

Champasak: Dhammayuttika Nikaya and the Maintenance of Power of the Thai State (Buddhist Decade 2390-2450)

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This article is intended to analyse the time during Siam's reign in Champasak, when Siam exercised the colonial power to collect tributes and taxes, resulting in the local Lao's burdens. This caused rebels to be formed under the culture of local Buddhists combined with indigenous beliefs. Siam therefore attempted to connect the local Lao and culture to the central power. One of the important policies was to send Thammayut monks to remove the local beliefs and to disseminate pure Buddhism, according to Thai Dhammayuttika Nikaya. Later, French colonies wanted to rule the Lao territory in the name of Indochina, resulting in that the monks of Dhammayuttika Nikaya were drawn to be part of the political mechanism, in order to cultivate loyalty in the Siamese elites and spread the Thai ideology. This aimed to separate Laos from the French's claiming of legitimacy for a colonial rule. However, even if the Dhammayuttika Nikaya was accepted and supported by the Lao rulers, but it was not generally accepted by the local people, because it was the symbol of the power of Siam who oppressed them, and appeared to have ideological differences with their local culture. Dhammayuttika Nikaya, as a state mechanism, was not successful in maintaining the power of the Thai state.

Key words: *Champasak, Buddhism, Siam State, French colonies.*

Introduction

This article discusses Thai Dhammayuttika Nikaya that has been exercised as a cultural and ideological mechanism to create political legitimacy in the administration of Champasak. Originally, Champasak was a settlement of indigenous or tribal groups. Later, the Lao

cultural influence, Buddhism and politics from the Kingdom of Lan Xang had expanded to rule in the 2250s Buddhist decade, resulting in the establishment of a Buddhist state led by a Buddhist monk named "Phra Khru Phon Samek" as political leader. Later, Siam extended its power to rule Champasak as a tributary state, collecting tribute and resources into the centre. There was an oppression of indigenous groups so much so that this mistreatment led to a rise of resistance by groups of people who relied themselves on local Buddhist beliefs. Siam therefore used the Thai Dhammayuttika Nikaya strategy to purify local Buddhism in Laos. Later in the 2430s Buddhist decade, the French colonies wanted to rule Laos, causing a clash with the power of Siam, which ruled Laos at that time. Under this circumstance, Siam had used Dhammayuttika Nikaya as a political mechanism to connect people and culture with the Thai identity, setting up schools to give a new practice of education to novices, monks, and laymen, teaching Thai language and conveying the ideology of the Thainess to create righteousness in preserving their power. Anyway, it was not successful; the chronological events are presented in the following points.

Champasak in the Conservative Era (21-23 Buddhist Century)

Champasak is the southern territory of the Kingdom of Lan Xang and, has a long history and development, before being dominated by politics from an external power. The topography of Champasak is mostly surrounded by highlands and plateaus, the most important plateau is called Bolaven which is the residence of tribes, especially the "Kha Laven" tribe. In the early 21st Buddhist century, the mighty King Setthathirath of Lan Xang Kingdom tried to expand his influence into this region (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Anyway, he was defeated by the "Kha" tribe that fought with no fear of death; King Setthathirath died in Attapeu (Chit Phumisak, 2013; Boonchuay Srisawad, 1960). However, it can be assumed that, in the same period of time, a number of Lao people may have moved into settlements along the banks of the Mekong River (Stuart-Fox, 1997), but most of the highland areas still belonged to the tribal possession. Later in the middle of the 22nd Buddhist century, there were conflicts within the royal court of Lan Xang Vientiane as the Lord Chancellor usurped the ruling power from King Suriyawongsa. A group of the royal blood suffered and ran away to seek for asylum from a monk named "Phra Khru Phon Samek," who brought people to the South of Laos into Champasak and became the ruler of Champasak, along with compromising and convincing the Kha tribe to cooperate with him. He laid the pattern of political culture in Laos (with Buddhism as the foundation), removing the tribal beliefs of those who respected ghosts and spirits to become under Buddhism. Later, Phra Khru Phon Samek renamed the name of Champasak to "Nakhon Champasak Nagapurisi" along with sending his laymen to rule the various districts around the area, such as Attapeu, Salavan, Xiang Taeng, Mueang Khong, Ban Thong (Yasothon), making the city of Champasak prosperous. The area of Champasak covers both sides of the central Mekong River, or the entire southern Laos, as well as the Chi-Mun River Basin, from Ubon-Roi Et (Fine Arts Department, 1941 Kor).

Later in the 23rd Buddhist Century, the prosperity of Champasak had to end, as being empowered by Siam, the local colony, who extended the power to rule over Champasak.

Siamese power and the Collision with the People/Culture

In 1778-1779, Champasak became a colony of Siam in the reign of King Sayakumane of Champasak, caused by an incident of King Siribunsan of Lan Xang Vientiane who was in a conflict with the group of Phra Wo Phra Ta. Phra Ta was killed; Phra Wo with his remaining allies fled to seek for asylum of King Sayakumane of Champasak. Anyway, not for long, Phra Wo broke with the Champasak ruler (Suwit Theerasasawat, 2000: 413-141). Phra Wo with his family fled to setting up allies in Don Mot Daeng near Mun River (Ubon Ratchathani province at present) and requested an administration of the Thonburi Kingdom. When King Siribunsan knew about the conflict between Phra Wo and King of Champasak, he assigned Phraya Supho to lead the army to battle with Phra Wo. In this battle, Phra Wo died but his son could escape from the battle and sent a request to ask King Taksin of Thonburi (Taksin the Great) to send an army to help in the battle (Boonchuay Srisawat, 1960: 295). King of Thonburi assigned His Majesty the King Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok who at that time was in a title of Phraya Maha Kasatsuek, to lead the army by land to meet with the eastern districts and also assigned Phraya Surasi Phisanuwathirat to send an army to Cambodia and enlisted Cambodian citizens to build warships, in order to sail along the Mekong River to join with the army of Phraya Maha Kasatsuek (Term Wiparkpotjanakit, 1987). Finally, Thonburi's army won over the battle with Champasak and Champasak became a colony or a tributary state of Siam since then. However, the royal blood of Laos was allowed to continue their reign.

When Champasak became a tribute state of Siam, Lao people, and the groups of Kha people were ruled by and had to pay tribute to Siam, resulting in the fact that the indigenous people/ the Kha were greatly exploited. Siam assigned Champasak as a key principality to control and forcibly provided Siam with manpower, slaves, and natural resources by appointing Lao peoples as authority to receive orders for exploiting and forcing the Kha people or the indigenous groups in the area of Southern Laos for economic and political benefits (Chit Phumisak, 2013; Suwit Theerasasawat, 2000: 177). For instance, the King of Thonburi appointed Thao Ngao to be Phra Ratchawongsa, as the ruler of Attapeu, to control the people of Lao and Kha, with an agreement of paying royal tributes of 6 chang (*unit of money*) per year to Siam. Moreover, Phra Ratchawongsa also persuaded the Kha people at 4 subdistricts to join the troops. The later ruler could add more 9 subdistricts to become allies with Attapeu, all based on the city of Attapeu (Term Wiparkpotjanakit, 1987: 55). Gathering resources and exploitation of slave labor went on until the early Rattanakosin period. The Kha were not only captured and forced to pay tribute or become slaves, but they also were traded as a product in the market. The largest slave market in this area is the town of Attapeu. Amonier

(2000 : 68) a French explorer, recorded during his Champasak survey at the time being ruled by Siam "Family members are often kidnapped and sold without any laws to protect the forest people who do not surrender..., killing anyone who tried to protect themselves, putting beams in the neck of women and children and sell out to merchants who come from everywhere. Children are priced at 1-2 silver bars where as young men and women, 3-4 silver bars." Being heavily exploited caused tension in the relationship between the Kha and Siamese elites. Finally, there was a rise of forces that the Kha had joined with, in order to not be so overtaken by such influence. Local Buddhist culture, claimed to have had a holy person, or claimed to have the sacred power to form a rebellion movement. For example, Ai Chiangkaew's rebellion in 1791, who claimed to be a holy person by referring to a Buddhism-oriented person to gain the respect among the mass of people. This resulted in gathering troops in which many of the Kha people participated. It was the same time that King Sayakumane was seriously sick, Ai Chiangkaew raised the troops to encircle the palace, resulting in that King Sayakumane was shocked to death. Ai Chiangkaew could take over the town of Champasak but not for long; the Siamese army was able to fight and suppress (Fine Arts Department, 1941 Khor). Anyway, such struggle of the Holy Men's Rebellion movement was later formed again to fight against the exploitation of the Siamese power. The leader of this battle was a monk named Bhikkhu Sa who was known among the Thai authorities of "Ai Sa Kiat Ngong's Rebellion".

Bhikkhu Sa had used the occultism and supernatural powers to assemble troops secretly for 2-3 years (Chit Phumisak, 1987). The Kha themselves had resentful feelings for the exploitation then ganged up with Bhikkhu Sa. Bhikkhu Sa gathered a lot of troops and then organised the army. Winning the battle, they took over the town and all the precious assets. Soon after, the Siamese army responded back, resulting in Bhikkhu Sa to flee from the town of Champasak and seek asylum at "Phu Pu" town of Attapeu, hiding with the indigenous people/the Kha, for 2-3 years. This Bhikkhu Sa, in the eyes of Siam, was considered a shameless monk, using trickery and deception to fool the Kha people to have faith in him. (Fine Arts Department, 1941) It was considered the same as a creation of discourse about a holy men's rebellion with the acts of perverse distortion from the doctrine— the essence of Buddhism. However, even though the authorities of Bangkok were trying to capture Bhikkhu Sa, they could not succeed doing that; therefore, they took control of King Manoi of Champasak to Bangkok to be prisoned until the King's death. In the reign of King Rama III, a royal command was sent to Chao Anouvong to catch Bhikkhu Sa. Chao Nyo, son of Chao Anouvong, with an army, was assigned to arrest Bhikkhu Sa. Finally, Bhikkhu Sa was captured and sent to Bangkok as of royal command¹. The "Holy-Men's Rebellion", was therefore being subdued by the power of the Siamese government with superior weapons and

¹ From this event, Chao Nyo, son of Chao Anouvong was treated with merits and later took the title of Champasak's governor.

forces. However, in the Lao local eyes, Bhikkhu Sa was a hero who led the Kha people in the fight against oppression and stood for years before ending.

Dhammayuttika Nikaya and the maintenance of power of the Thai state

Immediately after the reign of King Rama IV, the Dhammayut Nikaya that His Majesty was involved in, was encouraged to spread to the northeast in Ubon districts in the year 1851. There was a monk who was important in the dissemination of Buddhism, named Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di), who had been one of the King Rama IV's co-religionists during the King Rama IV's monkhood. He received a Thammayut motion granted by King Rama IV at Wat Bowonniwet Vihara as King Rama IV saw clearly that Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) was a disciplinary monk and would be an important person in propagating the Dhammayuttika Nikaya. Therefore, the King royally assigned Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) to lead the propagation of Dhammayuttika Nikaya in the Northeast. In the initial stage, the King assigned Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) and Phra Phrom Ratchawongsa (Kutong) (the 3rd ruler of Ubon Ratchathani) to build a Thammayut temple by royally funding 10 chang (*unit of money*) for the foundation in the year 1851; the temple was completed in the year 1853. King Rama IV royally gave the name of this temple as Supatnaram Temple, considered the first Thammayut temple in the Northeast (Phra Phrom Muni (Tisso Uan), 1936). After the completion of the Supatnaram Temple, King Rama IV invited Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) to be the first abbot of the Supatnaram Temple, together with the royal donation of 8 baht per month. Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) was considered to be an important leader who brought the Dhammayuttika Nikaya to propagate in Champasak as he could also persuade many Lao monks in the town of Champasak to come to meet King Rama IV. Later, these monks were a major group of Buddhist monks in propagating Thammayut in Laos, which can be mentioned as follows:

Phra Ajahn Mao, a native of Champasak (Sa-ngiam Saeng-alun, 2018: interview) was introduced to be in the presence of King Rama IV by Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di). When meeting, His Majesty the King had a word with Phra Ajahn Phandhulo that, "A good monk...he is! How come you didn't bring me more of someone like him?" Phra Ajahn Pandhulo then replied, "It's rare to find one, your Majesty." (Phra Phrom Muni (Tisso Uan), 1936: 19) Phra Ajahn Mao had been trained for some time and he was then motioned to be a Thammayut monk, with an ordination name as "Thewa Thammi" In addition, Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) also convinced another monk named Phra Kam, a native Lao residing in Mueang Khong (Sithandon), Champasak, to come to study in Bangkok and to submit himself to serve King Rama IV. After being trained, he was motioned to be a Thammayut monk, known as Khunna Sampanno, and was considered another form of the King Rama IV's disciples. Later, Phra Kam was promoted to have a title of "Phra Khru Pathum Thamthada".

After the town of Ubon had had the main Sangha cabinet of the Thammayut Nikaya, Phra Ajahn Kam Khunna Sampanno, expanded the branches of Thammayut to “Mueang Khong” in the south of Champasak which was his hometown, along with the construction of the Phukhaokaew Maniwan Temple as the first temple. (Phra Rat Worakhun (Saiyud Panyasarathera), 2005: 11-20), with the support of Chao Yutti Thammathon, the governor of Champasak at that time. In this regard, Phra Ajahn Kam Khunna Sampanno also convinced and sent the novice monks to study in Ubon and Bangkok from time to time.

However, from Mueang Khong², there were 4 other Lao monks who were disciples of Phra Ajahn Kam Khunna Sampanno. These 4 monks also went to Bangkok to study and returned to Laos and played a major role in the dissemination of Dhammayuttika Nikaya in Laos. The names of the 4 monks were, Phra Khru Tha Chotipalo, Phra Singh Akkhatammo, Phra Singh (ordination name unknown) and Phra Piu (ordination name unknown).

Thammayut monks who were the Lao people had a huge role in creating a connection of Thainess in Laos with Siam as the central government. In the early stages, the monks were sent to ordination in Bangkok every three years because they were unable to make a motion for Thammayut themselves. Later in the year, in which Bangkok had been afflicted by cholera, causing many deaths to persons going to ordain (Phra Phrommuni (Tisso Uan), 1936: 21-22), then King Rama IV royally appointed Phra Pandhulo a preceptor. The ordination was then accepted to be done in Laos, resulting in the delivery of the monks to Bangkok to begin to decline.

Local Lao Buddhism was not acceptable by the Siamese governing class. It was also seen as a problem for the government, such as the rebellions from the use of local Buddhist culture as mentioned earlier in this article. The propagation of Thammayut to the Lao principalities, therefore, aimed to reform the religion, to prove the purity of the local monks, including to exercise the strict discipline (according to the Thammayut ideology), and at the same time, to propagate the ideology of the Thai state that linked the localities with the Thai identity at the centre. With this reason, apart from the fact that Dhammayuttika Nikaya played a role in the dissemination of the code of practice and disciplines, it also had a key role in teaching and learning to Buddhists, the novices and monks in the province of Ubon. Many schools for teaching and learning of both monks and novices were established with curriculum covering both Dhamma and secular subjects such as Thai language and mathematics, for instance.

² During the period that it was disseminated to Mueang Khong, Thammayut Nikaya was considered at the peak prosperous period, noticing from the number of 46 newly built Thammayut temples on the Don Khong river islands, such as the Phu That Temple, the Phangkhaio Temple, the Ing Nakhon Temple, the Lao Song Temple and the Sae Phon Plueai Temple. (Mok Saeng-alun, 2018: Interview) Therefore, it can be said that the Mueang Khong district was a city of Dhammayuttika Nikaya, the propagation of Thailand state ideology..

At the end of the reign of King Rama IV, the propagation of Thammayut in Laos was progressing well and continuously. Later, around the first half of the Buddhist decade 2430, the Siamese power of the royal territory was confronted with political conditions from the pressure that French colonists who began to expand their political power into Laos, which was under the authority of Siam. (Army Training Command Department, 1941). Periodically, there were clashes of power between Siam and France. The Thai side saw that France wanted to seize more lands, so they prepared themselves for that, for example, improving the dominance and administration of the eastern districts, especially in Champasak, Nong Khai, and Luang Prabang (Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, 2004)

In this same period, Thammayut played a strong role in the Champasak district. Only one year after the reign of King Rama IV, Phraya Maha Amatayathibodi (Roon Sripen) and Chao Yutithamthon (Chao Nakhon Champasak), who was the provincial royal ruler of Bangkok, with Thao Fia of Department of Urban Affairs, joined together in the restoration of the Amatayaram Temple (which was an old temple located in Ban Amat, Nakhon Champasak, with an area of about 10 rai) to become a Thammayut temple. For the Sangha side, Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao) was the co-founder. After building a Thammayut temple, he built a school named **Burapha Siamkhet** School as well. Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao)³ became the abbot, and later became Lord Abbot of the Champasak district too. He invited one of his disciples, Phra Maha Chan⁴ to perform the duties of teaching the monks, novices and local people. Phra Maha Chan did good work and was well accepted so greatly that the governor asked for the King's graciousness to appoint Phra Mana Chan to be Leader of Sangha of Champasak. He then traveled to Bangkok to receive a royal commission at "Phrakhru Vichit Thamaphani" from the Master Dean of Champasak⁵, along with taking many of his disciples

³ At the field-survey for data collection, the author met with Thao Sa-ngiam Saeng-alun, a 98-year-old native Lao, Champasak, who identified himself as a nephew of Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao) and had ordained and completed Pali Studies (Primary). Thao Sa-ngiam told that when there was a school at Amatayaram Temple, he had the opportunity to help the teaching at this school. He also gave the impression that he had helped to make tables and chairs for the school as of those days; funding for the school construction was still minimal. Everyone had to help each other, including monks and novices. Thao Sa-ngiam confirmed that Dhammayuttika Nikaya that came to Laos, was first propagated in the Champasak area, before spreading to other parts of Laos such as Vientiane. Thao Sa-ngiam also confirmed the experience of Luang Pu Sao's funeral at Amatayaram Temple when he himself, along with other monks and novices, together made a coffin to store the body of Luang Pu Sao as well.

⁴ He was a native of Ubon Ratchathani and ordained as a Thammayut monk at the Sithong Temple where Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao), sat as the preceptor. He traveled to Bangkok in order to study until he had graduated in Pali Studies (Primary), then returned to Ubon to lay-support the preceptor at Sithong Temple as well as to study the Buddhist practice with him.

⁵ In the government of King Chulalongkorn, he was appointed to a title of Country Patriarch for the provincial administration at provinces such as Chanthaburi Province, Ratchaburi Province (titled as Phraratchakawi) and the Country Patriarch of Bangkok province, respectively; the last monastic title received was Commissioner of the Clerical, Deputy Dean of Aranyawasi as "Phra Ubali Khunupamajahn" in the year 1925; he became deceased seven years after that.

to study as well. These monks later became a major force at all religious services; one monk among these was Phra Maha Tisso (Uan) (Phra Ubali Khunupamajahn (Sirichanto Chan), 1969; Warawudh Palanan et al., 2014: 55-56)

The monks and novices of Mahanikai Nikaya or Lao monks (which in this article will later be called “local monks”) were considered as following local Buddhism which had a flexible practice integrated with the community, showing a local identity that was different from Bangkok or the central power. It was considered a popular Buddhism which had beliefs and practices related to the way of life of villagers and communities. The most obvious example was the appointment and the praise of monks. Lao people would appoint monks who they themselves had respect for by means of “Hod Song”, which had been practised for a long time since the era of Lan Xang and widely used in the areas alongside the Mekong river (Term Wiparkpotjanakit, 1987). However, such means of monks’ appointments were opposed by the Thai government as the appointment of monks had to be processed through the monarchy and approved by the central monastery. The central authority therefore did not accept and banned such appointment of monks. For the Lao Buddhist monks themselves, the Thammayut group of monks was considered to be different, such as holding a strict duty and practice, as well as the robes that were different. Thao Ken (of Pak Xong Champasak), aged 80 years old, who had ordained as a Mahanikai monk in Pakse town, said that “The coming of Thammayut monks makes a difference between local monks or Mahanikai because they didn’t hold on to the same practice; duty and practice are different. In some cases, monks even pay respect to novices as a novice can wear the robes and looks the same as a monk. In addition, sometimes there were conflicts between the two sects as Thammayut monks always claimed that they were devotees of the discipline and strict practice. This made local people misunderstand about the two sects and even to the consideration that “Phra Pa (Thammayut monks) was stricter than Phra Ban (Mahanikai monks).” The expansion of Thammayut in the Lao districts caused conflicts with the monks of Mahanikai Nikaya who were local Lao monks. According to the Thammayut ideology, it was necessary to reform Buddhism in accordance with the Dhammayuttika Nikaya ideology, beginning with denying the legitimacy of the existing monasticism, which was considered to have 5 failures, namely failure in speech, failures in boundary, failure in assembly, failure in conduct, and failure in the use of robes. This ideology made the Thammayut monks appear unfriendly and practise differently in the eyes of the native Lao monks. In some cases, there were quarrels among them, resulting in fighting and hurting each other, and between the monks and the novices of Thammayut and Mahanikai who walked alms in the opposite direction. This finally led to the issuance of rules or regulations prohibiting both monks to walk alms on the same road in order to solve the conflict between each other (Phra Phrom Muni (Tisso Uan), 1936: 24)

Thammayut was also considered to be related to the mechanism of the state power in organising education and propagating both religious and secular education, which was linked to the Bangkok centre. The Sangha cabinet played a key role in the education administration, not different from the general government bodies, such as sending reports on administration management/teaching and annual budgeting. It was also considered that teaching morality to the general public aimed to create peace for the Kingdom that would, in the end, benefit the state. In the case of Phra Upali Khunupamajahn (Chan Sirichantho), he also taught people to know about the capital city, taught them to be loyal to the King as it deemed equal to making merits, because the King was a charismatic person. According to “Sirichanthowat Teachings” that he authorised for the people of Laos to know about the capital and the king. The duty of citizens was to pay taxes to the country. The King had a royal grace like God to the lives of people. His Majesty had the virtues and was like the refuge of the people. Every nation must have a king. If there is no king, it will cause suffering and confusion. The people have a duty to pay the royal tax so that it will be used to govern and secure the country. In addition, good deeds should be devoted to the king; this is another means of making merits. Anyone who adheres to the King's grace will experience happiness and prosperity. (Phra Ubali Khunupamajahn, 1984: 12-18).

For those local Mahanikai monks who preferred to practice meditation⁶, when facing the Thammayut monks who were supported by the state ruling power, they became possessed to be converted into Thammayut too, such as Phra Ajahn Sao (Kantasilo) and his befriended monks. He had the opportunity to join the Sangha rituals with Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao), the leader of the Ubon Thammayut Committee. Anyway, Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao) refused to join the Sangha rituals with him, because Phra Ajahn Sao was considered to be a native Mahanikai monk, and did not follow the Thammayut Nikaya either. Anytime Phra Ajahn Sao touched any of the utensils, someone needed to renew the offerings before handing to Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao). Finally, Phra Ajahn Sao, along with all of his disciples residing at Wat Tai Temple, decided to perform a ritual called “Thanhi Karma” or “Yatti Karma” to become Thammayut⁷ at the Uposatha of the Si Thong Temple (the Si Ubon Rattanaram

⁶ For the Thammayut monks, the first group was Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) and Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao). Even these two bhikkhus had modes of practices more like itinerant and meditating monks; it did not appear that they had taken a pilgrimage to many places that much, because Phra Ajahn Pandhulo (Di) and Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao) had a habit of staying at one particular place and didn't prefer roaming to another place. For the daily routine of bhikkhus of a Thammayut Temple in the city of Ubon, every day they would divide the time for the study of Buddhist Scriptures for up to 5 hours per day, i.e. between 8.30-11.00 and 13.00-15.00. In addition, there were classes of reading Thai books and mathematics as supplementary classes.

⁷ Some refer to Phra Ajahn Sao that he showed an admiration for Phra Thewa Thammi (Mao)'s mode of practice, and therefore changed to be a bhikkhu of Thammayut Nikaya. Anyway, it's noticed that Phra Ajahn Sao was one of the monks who practiced Dhamma as well as those ruling monks (Thammayut), so it should not be more of a matter than the power of the monastic administration that Thammayut had over Laos at that time.

Temple) with Phra Khru Ta Chotipalo as preceptor and Chao Athikan Sita Chaiyaseno as act-announcing teacher. The status of the Wat Tai Temple has been then converted to a Thammayut temple. (Premwit Tawkaew, 1991: 151)

There were many cases that indicated differences and disagreements between the monks of Thammayut and Mahanikai in the local area (Champasak). One remarkable case was the case of Samret Lun who was a native Lao monk of Ban Woenxai Nong Hai Tha, Phon Thong Subdistrict, Champasak District. Samret Lun was honoured a monastic title of "Samret" as being directly Hod Song (*appointed and praised*) by the villagers. He was considered a local monk/Laos Mahanikai, who was known and respected by local people, both villagers and the local Lao upper class.

Figure 1. Samret Lun in the hall of Ban Woenxai Temple



However, it was clear to everyone that Samret Lun's mode of practice was to walk for a pilgrimage into the forest along the Mekong River. He preferred to live a solitary and modest life with only one meal a day, not receiving money or precious things or saving wealth. He never failed practising meditation. (Seri Somsa-at, 1995: 9). He was also known as a monk with a "mantra" or "witchcraft" that was believed to have many sacred aspects, including pharmacopeia and other magic spells. In some cases, Samret Lun was respected as a "holy man" with the supernatural power of flying in the air. This implied that the strict and pragmatic monks were already in the local area of Laos before the coming of Thammayut. However, these monks adhered to the guidelines coupled with the use of magic or spells, herbal uses and pharmacopeia for the treatment of people's sicknesses. Samret Lun was considered an example of a local Lao monk (Mahanikai) that had a mixture of Buddhism and local culture/traditional beliefs. This characteristic is the culture of the Buddhism in Lan Xang that has been practised since the past and also reflects that the monks were the people who maintained the discipline and were sacred for the way of life in the eyes of the villagers.

In Champasak, Samret Lun was accepted and respected by the clergy and people in Champasak. In addition, the ruling class and the local authorities also respected that he was special. But when Thammayut was spread into the area, Samret Lun had been blamed on the daily practice by the administrative monks of Thammayut Nikaya. “Phra Khru Wijitthamapani”, the Lord Abbot of of Champasak, criticised the local monks in Champasak, as well as Samret Lun, that they were not taking Buddhist education seriously, not knowledgeable in the practice, and just ordained to live in the forest or in the field only. As shown in the archives of the official document No. Ror. 5 Sor. 8/4, about Phra Khru Wijitthamapani, the Lord Abbot of the city of Champasak, Mahamattayaram Temple, criticised that “...The religion affairs in the area of the town of Champasak these day are showing signs of decay; it seems like the end of the religion— only one single bhikkhu who can perform Patimok recitation cannot be found in any of the district. Almost of the monks these days, after ordination, go out to live in the fields, thinking that secular education is not their business to do for the laymen. Those who did and practice well are few in numbers. When there is a declaration out to the local area, no one can read. There are only old-and-uneducated monks out there; they ordain as they just want to escape the government and officials. One of those bhikkhus, whose name is Samret Lun, has always stayed at home, drinking a lot for over number of years. He’s the one the ruling class of the country respected as they think he’s a holy man.”(National Archives, document No. Ror. 5 Sor. 8/4)

However, Samret Lun responded back against the administrative monks of the Thammayut Nikaya. For example, if he knew that there would be a clergy chief from Ubon coming to inspect his behaviour, Samret Lun would scrub Ngow (*a long handle sword*) to prepare for the welcoming procession. When coming, the adult monks saw Samret Lun holding the Ngow, so asked “What monk on earth holds a Ngow for a welcome?” Samret Lun replied “For the reception of the elite monks sir, we normally prepare a welcoming reception like this.” The elite monks couldn’t do anything but return back. Later, at the time the administrative monks came to assess his knowledge at the temple, Samret Lun brought out the palm-leaf scriptures to separate one by one leaf and spread them all over the temple grounds. After that, he used his stick to pull up those leaves and tie up into the same scripture like a miracle. The people who saw this incident were amazed.

Conflicts between Thammayut monks and Mahanikai local monks caused not only those two sides of monks not to eat together, but also not to share the monks’ deeds and routines, and refused to allow the other residents to live together. This also resulted in conflicts among villagers of each clergy too. The villagers even refused to allow their children or the young people to flirt or marry ones from the other monastic sects too. (Thao Sa-ngiam Saeng-alun, June 2018: Interview)

The event of this conflict between Thammayut monks and Samret Lun was a condition that clearly showed the fact that if the Thammayut monks criticised or blamed on the adult monks of the clergy who were respected by the people of Champasak, it would result in the Thammayut monks and the Champasak's citizens not receiving the faith from the clergy. In addition, the ideology of Thammayut that clashes with local Buddhists of Laos, as well as that the Thammayut bhikkhus are considered foreign monks who have been appointed from the outside (Siam), created conflicts with the local monks. The most important point is that it was the symbol of the Siamese emperor⁸ who was the oppressor in their point of view. Therefore, it was not accepted and respected by local monks and villagers.

However, in the context of the Thai state, the transmission of Thammayut into the local elites was related to the formation of the nation state in the colonial context. Thammayut was therefore incorporated into one of the tools to be an educational tool used to create a sense of Thainess which, at that time, was facing the French colonial power. Anyway, Thammayut was not as acceptable as it should have been in the local area. Finally, the confrontation between Thailand and France was pushed into dispute in 1893 (Ror. Sor. 112). France expanded the power to seize Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as they wanted them to merge with Laos, claiming that the Lao people and the land on the left the Mekong River belonged to Vietnam and Cambodia. When Vietnam and Cambodia were in French power, all the people and lands on the left bank of the Mekong had to be French. (Army Training Command Department, 1941; Term Wiparkpotjanakit, 1987 : 78) At that time, France used the policy to coerce Thailand by sending warships into the mouth of the Chao Phraya (Pak Nam) (in July, 1893) using a pilot ship to enter the Chao Phraya through Pak Nam. (Thongchai Winichakul, 2013:228) The gun turrets of the Thai side had fired for defence, resulting in damage to the French cargo ship. Anyway, the French warship shot back and damaged the Thai Crown Prince's ship as well, then finally reached the city of Bangkok. Jean Marie Auguste Pavie, who served as the French Ambassador to Bangkok, submitted an ultimatum to Thailand to cede the territory on the left bank of the Mekong, including the river islands in the Mekong that used to be Thai to belong to France, including the withdrawal of troops from all the borders. At the same time France seized the city of Chanthaburi as a guarantee in order for Thailand to fulfill the contract. At the end, Thailand handed over the land on the left bank of the Mekong to France, as well as the river islands in the Mekong that used to be Thai to France, including withdrawing all troops from the border. In this event Champasak, which had two lands on both sides of the Mekong River, had been split into two. The land on the left became a French colony, leaving the city of Champasak on the right bank, still in Thai's government.

⁸ Lao people often referred "Siam" that came to rule Laos as "The Siamese Emperor"

The Franco-Siamese Crisis in 1893 caused the Siamese to try its best to preserve the city of Champasak and the land on the right bank of the Mekong River, as well as principalities of Laos in various parts of the Northeast, such as Ubon, Nong Khai, by implementing the policy of reforming the province. (Chaiyan Ratchakul, 2017). In terms of culture, the Thammayut monks adjusted the strategy to create a strong spike in the land on the right bank of the Mekong by teaching and instructing the people to connect to the centre of the power of Siam. Phra Khru Wijitthamapani (Chan Sirichantho) returned to the Supatnaram Temple in Ubon Ratchathani, then traveled to Bangkok until 1896, then returned to Ubon again, along with the important disciples, namely Phra Maha Uan Tisso, Phra Maha Kitiwanno, Phra Maharat Ratapalo, and Phra Maha Lom Thitako, to establish the Ubon Witthayakhom School in the Supatnaram Temple in 1897 for the teaching of students including monks and novices, as well as lay people. The teaching work there of this group of monks was widely accepted so Somdet Phamahasamana Chao Kromphaya Vajirananavarorasa, was introduced to a private presence of King Chulalongkorn. King Chulalongkorn was pleased by the results of the educational arrangements so much he royally granted Monthon Isan Seal to appoint him as Director of the Board of Precinct, with an ecclesiastical peerage titled “Phra Yana Rakkhit”. In 1899⁹, after receiving the position, he organised the study throughout the northeastern region which was the beginning of the foundation of the new educational model (Warawudh Palanan et al., 2014.56)

According to the Franco-Siamese Crisis in 1893, although Thailand lost its power to rule the city of Champasak on the left bank and the Lao land on the left bank of the Mekong for France, yet such events didn’t resolve easily. France was still relying on the military policy to seize Chanthaburi in order to pressure and continue to compete with Thailand for lands. France still refused to withdraw from Chanthaburi until 10 years later. The Thai didn’t want to lose Chanthaburi; therefore, made a contract in exchange for Chanthaburi again in 1902. One of the terms was that France forced Thailand to hand over the towns of Mano Phrai and Champasak (the right side of the Mekong) to France (Army Training Command Department, 1941:20). This incident caused Thailand to lose the right bank of the Mekong river, or

⁹ However, in the transition to the reign of King Rama VI, Phra Yana Rakkhit (Chan Sirichantho) preached some of the teachings contrary to the national policies and ideologies; he was removed from the monastery. This happened when a book named “Dhamma Witchaya Nusorn” written by Phra Yana Rakkhit (Chan Sirichantho), was published and mentioned “bad instructions”, which pointed out the disastrous effect of bad instructions, for example, building a warship and creating weapons to go to war were considered sins; it was against morality. This kind of content became a contradiction to the national administration and the ruling policy during that period, yet opposed the royal favour of King Rama VI, who was in the middle of fundraising to build warships and bringing the nation into war so this was considered contrary to the government’s public administration and opposed the royal favour. When King Rama VI acknowledged this, therefore, the royal command was ordered to remove him from the ecclesiastical dignity, (Wirasak Charuphaet, 1989:141), and was brought to Bangkok for a detention at Bowon Niwet Temple until the year 1916. After being released, he was graciously granted an ecclesiastical peerage titled “Phra Tham Thirarat Mahamuni”.

Champasak, completely, yet the area that used to join the Kingdom of Champasak on the right side of the Mekong— Ubon, Yasothon and Roi Et, were still included as part of Isan region under the Thai rule following the reform of the Thesaphiban (local government), according to King Chulalongkorn's command of local administrative reform. According to this, the Kingdom of Champasak in the conservative era, (which once flourished on the banks of the Mekong) was separated into different colonial powers. While the Thammayut in Champasak, which had been acting like a representative of Siam, gradually lost its power until being cancelled when Laos declared its independence. The Lao government has dissolved all the monastic sects to become one and established a Sangha monastery under the socialist politics.

Summary

The propagation of Thammayut into the principalities of Laos and Champasak, which were considered the territory at the edges of the Kingdom of Siam, was related to the social, cultural and political conditions that the Siam considered people and cultures were different, and were rebellious towards the ruling power, having a culture that was related to non-scientific beliefs and ignorance but mixed with local Buddhist style or impure local folk, which is not in accordance with the Buddhist *vinaya (disciplines)*. This can be seen when there were two cases of rebellion led by beliefs in superstition combined with local Buddhism, leading the army to rise against the power of Siam. Thammayut which was like the representative of Thainess, therefore, played a key role in the purification of local Buddhism, as well as disseminating the ideology of the Thainess that was linked to the administration power with the Bangkok centre, and also having a role in propagating the Thai ideology such as teaching Thai language and teaching the sermons to build loyalty to the Siamese elites in the minds of people. The role of Thammayut had become more intense when Siam tried to keep Champasak and other Lao principalities in confrontation with the French colonies, as if to be in a war, trying to win over the people's minds by dominating the culture, creating a Thai identity to become over Laos (which France claimed legitimacy to integrate with Indochina at that time), along with the implementation of the Siamese government's policy of administration in form of Thesaphiban (local government), over the districts and lands on the right bank of the Mekong River, called the Isan region. Such policy worked efficiently, so Siam was able to combine the Isan and some districts that used to join the Champasak Kingdom during a conservative era (such as Ubon and Roi Et) to become part of Thailand. Anyway, on the other side, for the case of Champasak, even though the Dhammayuttika Nikaya was accepted and supported by the ruling class and local authorities, it had been rejected by the local people in general in the area. Thammayut took a role as representative of Siam's power in which various groups of people in the area had had painful memories that they had been ruled, facing exploitation and oppression for a long time. When facing with the two sects of Buddhism, the local people chose to keep holding on to being



Lao, which was bound to local Buddhism rather than the Thai-styled Dhammayuttika Nikaya. Local Buddhism in Laos became a symbol of anti-Siam as seen from the case of the Ai Chiangkaew rebellion and the Bhikkhu Sa (the Ai Sa Kiat Ngong's rebellion). The next important issue, the Thai-styled Thammayut ideology, appeared to be insulting the attitudes or opposing the existing practice of the Lao monks, as well as raising itself to be at a higher state regarding the purity of the disciplines until some cases led to conflicts or disagreements, for instance, the conflicts between Samret Lun and Phra Upali Khunupamajahn (Chan Sirichantho). As a result, Dhammayuttika Nikaya therefore did not succeed in either creating the Thai identity, or maintaining the power of the Thai state in the Champasak area. Moreover, when being pressured by the French colonies to seize Chanthaburi for political negotiation, Siam therefore had to lose the Champasak province in exchange for the Chanthaburi province.

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