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The Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle: Modern Buddhism in the Suppression of the Shan Rebellion in Thailand, 1900s-1920s*

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Abstract

A few years after the suppression of the Shan Rebellion by the army of Siam in 1902, the kingdom's young crown prince Vajiravudh made an official visit to the Northern Administration, where the rebellion has taken place. The trip took three months, and required a great deal of strength from the prince, who up until then had little experience of governing. He spent his nights in the thick jungle area where the Rebellion had taken place. And it was on one of those nights that one of his entouragedreamt that although there were many different threats to his life, he was protected by Thao Hirunphanasun (lit. The Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle). Soon afterwards the prince ordered that a statue of the guardian demon be erected and the deity has stood ever since in Bangkok's Phayathai Palace. This was an ambiguous episode in the history of Thai Buddhism. The crown prince, who had spent nine years being educated in Britain and had travelled through Europe, acted in something of a contradictory manner to the modern form of Buddhism that he would be championing as the next King of Thailand.

What were the factors that made the crown prince “invent” a deity which had no Buddhist origin? This paper shows that there is a need to reconsider the relationships between Buddhism and the power of the absolute monarchy in the making of the modern Thailand.

Keywords: Thailand, Modern Buddhism, King Vajiravudh, Thai Absolute Monarchy

1. Introduction

Modern Buddhism and the role of the laity in Thailand

In a compilation of articles on Buddhist studies by the Dhammakaya Foundation called *Buddhism into the Year 2000*, Professor Heinz Bechert,[1] who had coined the term Buddhist Modernism (*Buddhistischer Modernismus*) a few decades earlier, took the opportunity to stress the importance of the concept for one of the last times in his career. He again emphasized the characteristics of Buddhist Modernism in twelve features. The important features among them were the "de-mythologization" of Buddhism, the view that Buddhism was a philosophy, which made Buddhism compatible with modern science, and the role of the laity.

Many studies have followed since Bechert coined the term. Extending the discussion based on Buddhism in America, McMahan posits that Buddhist Modernism is a reform movement that came out of complex relationships between Buddhism and the discourses of modernity. This process played out differently in Buddhist countries, whether followers of Theravada, Mahayana or others, but contains a few characteristics that all the Buddhist reform movements shared. Firstly, it negotiated with the discourses

[1] Heinz Bechert, "Buddhistic Modernism: Present Situation and Current Trends," in *Buddhism into the year 2000: International Conference Proceedings* (Patumthani, Thailand: Dhammakaya Foundation, 1994).

of scientific rationalism, Christianity (more from Protestantism), and Romanticism. Secondly, it was a manifestation of more liberal forms of Christianity. There was an internal contradiction within the Christian traditions itself and there emerged criticisms towards the conservatives, drawing in elements outside of the tradition, including Buddhism. Thirdly, it was a process that was also critical of the positivism that was a product of rationalization.[2]

For a discussion about Modern Buddhism in Southeast Asia, Hansen[3] draws examples of movements from the nineteenth century to illustrate three broad developments. The first was the continuing importance of religion in the region, contrary to the well-known claim that modern societies will be "disenchanted". The second theme involves the increasing transnational level of Theravad in activities, which include the emphasis on textual scholarship and the rising role of meditation in Buddhist practice. The third development of Modern Buddhism in Southeast Asia is an uneasy relationship between nation-state and religion. While Buddhism was an essential component of the oppositional forces towards the state, the latter also patronise and made Buddhism the ideological force bolstering control and suppression. These three broad themes of Modern Buddhism synchronise well with the particular focus of this paper.

[2] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 86.

[3] Anne RuthHansen, "Modern Buddhism in Southeast Asia," in *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian History*, ed. Norman G. Owen (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

Turning to Thai Studies, there have been a number of studies on Buddhism and modernity.[4] One of the latest studies by Tomomi Ito focuses on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993), the quintessential modern monk who campaigned hard to make Buddhism a scientific form of knowledge. Ito notes that among such modern Buddhists as Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, Anagarika Dharmapala, Yang Wen-hui, T'ai Hsu, Soen Shaku, D. T. Suzuki, Mahasi Sayasaw, and others, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu of Thailand was part of the transcendent modern Buddhist movement. However, Ito remarks, while other modern Buddhist modernists travelled across the globe to promote their causes, Buddhadasa travelled comparatively little and enjoyed reclusive surroundings. Almost his entire corpus was in Thai and he seemed to "contribute much more significantly to Thai Buddhists in Thailand than to Western Buddhists…" and that "…the drive of modernity did not transform Buddhadasa and contemporary Thai Buddhism on the same scale [as in other Buddhist countries].[5]

Ito's remark is a very useful point of departure for a discussion that will follow. Her study looks at a monk for the source of modernity, and she could not find it perhaps because she was looking at the wrong place and time. This paper argues that modern Buddhism in Thailand emerged during the time of the Absolute Monarchy (1892-1932), a period long before the rise of

[4] Notably see Donald K.Swearer, "Thai Buddhism: Two Responses to Modernity," in*Tradition and Change in the Theravada Buddhism: Essays on Ceylon and Thailand in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973),78-93; Peter A.Jackson, *Buddhadasa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2013[1987]).

[5] TomomiIto, *Modern Thai Buddhism and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: A Social History* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 2-3.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.[6] It will look specifically at King Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925) and his invention of *Thao Hirunphanasun* (The Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle), a deity that was part of the expansion of the Absolute Monarchy, and argues that in order to understand how Buddhism works in Thailand, it is not possible to separate it from the political power exercised by the state. We need to look at the centre, not the periphery, of modern Buddhism.

In order to put the argument to work, there is a need to add one important feature into the discussion of modern Buddhism: the role of the laity. Since Bechert coined the term, there have been attempts to modify and extend it. One of the most important efforts was made by Gananath Obeyesekere[7] on Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka. He stressed the role of the "Anakarika" as a mediator between the monkhood and the laymen. Later, he developed the concept more fully when he coined the term "Protestant Buddhism", and one of the most important features of this concept was the role of laymen. "The hallmark of Protestant Buddhism…is its view that the layman should permeate his life with his religion; that he should strive to make Buddhism permeate his whole society; and that he can

[6] Although the term "The Modern Buddhist" was used already in 1871 by the British consul, Henry Alabaster, basing his work on Chaopraya Thiphakorawong's *Kitchanukit,* it relates to a discussion on whether or not Thai Buddhism was rational or not. My focus on the term rather refers to the relationship between the Sangha and the laity, which manifested itself later on, during the absolute monarchy. Craig J. Reynolds, personal communication, August 11, 2017, see also Thongchai Winichakul, "Buddhist Apologetics and a Genealogy of Comparative Religion in Siam," *Numen* 62 no.1 (2015): 76-99.

[7] Gananath Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon," in *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972).

and should try to reach *nirvana*".[8] Modern Buddhism, therefore, includes the unprecedented role of laity in Sri Lanka.

2. The Thai Absolute Monarchy and Modern Buddhism

In the case of Siam at the turn of the twentieth century, the laity was the king. Kingship and Buddhism have had a direct link throughout Thai history. The role of the *cakravatin*, the wheel-turning monarch, has been part and parcel of the Thai monarchy, up until the present day. Craig J. Reynolds explores the complex relationships between kingship and Buddhism by referring to the life of Gautama, noting that when he was a boy he had to choose between being either a warrior king or a Buddha. This duality, for Reynolds, was "two sides of the same coin":

> If the Buddha represents the absence of power, then he leaves a very large black hole that exerts immense gravitational force on all those in its orbit. This relationship between [Buddhahood and kingship] had implications throughout history in the way secular leaders availed themselves of Buddhism's idioms of authority and leadership.[9]

[8] Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers PVT. LTD, 1990[1988]) 216.

[9] Craig J. Reynolds, "Power," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism,* ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 220.

The black hole was the Thai king, Vajiravudh, whose reign indicated that modern Buddhism had emerged in Thailand. He continued the system that his father Chulalongkorn (r.1868-1910) had established, and was an important figure in the history of Thai Buddhism, an aspect that major studies on his reign have overlooked.[10]

Vajiravudh was a devout Buddhist and many of his policies reflected that his views were indeed modern. According to the first characteristic defined by Bechert, the process of reinterpretation of the early canonical texts was part of this movement.[11] In the 1920s, Vajiravudh commissioned the recension of the *Pitaka* under the Supreme Patriarch Prince Vajiranana. It was the second recension after King Rama I's reign, when the Bangkok Era began. After the recension was finalized in 1925, and called the *Siamrat Pitaka*, one thousand copies were distributed to the temples across the country and sent to Buddhist countries abroad.[12]

There have already been extensive discussions about the nature of the Thai Absolutist State, especially in political science regarding the concept of state transformation, about which I

[10] Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu: The University of Press of Hawaii, 1978); Stephen L. W. Greene, *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999).

[11] Heinz Bechert, "Buddhistic Modernism: Present Situation and Current Trends," in*Buddhism into the year 2000: International Conference Proceedings*, 254.

[12] Vorachart Meechubot, *Phrabatsomdetphraramathiphodisrisintharamahavajiravudhphramongkutklaojaophaendinsayamphramahakasatphu song pen nakkanthahanlaejompratkhornglok* [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], (Bangkok: Sangsan, 2010), 117-119.

will not go into great detail.[13] Somkiat Wanthana was one among the early scholars who drew the attention of Thai studies to the discussion of the nature of the Thai Absolutist State. He argues that the absolute power of the Thai state was not the status that had been in place for centuries. Instead, it began only in the late nineteenth century, and lasted for merely forty years. Somkiat points out that the Thai absolutist power began in the period during which, for the first time, the elite, led by King Chulalongkorn, gained absolute power in politics, economics, and culture over the Kingdom of Siam. This period began in 1892 with the political reform by King Chulalongkorn and ended in 1932 with the overthrow of absolute monarchy.[14] Chaiyan Rajchagool opines that the period of absolute monarchy began a little earlier, in 1873, when royalty began to take control of the Finance Office, and a year later the Privy Council and the Council of State were established. These attempts were one of the series of power struggles of King Chulalongkorn and his allies to rise to the top.[15] Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead contends that the Siamese absolutist state began as early as 1869, when during the Regency,

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[13] see Kengkij Kitirianglarp,"*Sathanakhorngwiwathawaduaykanplianrupkhorng rat thaiphailang* 2475," [The status of the debate on the state transition in Thailand after 1932],*Thammasat University Archives Bulletin,* 16 (2012-2013): 11-37.for the recent survey

[14] Somkiat Wanthana,"*Rat somburanayasitnaisayam* 2435-2475," [The absolutist state in Siam, 1892-1932]. *WarasanSangkhomsatlaeManutsat* 17, no, 1 (1990): 23-44; Nidhi Eoseewong,"*Rabopsomburanayasitthiratthai*," [Thai absolutism], in *Chatthai, muangthai, baeprianlaeanusaowari: waduaiwatthanatham, rat, laerupkanjitsamnuek* [Thai nation, Thailand, textbook, and monuments: Cultures, state, and forms of consciousness] (Bangkok: Matichon, 1995), 125-135.

[15] Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy: Foundations of the Modern Thai State from Feudalism to Peripheral Capitalism* (Bangkok; Cheney: White Lotus, 1994), 85-92.

the young King Chulalongkorn took steps to campaign for the centralisation of power, which became more successful towards the last decade of the nineteenth century.[16]

For our purposes of our discussion, the cultural side of the absolute monarchy was the centralization of Buddhism. The Supreme Patriarch Prince Vajiranana, Chulalongkorn's younger half-brother and Vajiravudh's uncle, was at the heart of this process. The Sangha Act was enacted in 1902 and led to the creation of the Council of Elders (*mahatherasamakhom*) to supervise the whole of the Thai *Sangha*. That marked the beginning of the alliance between institutional Buddhism and the Thai state. The most important part of this transformation was that it created the structure that put the monarch as the defender of religion, and he/she must extend his/her patronage to all monks.[17] The role of the king vis-à-vis the monkhood turned into a form similar towhat we call modern Buddhism.

3. King Vajiravudh and His Time

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Siam found herself in a world where the contrast between the new and the old seemed starker than ever. From the 1900s to the 1930s the world saw a wave of wars and revolutions, and nations became more intensely interconnected, paving the way for easier flows of capital, commodities, technological innovations and ideas. What

[16] Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 51-58.

[17] Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History,* trans. Peter Hawkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 69-80.

was happening in one corner of the world could be heard in the other corners in less time than ever before. This transition was not only felt in the political and economic realms, but also in the cultural and intellectual arena in Siam as well. King Vajiravudh, who acceded to the throne in 1910, found himself in this kind of world, and maintained his position amidst numerous pressures for him to change.

We might be able to understand what happened by taking a brief look at the king's life. The impact of his overseas studies became apparent in Vajiravudh's reign for the first time, as members of the elite with foreign education returned to Siam. The king himself was educated in England, which affected his views towards education and sport, and became the basis for his political manoeuvrings throughout his reign between 1910 and 1925.

Prince Vajiravudh was born on 1 January 1881, the 29th son of King Chulalongkorn, andthe second son of the king with Queen Saowapha. He began his education, both in Thai and English, at a young age. In 1893, at the age of twelve, Prince Vajiravudh was sent by his father to England for an education. He left Siam not long after the Franco-Siamese conflict[18]of that

[18] The 1893 Franco-Siamese conflict occurred from the attempt to settle the margin along the Mekong River. The dispute ended with the defeat of Siam, and the humiliation of the Siamese rulers. See Noel Alfred Battye, *The Military, Government and Society in Siam, 1868-1910: Politics and Military Reform During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1974), chapter 7. Thongchai Winichakul has argued that this 1893 crisis was the utmost agony, the "psychological breakdown" for the Siamese rulers, and they, in turn, had to rethink the world around them in a whole new light. One of their new evaluations was to think about the past in a new way. "The defeat by the French," Thongchai suggests. "gave birth to a new biography of Siam and Thailand today" see Thong-

year. In England, he was home schooled in Latin, Geometry, and Gymnastics. A year later, in 1894, he heard the news from Siam that his elder brother, Crown Prince Vajirunahis, had passed away suddenly. The title of Crown Prince thus passed to him, and the ceremony took place in March 1894 in the Siamese Embassy in London. At the dinner on the same night, he gave a speech that he would "return to Siam more Siamese than when he left it"[19]

In 1897, Vajiravudh went to study at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. There he learned riding and other military skills. In 1899, he began civilian training at Christchurch College, Oxford University, and finished without a degree, albeit having written a dissertation titled *The War of the Polish Succession.*[20] During his time abroad, like other elite of his generation, he spent time travelling on the continent. He went to Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, Egypt, Austria, Hungary, France, and Denmark.[21] In 1902, he left England for good. But instead of travelling east,

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chai Winichakul, "Siam's Colonial Conditions and the Birth of Thai History," *Southeast Asian Historiography Unravelling the Myths: Essays in honour of Barend Jan Terwiel,* ed. Volker Grabowsky (Bangkok: River Books, 2011), 30.

[19] Vorachart Meechubot, *Phrabat somdetphra ramathiphodi srisintharamahava-jiravudh phramongkutklao jaophaendinsayamphramahakasatphu song pen nakkanthahan lae jompratkhornglok* [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 18-19.

[20] Vorachart Meechubot. [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 31.

[21] King Vajiravudh's trips to Europe and Africa were: Italy, 30 March-8 April 1901; The Netherlands, 28 June-5 July 1901; Belgium, 5-16 July 1901; Russia, 9-26 January 1902; Egypt, 3 February-6 March 1902; Austria, 25-29 April 1902; Hungary, 29 April-4 May 1902; France, 8-13 July 1902; and Denmark, 16-18 September 1902.seeVorachart Meechubot. [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 34-35.

he headed west to New York, meeting with President Roosevelt[22] and continuing to Canada. Hethen crossed the Pacific to Japan, and met with Emperor Meiji and the Japanese Royal family, and left Japan on 14 January 1903. After a brief stopover in Hong Kong, Crown Prince Vajiravudh arrived in Siam on 29 January 1903[23]

By the standard of the time, it is fair to say that Crown Prince Vajiravudh was as cosmopolitan as he could be. He had travelled to most of the modern cities that the world could offer him, gaining first-hand knowledge of the modern world. But unlike his father King Chulalongkorn at the height of power, Vajiravudh did not have the constituencies that he needed when he ascended the throne in 1910. Back in Siam in 1903, he found himself facing many challenges, ranging from a lack of support within the Siamese bureaucracy to the threat to the monarchy resulting from the decline of dynasties around the world, and especially the Xinhai Revolution in China that was the major inspiration of the Revolt in 1912.

[22] Stephen L. W. Greene, *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925*, 3.

[23] Stephen L. W. Greene, *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910-1925*, 2-3; Vorachart Meechubot. [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 37-41.

4. The Challenges to King Vajiravudh and his need for political constituency

Crown Prince Vajiravudh faced at least four levels of challenges upon his return to Siam in 1903, and these challenges became even more serious following his accession to the throne in 1910. The first challenge took place within a circle of the Siamese elite, while the other three can be regarded as the accumulation of structural changes Siam had experienced from the time of Vajiravudh's father, King Chulalongkorn.

The first challenge was on an individual level. Crown Prince Vajiravudh felt isolated from his father's bureaucratic structure. He felt that he lacked support, and his path to the throne was not of his own choice. Prior to the acceptance of the title of crown prince, Vajiravudh's brother, Crown Prince Vajirunahis, had been the first holder of the title, which King Chulalongkorn created in 1886 when Siam adopted the European royal tradition of succession by primogeniture. Prince Vajirunahis was the son of Queen Savang Vadhana, and was the favourite of the Siamese elite circle and foreigners in Bangkok alike.[24] This situation, one historian suggests, caused Prince Vajiravudh to feel that he was

[24] After Crown Prince Vajirunahis' Tonsure Ceremony in 1891, King Chulalongkorn organised a grand dinner party reception for foreign guests. It was presumably the biggest of its kind. Participants were "the elite of Bangkok" and the foreign guests included the Rajah of Kedah. About 800-900 guests attended the dinner, from about a thousand invitations sent (*Bangkok Times*, 28, 31, Jan 1891, 2, 3).

Moreover, following Prince Vajirunahis' birthday on 27 June 1891, a celebration and exhibition were organised at King Chulalongkorn's summer palace in Si Chang Island, off the coast of Chonburi (*Bangkok Times,* 24 Jun 1891, 2-3).

only an auxiliary, the second best.[25] The crown was to be thrust upon him whether he wanted it or not.

Prince Vajiravudh did not have support from the higher echelons of the bureaucracy before ascending to the throne in 1910. He lamented this situation, saying:

> "I feel very isolated, without any supporters. Those who are my supporters happen to be powerless. As for those who are in high positions in the bureaucracy, they have less faith in me than they should. Therefore they will not listen to any of my suggestions, but are proud of the fact that they have been in service longer than I [have], or have more knowledge and better understanding of the people's feelings than [me]".[26]

The second challenge for Crown Prince Vajiravudh was due to the political influences from outside Siam. During the 1890s, the memory of Western imperialism was vivid among the Siamese elite. The Franco-Siamese crisis in 1893 was the greatest threat from imperialism that they had experienced. This event subsequently brought a reorientation of ideas among the elite about Siam's relationship with the West as no longer a "friendly" one. It was, in Thongchai's words, "the real first taste of colonial

[25] Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, 12.

[26] Translated and quoted in Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, 129.

threat and defeat Siam had ever experienced".[27]

But a more urgent issue challenged the Siamese monarchy than Western imperialism from the 1910s, namely the global current of reforms and revolutions. Prince Vajiravudh knew the threat from Western imperialism before he even ascended to the throne, as he had left for England the same year as the Franco-Siamese crisis. The precarious situation for the Siamese elite ended with treaties that France and Great Britain signed in 1907 and 1909 respectively, which determined the borders with the colonial powers, and thus effectively settled the question of what modern Siam would look like on the map.

The global currents of reform and revolution after Vajiravudh became king in 1910 were more acute. The influence came from England, Japan, Turkey, and particularly China, and the new king became alarmed about the repercussions of the revolutionary ideas that were circulating among bureaucrats and educated Siamese.[28]

To be sure, pressure for reform had already been present before the reign of King Vajiravudh, and members of the Siamese monarchy were well acquainted with this pressure. It is not surprising, therefore, that the royals sought ways to slow

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[27] Thongchai Winichakul, "Siam's Colonial Conditions and the Birth of Thai History," *Southeast Asian Historiography Unravelling the Myths: Essays in honour of Barend Jan Terwiel*, 26.

[28] Thamsuk Numnon, *Yangtoek run raek kabot ror.sor. 130* [The first Young Turks: the 1912 Revolt] (Bangkok: Rueangsilp, 1979), 18; Atcharaporn Kamutpit-samai, *Kabot ror.sor.130 kabot phuea prachathipatai naewkhit thahanmai* [The 1912 Revolt: The revolt for democracy and the new ideas of the soldiers]. (Bangkok: Amarin, 1997), 162-163; Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, 155.

down the rate of change in society. As early as 1885, a group of Siamese ambassadors to London and Paris drafted comments for the political and bureaucratic reform to King Chulalongkorn. The comments stressed the need for Siam to reform in order to weather the imperialism storm from the West. Many reform plans were proposed, among them Siam changing from an absolute to an institutional monarchy, and reforms to the salary system for the bureaucracy as well as the recruitment system. Siam, according to the group of ambassadors, needed to walk as close to Europe as possible, just as Japan had successfully done. In reply, King Chulalongkorn agreed that there was a need for political reforms, but he insisted that Siam was not ready.[29]

But the rate of change during the first decade of the twentieth century was too rapid for the absolute monarchy in some countries to cope with. In 1911, the world heard about the Xinhai Revolution, which ended the Qing Dynasty and began the era of the Chinese Republic. This revolution was "the culmination of nearly two decades of extraordinary ferment that left China more radically changed than had any other two decades in many centuries"[30] The Xinhai Revolution was the amalgamation of forces that began from 1905, as the triumph of Japan over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War that year helped fuel the alliances between diverse revolutionary groups in China. The time came

[29] Chai-anan Samudavanija and Khattiya Kannasutra, *Ekkasan kanmueang kanpokkhrongthai phor. sor. 2417-2477,* [Documents on Thai politics and administration, 1874-1934], ed.(Bangkok: The Social Association of Thailand, 1975), chapter 3 and 4.

[30] Michael Gasster, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement," in *The Cambridge History of China Volume II Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1980]), 464.

in October 1911, when a series of events swept the nation and ripened the conditions for the revolution, ultimately leading to the abdication of the Manchu emperor in February 1912.[31]

The events in China influenced the young and educated Siamese men enormously, and dissatisfaction towards the old system manifested itself in the 1912 Revolt[32] (*Kabotror.sor. 130* - กบฏ ร.ศ. 130),[33]but the plan was exposed and aborted only a few days before it took place.[34] There was a direct link between the Chinese revolutionary currents and the situation in Siam, which can be observed a few years prior to the plan for revolt being revealed. In 1907, a branch of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance was established in Siam.[35] This Chinese Revolutionary Alliance

[31] Michael Gasster, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement," in *The Cambridge History of China Volume II Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, 484-485.

[32] For major works on the 1912 Revolt, see Atcharaporn Kamutpitsamai, [The 1912 Revolt: The revolt for democracy and the new ideas of the soldiers]; ThamsukNumnon, [The first Young Turks: the 1912 Revolt]; Varangkana Charanyananda, "*Khanaror.sor. 130: chiwit udomkan laek anjattang*," [The R.S.130 group: Life, ideology, and organization], (Unpublished MA thesis. Ramkamhaeng University, Thailand, 2006); Nattapoll Chaiching, "*Jak 'khanaror.sor. 130 thueng 'khanaratsadorn': khwampenma khorng naewkhit prachathipatai nai prathetthai*," [From the 1912 Revolt to the People's Party: The origin of democratic ideas in Thailand], *Sinlapa Watthanatham* 32 no.4 (2011): 80-99; Nattapoll Chaiching, "*Sayam bon thang sorngphraeng: 1 sattawat khorng khwamphayayam patiwat ror.sor 130*," [Siam and its dilemma: A century of the 1912 Revolt],*SinlapaWatthanatham*33 no.4 (2012): 76-94.

[33] *Ror.sor.* is the Thai calendar for Rattanakosin Era, or Bangkok Era (1782-present).

[34] Nattapoll Chaiching, [Siam and its dilemma: A century of the 1912 Revolt], 80.

[35] Kasian Tejapira, "*Wiwatha Uttarakuru: Asawaphahu VS Sri-inthrayut*," [The Uttarakuru debate: Asavabahu VS Sri-intharayut], *Sinlapa Watthanatham* 14, no. 8(1993): 143.

was one of the key players in the Xinhai Revolution.[36] In 1908, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, one of the leaders of the Chinese revolutionary coalitions, visited the overseas Chinese community in Siam for ten days.[37] The first decade of the twentieth century, therefore, saw an acceleration of the need to change that China brought to Siam. One of the members of the 1912 group declared that the ideas of revolution came from China, and the political models planned after the revolution came from the West.[38]

The 1912 revolt began among the group (*khana*) of young army and navy officials and civilians, who recognised that Siam's existing political system was out of date and wanted to change it. The exact number of the members of the group cannot be determined due to its rather loose organisation. One study suggests that there were ninety-two members, made up of eighty-eight middle-ranking army and navy officers, and four civilians who belonged to the Department of Justice[39] But the numbers of those who were involved are estimated to be higher, ranging from one hundred and nine[40] to about two hundred.[41] The majority were young army officers in their mid-twenties of low rank,

[36] Michael Gasster, "The Republican Revolutionary Movement," in *The Cambridge History of China Volume II Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part 2*, 484-486.

[37] Kasian Tejapira," [The Uttarakuru debate: Asavabahu VS Sri-intharayut]: 144.

[38] Nattapoll Chaiching,[From the 1912 Revolt to the People's Party: The origin of democratic ideas in Thailand]:79.

[39] Thamsuk Numnon, [The first Young Turks: the 1912 Revolt], 27-34.

[40] Varangkana Charanyananda, [The R.S.130 group: Life, ideology, and organization], chapter 5.

[41] Atcharaporn Kamutpitsamai, [The 1912 Revolt: The revolt for democracy and the new ideas of the soldiers], 178.

mostly Second Lieutenants[42]

Although members of the 1912 revolt were young and subordinate in rank, they had high intentions, if not ambition. The aim was to turn Siam from absolute monarchy to a democracy with a constitution.[43] The plan of the group was based on the political models that the members of the group had in mind: absolute monarchy, limited monarchy, and republic.[44] In the meetings between members to discuss the political model that they thought most suited Siam, some members of the radical wing of the 1912 group preferred the republic model like in the United States, France, and China. After the group gained more members, however, the majority preferred Siam to have limited monarchy as her political system.[45]

In March 1912, the plan of the group was exposed, and the members were captured, and so the initiative was called a revolt rather than a revolution. Had the 1912 Revolt become successful, Siam's path in history would have changed course in an unimaginable way.

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[42] Thamsuk Numnon, [The first Young Turks: the 1912 Revolt], 29-31; Varangkana Charanyananda, [The R.S.130 group: Life, ideology, and organization], chapter 5.

[43] Rian Srijan and Net Phunwiwat, [The 1912 Revolt (the first revolution in Thailand)], 18.

[44] Atcharaporn Kamutpitsamai, [The 1912 Revolt: The revolt for democracy and the new ideas of the soldiers], 168-172.

[45] Nattapoll Chaiching, [From the 1912 Revolt to the People's Party: The origin of democratic ideas in Thailand]: 79-80.

The third challenge that King Vajiravudh faced when he ascended the throne in 1910 was the declining financial situation of the kingdom. The trade surplus dwindled from the year he became king. Signalling the economic recession was rice exports, Siam's major export commodity, which started becoming very unstable in 1905. The total volume of commodity exports went down from 106.9 to 81 million from that year, with the largest drops occurring between 1911 and 1912. This was due to a global recession and the change from silver to the gold standard in international trade in 1908, which affected the rice price in the world markets.[46] Furthermore, between 1903 and 1911 a scarcity of rainfall significantly affected rice crops in the Chao Phraya Basin, the Northeast and the North, pushing the rice price up.[47] In 1912, the government turned to reliable domestic taxes on gambling, opium, and liquor, which added up to about 66.8 million baht, constituting over 40% of the total income of the government.[48]

[46] Pornpen Hantrakool, "*Kanchaijai ngoenphaendin nai ratchasamai phrabatsomdet phra mongkutklaojaoyuhua (phor. sor. 2453-68)*," [The government spending during the reign of King Rama the Sixth (A.D. 1910-25)], (Unpublished MA thesis. Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, 1974), 50-51.

[47] Atcharaporn Kamutpitsamai, [The 1912 Revolt: The revolt for democracy and the new ideas of the soldiers], 76-80; Pornpen Hantrakool, [Government spending during the reign of King Rama the Sixth (A.D. 1910-25)], in *Prawatsatsetthakit thai jonthueng phor. sor. 2484,* [Thai economic history until 1941], ed. Chatthip Nartsupha and Somphop Manarangsan (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press and Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1984), 474.

[48] Pornpen Hantrakool, [The government spending during the reign of King Rama the Sixth (A.D. 1910-25)], 61.

The deficit problem was exacerbated by the dissatisfaction of the private business sector. Groups of Siamese businessmen could see that the reason for the difficulties in achieving successful capital accumulation was the domination of the country's entire business apparatus by colonial and foreign companies. Major export-oriented industries including rice, tin mining, teak and banking were in large part dominated by Chinese and European companies. Chinese entrepreneurs and coolies were heavily involved in rice milling, Europeans in sawmills and mines.[49] Akira Suehiro concluded that there were three capitalist groups by the end of the 1920s: 1) European 2) Chinese and 3) Thai, or sakdina, group. Overall, the major export-oriented industries were dominated by the first two groups, the Europeans and Chinese.[50] Siamese businessmen resented this situation because they were unable to gain access to means of production, especially in acquiring new technologies. Moreover, they felt that the government's tax and tariff regime favoured the Western companies the most.[51]

The fourth challenge that King Vajiravudh faced came from the intellectuals and journalists. According to Matthew Copeland, Siam entered the new era of "political journalism" (*nangsuephim kanmueang*) during the reign of King Vajiravudh.[52] That is, the

[49] Pornpen Hantrakool, [The government spending during the reign of King Rama the Sixth (A.D. 1910-25)], 52.

[50] Akira Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855-1985*(Tokyo, Japan: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1989), 103-105.

[51] Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand, Economy and Politics*. (Selangor, Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 2002), 262-263.

[52] M. P. Copeland, "Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam" (Ph.D. thesis. Australian National University, 1993), chapter 4. Copeland also included political cartoons that he discovered during his fieldwork into his thesis. These cartoons are critical of the nobility and

monopoly that the Siamese monarchy claimed on politics was dismantled. A different kind of polity emerged that provided an institution which included the views of the opposition from the critical press to the Siamese monarchy. This Siamese public sphere emerged in a situation which, according to Thanapol Limapichart, "was the first time that every aspect of the Siamese government had been monitored by the newspapers, from economic and social policies and the corruption of high-ranking bureaucrats to gossip about the king's personal life".[53] The absolute monarchy responded to these criticisms in several ways, trying to control the uncontrollable Siamese public sphere. In 1917, King Vajiravudh bought one of the most critical of the political journalism sources, *Bangkok Daily Mail*, and its Thai-language edition, *Krungthep Daily Mail*. In 1922, he enacted the first press act in Siam. But these manoeuvrings still could not stop criticisms of the government and, particularly, of the king himself.[54]

King Vajiravudh, in particular. Looking at them, I cannot imagine that such cartoons could escape Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code in present-day Thailand, especially the cartoon on page 122 of the thesis. See M. P. Copeland, "Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam", chapter 5.

[53] Thanapol Limapichart, "The Emergence of the Siamese Public Sphere: Colonial Modernity, Print Culture and the Practice of Criticism (1860s-1910s),"- *South East Asia Research* 17 no.3 (2009): 387.

[54] Thanapol Limapichart, "The Emergence of the Siamese Public Sphere: Colonial Modernity, Print Culture and the Practice of Criticism (1860s-1910s)": 388.

5. The Shan Rebellion in 1902 and the Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle

Among the numerous pressures on King Vajiravudh I have discussed so far, is one event that barely gets mentioned because it did not happen during his reign: the Shan Rebellion in 1902, eight years before he acceded to the throne and the same year that the Sangha Act was enacted. The event is registered in mainstream Thai history as one of the small unrests that was quelled easily by the authorities.[55] But I want to suggest that it had a more profound repercussions.

In 1902, when the Crown Prince Vajiravudh returned to Siam, his important task wasto show that he was ready to become the next king. Between 1905 and 1906, after he ordained as a monk for a few days to fulfil his role as a Buddhist, he took on the first major task to fulfil his role as the crown prince by launching an official visit to the Northern region.[56] It was a telling choice, as the area that he was visiting was the heartland of the rebellion that took place in 1902 and lasted at least until 1904.[57] To overcome the challenges, the crown prince had to prove that he was an able person to rule Siam. In other words, the trip was a rite of passage for him.

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[55] Tej Bunnag, *Khabotror.sor. 121,* [The 1902 Rebellions], (Bangkok: Social Science and Humanities Textbook project. 1981), 32.

[56] Vorachart Meechubot, [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 48-49.

[57] Andrew Walker, "Seditious State-Making in the Mekong Borderlands: The Shan Rebellion of 1902-1904," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*29 no. 3 (November 2014): 554-590.

The Shan Rebellion erupted in the area around the provinces of Phrae, Lampang, and Nan. On 25 July 1902, Pakamong, the Shan leader, led a group of more than forty rebels to plunder the centre of Phrae, attacking the police station and the post office aiming to cut the telegraph line. They targeted the Thai officials there and around twenty of them were captured and killed. The Thai officials who went into hiding were tracked down by the locals and handed to the rebels, who decided their fate. After the first successful attack, the rebels split into two. One group advanced northwards to gather support from the Shan community in the area, which consisted of up to 20,000 people.[58] Another group went down South to the thick jungle of Uttaradit to slow down the Thai troops expected to march up from the south. This group launched guerrilla attacks on the Thai troops that were marshal led into the area, especially at night time. According to the official account, the Shan offensive lasted for about two weeks, and was effectively suppressed before the Bangkok troops arrived. Nevertheless, the Shan "problem" was not resolved until at least 1904.

The Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle (*Thao Hirunphanasun*) emerged in this context. Indeed, if we consider the time that the Rebellion took place, Crown Prince Vajiravudh would have had this in his mind. He arrived in Bangkok only five months after the offensive, and throughout his time in Bangkok he knew that the Shan "problem" was still on-going. His trip to the North lasted three months. The most intense period was when he entered the thick jungle bordering Phrae and Uttaradit, the very area where the Shan rebels targeted the Thai officials. When the crown prince and his royal party entered into the jungle trail, they

[58] Andrew Walker, "Seditious State-Making in the Mekong Borderlands: The Shan Rebellion of 1902-1904": 561.

were afraidof the perils and threats that they would face in the jungle. The crown prince was sure that there were supernatural beings that would protect them from harm. The report states that "one member of the royal party" then said that he had a dream that a tall, powerful guardian appeared and said that he would follow the royal party to protect the king throughout his time in the deep jungle. The king heard this and ordered propitiatory gifts to be offered to the guardian every day that the party spent in the jungle of Uttaradit.[59]

The incident seemed to be vivid in the king's mind and when he ascended the throne, he ordered a Brahmanistic ritual to condone the making of four statues of the Guardian. The first he kept personally as an amulet; the second one was placed at the Royal Page Department; the third in front of the royal vehicle and the last one as a statue at the Phayathai Palace.[60]

What are we to make of this deity? It does not seem to fit neatly with Bechert's modern Buddhism nor Obeyesekere's Protestant Buddhism. I would like to suggest that we might need to extend the understanding of modern Buddhism also in the dimensions when it encountered other "informal" religions such as spirits and animism, especially in regard to the expansion of the Thai absolute monarchy at the turn of the twentieth century. This process is what Hayashi called Buddhacization,[61] but Holt

[59] Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, 229-230; Vorachart Meechubot. [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 51-53.

[60] Vorachart Meechubot, [King Vajiravudh: A Militarist and a learned man of the world], 53.

[61] Yukio Hayashi, *Practical Buddhism among the Thai-Lao: A Regional Study of Religion in the Making* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2003).

insists that it was not a one-way interaction. There were constant responses by local forces that he described in the Lao religious culture as "inspiriting" when Buddhacization from Bangkok arrived there.[62]

The process of Buddhacization, I would argue, in this case the Thai king's Buddhism towards the informal religions of the northern region needs a different approach than the Saidian self-other opposition. The Buddhacization process under the Thai absolute monarchydid not have only one dimension of rule, that is, to overcome and turn the local religions into Buddhism. Instead, Thai absolute monarchy under King Vajiravudh incorporated and hierachised the Silver Guardian Demon of the Jungle into the cosmos of its modern Budhhism, by placing it in the heart of the Bangkok Empire, at the Phayathai Palace where the king resided. As Ann Laura Stoler put it forcefully, this strategy was similar to elsewhere in the colonial East Indies, where colonial administrations adhered to non-interference in local religious practices, but in fact incorporated it with the colonial hierarchy of rule.[63] Bangkok was no different. During the same period, Bangkok applied plural jurisdictions towards the Malay-Muslim South regarding family law.[64]

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[62] John Clifford Holt, *Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 232-258.

[63] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule,*(Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2012).

[64] Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand,*(Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Vajiravudh incorporated informal religious institutions – the supernatural – with absolute monarchy's modern Buddhism by making it compatible with the discourses of scientific rationalism. His position on the supernatural was determined by reasoning. He wrote that Buddhism, like Judeo-Christianity, needed miracles to attract the believers. For him, miracles and supernatural beliefs were not foreign to religion. He gave an example:

> For the legend that before the Buddha attained the state of Awakening [*Tratsaru*], there were two occasions that the Great Demon [*mara*] tested him. The first occasion the Great Demon turned to be a female to seduce the Buddha but failed. On the second occasion, the Demon summoned a large army to test him. Both these tests, for those who have wisdom could contemplate that…they were metaphors. They happened inside the Buddha's mind during his contemplation, not outside.[65]

By relying on the empirical, King Vajiravudh followed what Bechert called the "de-mythologization" of Buddhism, which he termed "the use of…early sources…combined with modernization of the concepts of cosmology and with a symbolic interpretation of traditional myths which were customarily associated with Buddhism".[66] Here was the indication that Thailand was part of the transcendental movement of modern Buddhism, and to make of this movement we have to understand it in the context. Thai modern Buddhism was process of hegemony during the period of absolute monarchy in Thailand.

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[65] King Vajiravudh, *Thetsana Sueapa,* [Sermon to the Wild Tigers], (1920), 50-51.

[66] Heinz Bechert, "Buddhistic Modernism: Present Situation and Current Trends," in *Buddhism into the year 2000: International Conference Proceedings*, 254-256.

6. Conclusion

This article has taken a historical approach to the study of modern Buddhism in Thailand by the early twentieth century by analysing the relationship between a particular form of rule, the Thai absolute monarchy, and a particular form of religion, Modern Buddhism. I have suggested that the form of modern Buddhism in Thailand has to be reconsidered based on its historical development, and that it could be seen that modern Buddhism was not a neutral concept but was utilized for the expansion of Buddhism from Bangkok to the other parts of the country by the turn of the twentieth century.

One dimension that can be scrutinised further is the class relations of modern Buddhism. Members of the political constituencies were part of the formation of a new class that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. They were not of royal origin, yet were not anymore part of the old feudal relations. The exploration of the relationship between this new group of people and their Buddhism will shed light on the socio-political dimensions of modern Thailand, including her present political conflict.

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