitalism – communism, respectively. Although, this is Reynolds and Lysa’s word, ‘scattered reference’. But the point of pushing a non-western society into Marx and Engle’s general theory is identifying Thai society as a part of the universal social formation. This is a counter proposal to the conventional belief of Thai society among upper ruling class who relied on conventional Buddhism grand theory of the Buddhist king or Devaraja. Scholars in Thai historical studies of Buddhism and Marxism may be disappointed. The important aspects of imported Marxist theories were not meant to be used to collide the dominant existing social theory. If so, why did the radical intellectual Marxist-communist dominating leftists still recite Buddhism as one of the flagships of their journey to

the idealistic Socialist future. This study is trying to suggest that the Marxism theoretical approach was reinterpreted as the most prominent background thinking of Thai citizens at the last quarter of 24 century B.E. but not a practical intervention in a political movement.

3. The Radical Discourses and the Aim of Usage

The Pridi-Aksornsarn group is characterized by a political scientist (Kasian Tejapira, 2001) who describes Thai citizens who's highly educated both domestically and abroad. This study tends to call them modernist Buddhists. Their social hierarchy belonged to the middle class. Most of them came from government officers or farmers' family backgrounds. It does not exaggerate that they were efflorescence of the absolutist government's reformation scheme in the earlier decades as described before. The bureaucratization of the Sangha hierarchical syncretism that caused educational expansion through the Buddhist monasteries across the country opened the broadly professions opportunities to the Thai citizens. Eventually, Thai Buddhist followers, both monks and laymen, gained their confidence in comprehensible interpretation of Buddhist knowledge. This fractured structure of modernity that arrived in Thailand in associated with Western imperial power caused the popularity and success of orientalist's studies on religions around the Indian ocean and the print capitalism empowered the emergence of modernist Buddhism and the reinterpretation of comprehensive Buddhist texts. Thai modernist Buddhists must wait until the beginning of the twentieth century to engender their novel innovations of intellectual choices of meaning of Dharma.

Tomomi Ito (2012) and Peter A. Jackson (1988) studied Buddhāsa as a modern time Buddhist philosopher who revived the *lokuttara Dhamma (supermundane teaching)* and spread those words to his dhamma followers. Buddhadasa has become a primary focus of debates about Theravada Buddhist doctrine in Thailand. Buddhāsa began to systematically reappraise and reinterpret Theravada Buddhist teachings in 1932, and some of his sermons and articles were published in local Buddhist journals in the 1930s and 1940s. His sermons were also broadcasted through Suan Mok, Mahamakut Buddhist University, and Buddhist Society of Thailand. Most of the teachings were recollected and printed as booklets by Mr.Sa-art Watcharapai (?), the owner of Suvichan Bookshop (Ito, 2012: 83 – 85). Buddhāsa's teachings were popularized among urban middle class, including a few numbers of Marxist sympathizer, such as a former parliament member represented Surat Thani and a member of the federal committees of the Communist Party of Thailand, Mr. Prasert Subsoontorn (1913 – 1994) (Ibid.: 167 – 169). Despite the fact that Buddhāsa's meditation center or Suan Mok once used to be an attractive

cluster of Marxist and Socialist policy sympathizers, however Buddhāsa has never had agreed to such ideas.

The modernity created fissures trajectories within syncretistic Thai Buddhism, intellectually as well as ritually. As Jackson observes that while monastic Buddhism and the canonical Theravada Buddhist scriptures, the *Tipitaka*, came under state administrative control, support and sponsorship, multiform varieties of code of conduct predominantly by lay specialists outside of monasteries largely fell outside the scope of state interest and bureaucratic oversight (2022: 131). As Dominick LaCrapra points out that their capability in documentary research not only could create a new knowledge, but also would utilize a present knowledge in their time to make the most profitable (1983: 30). The knowledge circulation of modern time Buddhist canon derived from the cooperation of Pali Text society founded by Thomas Rhys Davis (1843 – 1922) and courts and courtiers in Buddhist literature under King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868 - 1910), and the orientalist scholarship institutions around the Indian Ocean in the past decades. Such a cooperative produced Buddhist texts from various sources, for example, the prominent *The Sacred Books of the East* or *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold (1832 – 1904) the famous English poet — later it was translated in to Thai language in 1928 (old calendar) (Hansen, 2008: 82). The diversity of Thai Buddhist society indicates that the emergence of the process of intellectual religious modernizing has just begun after the end of nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. Which is worth considering as one of the modern progressive in Thai Buddhist intellectual fields.

Coinciding with McMahan observations, first, it [scientific naturalism] views the world as made up of predictable phenomena governed by natural laws that are discernible through systematic and detached observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Second, it opens possibilities for the emergence of modern forms of nihilism, along with various attempts to stave it off (2008: 63). To this point of view, the modernist Buddhist's interpretation fits in quite well. The *lokuttara Dhamma* (*supermundane teaching*) is a subject matter of Buddhāsa's teaching, to be specific, *Paṭiccasamuppāda* or 'the Buddhist theory of causation and consequences' (Jackson, 2003: 33). In addition to the intellectual impact of the West, Buddhāsa's teaching can be seen as responses to the religious and moral dilemmas facing the modern, educated sections of the Thai elite, who make up Buddhāsa's main audience in Thailand (Ibid.: 48 – 49).

They were both inside and outside the bureaucratic system while they used Marxist's theory to critique society. These Marxist empathizers included Supha Sirimanond (1914 - 1986), a former diplomat officer and the founder of *Aksornsarn* magazine (1949 – 1952), Kulap

Saipradit (1905 - 1974), a journalist and a novelist, and Samak Burawas (1916 - 1975), a science teacher and a Buddhist philosopher. Their mutual interests were not only in Pridi Banomyong's (1899 - 1893), political ideals, but also Buddhadasa's (1906 - 1993) followers at Suanmok, Nakon Sri Thammarat, Southern Thailand. Interestingly, the intellectual modernist Buddhists who were also Marxist empathizers had the same focal point at Suanmok as a geographical division within the Thai religious' field. This diversity of Buddhism in the modern era and the emerging of the new social hierarchy, indicates that the bureaucratization of Sangha under the absolute monarchy, in the previous three decades, created the fork trajectories — one cherishes the dominant ideology of nation, religious, and the king, and the other supports democratic system and socialistic ideology.

Kulap was well-known as a Thai government critic by publishing his aggressive articles, for example, *Manusayapab* (1933, old calendar). His intense writings caused him hatred among the noble elites who filled higher positions in the Thai government (Batson, 1981: 61). Kulap was educated in journalism from Japan and later joined many political sciences classes in Australia (Bramé, 1995: xxviii). The late 1940s is a pivotal period for Kulap because after came back from Australia he wrote a number of articles about democratic and socialistic political systems and published a series in *Aksornsarn* magazine. Samak Burawas is a good example of Thai citizens who have a modernist Buddhism point of view. His most important contribution is as an interpreter of the Marxist theory to Thai vernacular language. He puts a lot of effort into rewritten what Karl Marx taught to other common Thai citizens. Even though he is not categorized in socialist group of Thai leftists based on Sutachai Yimprasoert's study. His provocative article "Buddhi Facing Communism," 1952, published in *Aksornsarn* magazine got him with the serious accusation of being part of communist movement that leads to arrest him with the charge of mutiny (see Narong Petchprasoert, ed al., 2006: 113 – 169). The circumstances which lead to this incident owe to Supa Sirimanond, who founded and edited most of the articles in the magazine. Supa had testified that he had to avoid the searching of police officers that might surprisingly show up and forcefully shut his newly established editorial office down. To do so, he contained religious articles to publish in several volumes (Somsak Jeamteerasakul, 1993: 282 – 283). This might be read as an accidental makeup of Supha. As this study suggests, the very incident is the origin of intersection of Theravada Buddhism and Marxist theory in modern time Thailand.

The dynamic of socio-economic situation in the post-war was affecting the lives of all Thais both physical and moral conduct. Many intellectual Buddhists wish Buddhism to act as the ideological foundation of a religious and moral approach to socio-economic development,

as a unique Thai alternative to both capitalism and communism (ibid.: 59). Explaining to this point, communism accessed to Thai society as, in Kasian Tejapira's word 'a foreign derived discourse,' a group of intellectual Buddhist read Marxism and Socialism ideas and proposed them deliberately to the Thai readers that these radical outlooks are tolerated to Thais' own mindset based on Buddhist's moral. Thai governments acted in every way to eradicate these thoughts and exposed their illegal articles. Eventually, Supa's opening statement on *Aksornsarn* of the Buddhist holiday, Vassa rains retreat [*Kao Pansa*], on July 1949, indicates that

“...[the] *Aksornsarn* office editor is presenting with confidence that there is no more suitable time than this time that Buddhist philosophy is the most desired as urgent as it is. The urban dwellers of all social hierarchies and evert occupations who seek for peace need it. The Buddhism as a wholesome belief system can remain peaceful, and unveil all the profanities, but also fix the selfishness. In the end, Buddhist philosophy is suitable for righteous Thai citizens of all moral levels” (Supha Sirimanond, 1949).

Draws from political set up in Thailand during the post war time indicated the rapid diversity of moral conduct among Thai citizens including *lukjin* (Kasian Tejapira, 2001), the sino-thai immigrants. The time frame sketching may help it easier to follow: 1944 – 1958, Kuang Apaiwong to Pridi Banomyong governments then overthrown by Field Marshall Por. Phibunsongkram in 1957 and exiled in the following year; 1958 – 1973, after the coup d'état by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat following the regimes of Phin Chanhavan and Phao Sriyanond, both were Sarit's henchmen. The turmoil political impeachment, on one hand exhausting people's trustworthiness in their government. And on the other hand it was paving the way for ritual expressions of popular devotion outside the official Buddhism. The rationalization of the modern enchantment of Buddhist rituals and cults of wealth, in intellectual modernist Buddhists' opinions, was hard to admit (Jackson, 2022: 5 – 6). For them, the religious thinking process must be moderated as scientific naturalism which views the world as made up of predictable phenomena and it opens possibilities for the emergence of a modern form of nihilism (McMahan, 2008: 63).

A modern form of nihilism in this point of view may be accessible in the Weberian sociological analysis. The religious rationalization in the modern time might be predictable in Weberian eyes but in fact religious traditionalism such as making merit for accommodating

good deeds so one could carry them to the next life is very popular. Some of Thai modernist Buddhists stated against it. As a moderated Buddhist believer, he underestimated that:

“The Buddhist’s believers who are lured by faith can never go through the right path. For example, going to heaven or avoiding hell or getting everything, one ever wishes etc. One must not pursue of vague points. Such a practice would be instituted in the wrong ways” (Pui Rojjanaburanond, 1951: 22 – 24).

The modern disenchantment is known as the modernist Buddhist intellectual’s approach. However, a key to the prosperity of livelihood must be provided by democratic institutionalism. As Pridi Banomyong, a French educated lawyer who gained access into power after the 1932, used to promote *Kaokrong Khan Setthakij (economics proposal)*, so called the yellow cover book. His economics proposal contains with democratic socialism ideology which marked a standpoint of combination between political economy and active modern Buddhist moralism. This is a serious intention to pursue the ‘Sri Arya Mettrai’ ideology, his futuristic version coincides with socialist’s standpoint, regulated trade freedom by government, decentralization of natural resources, and protecting national independence autonomy. He wrote:

“The extreme desire of all citizens is happiness and prosperity. These conditions, as we call it ‘Sri Ariya,’ are going to happen to all citizens. But our hesitation of paving the way to the magic tree [Kalapapruk tree] stops them from reaching onto the tree then collecting the fruits of happiness and prosperity. According to the Buddha’s prophecy tells us about the Pra Sri Arya faith” (Pridi Banomyong, 1999: 43 – 44).

Kallapapruk or the magic tree is a metaphor for gratification of physical appetites. Pridi’s visualizing the idealistic society, Pra Sri Ariya, meant no ill will to Thai citizens, yet, the political opponents severely attacked him and accused him of being a communist. This restless atmosphere can be read as a politics of derived foreign knowledge. Socialism and communism, under this circumstance, are knowledge applications. Excluded the communist’s movement which was conducted by Chinese and Vietnamese migrants from the proposal, yet the rioters continued making problems to the government. They were behind denunciation against People’s Party, sprinkle the leaflets that contained inflamed letters until the anti-Communist Act 1933 was enacted. (Murashima, 1996: 102 – 104). Pridi’s proposal clearly was

not strong enough to convince the government to follow his decision and somehow posted a threat of nihilism to his conservative Buddhist parliament members.

A group of Thai modernist Buddhist intellectuals created a new moral orientation from revisioning Marxism's theory. Mostly, they shared the same social circle inheritance, such as writers, journalists, diplomats, lecturers etc. The essential moral code of conduct that contributed to democratic political society was their cohesive agreement. Buddhist modernism as a fundamental analysis of Thai social advancement under the rapid change of Thai society. Interestingly, the Thai intellectual modernist Buddhists who revised Marxist theory have the same focus on Buddhadasa's dhamma teaching. This point draws the presumption of this study that the modernist Buddhist retreated themselves from bureaucratic Buddhism and redirected their attention to the progressive reinterpretation of dhamma. Buddhist modernism studies also pointed to socio-economics conditions make up the alternative Buddhism, Buddhāsa's initial impact on public sphere of lokuttara dhamma (supra-mundane teaching) came from the diversity of the reinterpretations of dhamma (Ito, 2012; Jackson, 2003).

On the contrary, the bureaucratic Buddhism as this study pointed above is an official moral conduct unionized by the central authority of the Thai government or the Buddhist syncretism. Since 1947, Thai Buddhist syncretism has disintegrated to the alternative paths, the modern Buddhism and the bureaucratic Buddhism. The most important component of the first one is the progressive moral conduct based on a fraction of Marxist thoughts, and the later perishes chauvinism consists of nation, religion, and king. The bureaucratic Buddhism's uttermost accomplishment derived from combating against communism not only within this country but also across Southeast Asia. For example, the Thai military who volunteered to fight in the American-Vietnam War (Ruth, 2011; Ford, 2017). This may describe as, Kasien Tejapira's word, cultural politics of Thai Buddhism, that is the naturalization of marxism both anti-communist and marxist sympathizers were using the political implication of the two different moral predicaments to gain righteous standpoint in Thai society (2001). Eventually, the bureaucratic Buddhism which gain much more power by working alongside with the army's chaplain than the modernist Buddhists. Thai Buddhism under protection of government's authority was accentuated in to Thainess as we can see the emergence of institutionalizations on Thai Buddhism and nationalism (Saichon Sattayanurak, 2002: 152; Keyes, 1971: 511; Pinyapun Pojjanalawan, 2012: 77).

As this study argued in the previous section. Colonel Pin Mutugun is the best example of the causation of bureaucratic Buddhism against Marxism in the middle of the twentieth-century. He is also the efflorescence of Thammayut sect's expansion to the Northeastern region

in the past several decades. From his background as a farmer, he was ordained as a young novice in E-sarn monastery then moved to Wat Sampantawong or Wat Kao, for short, a thammayut's monastery in Bangkok. Not too long enough, he resigned yellow robe and joined the Thai army force in a religious chaplain position (Dhammaraksa, 1974: 14 – 26). Colonel Pin soon gained his power as a general director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1963. As a government's officer, Colonel Pin taught Thai citizens the moral conduct that was suitable to the government. He reinterpreted Mangala Sutta, Sigalavada Sutta, Kalama Sutta. These doctrines suggest Buddhist followers that they should be economize, diligent, keeping in good relationship, and live moderately (Tambiah, 1993: 437). His Buddhism reinterpretations were compatible theology to Capitalism.

4. Conclusion

The emergence of the Buddhist modernism as a Marxism sympathizer and the theoretical rationalization is a historical consequence of intellectual development in the modern time Thailand. The moderated reinterpretations of the Buddhist doctrines composed with dialectic materialism and historical materialism were made up to be a compromise with capitalism as a dominant economic system that created a high risk and competitive society. The changes in modern Thai society inevitably affected everyone's life one way or another. The political and cultural conservatism, on one hand, the Sangha hierarchy was bureaucratizing in order to absorb those changes and became initially government agents who spread the changing of moral conducts. The modernist Buddhists, on the other hand, the modernizing operations sponsored by the Thai government on education and religious reforms created a new social hierarchy. The latter group of educated middle class were brave enough to frankly study of Marxist's theory. They studied Marxist's approaches to challenge the conventional determinism ideological religious thinking which believed that the historical developments of Thai society were determined by the divine's power channels by royalties. The articles published by the Pridi-Aksornsarn group indicate that the moderating process within the intellectual religion ideology of the modernist Buddhist group was coming to face the facade of existing dominant religious ideology. They were also indicating that Buddhism per se could not help Thai society walk through the threat of nihilism that might be created by Capitalism. Because the existing moral conduct as being good citizens under the absolutist government was not efficient enough to lead people to walk through consumerism society with high competition. Eventually the Buddhist doctrines were reinterpreted as principles that were suitable to a capitalist society in both a chauvinistic way as well as a moderated way.

As we can see, the historical approach of the existing Thai Buddhist Modernism as sequences after the Thammayut Sect foundation can no longer clarify this paradigm shifting phenomena in the modern period Thai. However, this trajectory created the dialectic relationship in the Thai religion realm, between bureaucratic Buddhism and modernist Buddhism, was an important process of moral conduct development. The contradiction of these two were once collided and consequently created a trajectory of moral standards among Thai citizens. Marxism as a key ingredient was one overlooked by the past studies of this process. So, this study suggests that Marxist theoretical thinking is a crucial causation of paradigm shifting even in the religious realm, if not so, the rationalizing historical development might have been predictable by mythology approaches. As a new framework, this study also suggests that modernization of intellectual religious thinking and the shifting on moral conducts can be expanded from Thai Buddhism centric and include the other factors of those changes whether a threat or not.

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