

householders, but are also less closely bound to the seasonal cycle. As is clear from the calendar of religious events attended by one lay informant, which is presented in chapter 5, there is in town a continuous round of religious ceremonies sponsored both by private individuals, and by the State on the occasion of Buddhist national holidays. In rural areas on the other hand the pattern of religious participation is largely determined by the pace of agricultural activities, for outside the Lenten season (*phansa*) all except the young or the very old and infirm are involved in these.

Furthermore, as will become clear from subsequent discussion, the *bhikkhus* in an urban area are involved in more activities directly pertaining to the monastic community and to the Buddhist *Sangha* as the Church of Thailand than are their fellows who live in smaller and more isolated village monasteries.

2

The monk and the lay community

*Son, wife and father, mother, wealth
The things wealth brings, the ties of kin
Leaving these pleasures one and all
Fare lonely as a rhinoceros.*

Verses from the *Patimokkha* translated by Edward Conze (Conze 1959, p. 81)

Having defined very broadly the scope and limits of a Thai monk's activities, it is now necessary to analyze more specifically the concepts and notions entertained by various informants as to how these varied activities should be evaluated, and to discuss the implications of this evaluation for relations between the monk and the layman. As might be expected, the order in which these role-attributes are placed varies according to the mental sophistication and scriptural education of the informant concerned; which latter qualities would in themselves tend to have certain rather loose spatial correlates. One would expect for example that a monk from one of the more academic Bangkok monasteries would have a concept of his role more similar to the Theravada ideal with which he is familiar from his own reading than would a semi-literate monk in a remote rural village, who is besides subject to more pressures from the laity to develop his less orthodox extra-curricular talents, as was mentioned above in the preceding chapter. The average small-town *bhikkhu* falls somewhere between these two extremes. It should be understood that I have been talking not in terms of clear-cut distinctions but rather in terms of general trends in the ways in which the role of the monk is conceptualized by different people in different places.

A second main theme of this chapter concerns the maintenance and creation of ties between the *bhikkhu* and the lay community. Interaction with the lay community varies both qualitatively and quantitatively as between monks and, as will become clear, both parties in the monk-layman relationship must tread a narrow line between social obligations and partiality, being careful to honour the first and to avoid the second, at least in appearances.

In the preceding chapter I drew attention to some of the discrepancies which exist between the role of the Buddhist *bhikkhu* as it is defined in the *Patimokkha* code, and its social interpretation; discrepancies which are by

no means apparent to all monks or to all laymen, although a few philosophically sophisticated members of both sectors of society are aware of the hiatus between ideal and practice. Nevertheless such awareness does not give rise to grave spiritual distress on the part of its bearers nor fill them with any desire for reform of the situation: as Buddhists they are ever ready to recognize the existence of 'different levels of awareness of the doctrine, characteristic of the people who approach it at different times and in different places' (Mendelson 1965, p. 217).

Subsequent paragraphs are devoted to a more detailed analysis of the varied activities entailed in becoming a monk, in an attempt to show how far it is possible, or indeed considered desirable, for a man to turn his back on lay society when he enters the Thai *Sangha*. As many scholars have already pointed out, a certain degree of structural tension is inherent in the institutionalization of the ascetic way of life in that the religious mendicant's abstinence from secular activity renders him permanently dependent for material subsistence upon those who remain in the world.¹ And yet, as will become apparent, few if any of my informants were conscious of the paradoxical nature of the situation whereby the *bhikkhus* who should renounce the world in order to perfect their knowledge of the *Dhamma*, not only relied upon the householder for 'daily bread' but also spent the best part of their time in ministering to his spiritual needs.

For the purposes of analysis the monkish persona can be regarded as having three different aspects, to be labelled here 'personal', 'pastoral', and 'monastic' according to their several orientations. The monastic activities are those which take place between two or more monks, who may be resident at the same monastery or merely brothers in the nation-wide society of the Thai *Sangha*. The procedures pertaining to disciplinary affairs (*Sanghakkamma* or Acts of the Sangha) which thus derive their ultimate authority from the Pali canon, and administrative matters sanctioned by the Royal Edicts pertaining to the Buddhist *Sangha* and Laws of the Council of Elders,² are alike subsumed under the single category of monastic activities. The actions known as *Sanghakkamma* which can be performed only by fully ordained members of the Order consist of regular observances, such as the fortnightly recital of the *Patimokkha* code which takes place in every monastic community where there are at least four monks, and other more occasional ceremonies such as that performed to reintegrate into *Sangha* any

bhikkhu, guilty of a second-class offence, who has completed the required term of solitary self-purification.³

The administrative processes which are an aspect of the centralization and indeed the nationalization of the Order of Buddhist Monks in Thailand are irrelevant to disciplinary concerns except in so far as the boundaries of their spheres of authority overlap with respect to certain major offences such as murder or theft. All cases of homicide are in fact the concern of the State authorities, as are other criminal acts which involve a member of the lay community, and although in theory such offences as an act of theft committed by a monk against another monk could be settled within the Order, it would appear that disputes of this nature are usually taken to court by the plaintiff, to the embarrassment of the judges, who are loth to bring discredit upon a *bhikkhu*.⁴

The Acts on the Administration of the Buddhist Order of Sangha also regulate the procedure for appointment to Ecclesiastical Office, a monastic activity to be discussed in the following chapter.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND ACADEMIC INTERESTS

Those activities which, ideally at least, are entailed in becoming a monk, namely the study of and meditation upon the Pali texts, form the 'personal' category of actions which are my immediate concern. According to Buddhist doctrine, study and meditation are progressive steps on the path to *Nirvana*, in that techniques of meditation are used to gain an insight into the teachings which have already been absorbed intellectually. In practical terms, however, these activities are personal in the sense that the decision as to what level to pursue them, if at all, rests with the individual monk though at a later stage other *bhikkhus* might co-operate with him as teachers of Pali or Sanskrit, or to give instruction in techniques of meditation.⁵

It is interesting that in the Thai context, or rather in the context of Ayutthaya society, *wiphasana-thura* (lit. insight-work, meditation), which was originally intended to represent a more advanced stage in the process

³ See below, chapter 3. For a complete list of the monastic activities known as *Sanghakkamma* (Acts of Sangha), see Dutt (1960, p. 122).

⁴ During my period of fieldwork in Ayutthaya a monk who felt he had been wrongly passed over in the procedure for appointing a new abbot at his monastery, to replace the previous incumbent who had died, tried to bring a court case against the ecclesiastical officials at District and Sub-District levels who had chosen the new incumbent. As the decision of the officials in question was final the plaintiff was dismissed, but the chief judge of the law courts in Ayutthaya was pained by his unseemly behaviour and embarrassed by his having brought to the public notice affairs which were the private concern of the *Sangha*.

⁵ Wells (1960, p. 159) discusses some of the techniques of meditation (*wiphasana-thura*) used by Thai monks.

¹ See Michael M. Ames on the Sinhalese situation (Ames 1964, p. 21 and *passim*) and Gananath Obeyesekere in his article 'Theodicy, Sin and Salvation' (Obeyesekere 1968, pp. 7-39).

² See the *Phrarachabanyatkhansong* (Royal Edicts pertaining to the Buddhist *Sangha*), B.E. 2505 (1962) and the *Kot Mahatherasomakhom* (Laws of the Council of Elders), Vols. 1-3, B.E. 2507 (1964).

of self-purification, is a less highly regarded activity than is the study of the Pali texts: which is to say that the latter pursuit, being more easily assessed in terms of academic degrees and certificates, is accorded a higher evaluation than *wiphasana-thura*, for success in which the evidence is less tangible.⁶

Less than one-third of my informants in Ayutthaya reported that they practised *wiphasana-thura*, and even these monks only meditated 'from time to time' or 'when they were free'. When questioned as to the techniques used they invariably replied in very vague terms; some said that one should concentrate on a single fixed point (*chut dieo*) in order to empty the mind of all distracting thoughts and make one's heart peaceful; others said that they reflected upon inevitable death, or upon the grace of the Buddha. Although most monks paid lip service to the idea that one should meditate in order to forget one's selfishness and greed (even though achievement of *Nirvana* was out of the question) nevertheless it was regarded as an activity more appropriate to nuns (*mae chi*),⁷ to *bhikkhus* who were *saiyasat* (magical practitioners),⁸ or to those monks who *doen thudong* (go on pilgrimages to Buddhist shrines).

The Thai word *thudong* is derived from the Pali term *dhutanga*, meaning Austere Practices, of which there are thirteen mentioned at various points throughout the *Sutta-pitaka*.⁹ The word *thudong* is, however, most commonly used to refer to those monks who leave the monastery and go on foot to visit the various Buddhist shrines which are scattered throughout the country. During this time the *thudong bhikkhu* takes only one meal each day, eating whatever food is offered, without discrimination, and directly from the alms-bowl. At night he sleeps in the open, under a large umbrella-like shelter (*krot*) which is equipped with a mosquito-net and can be folded for carrying on the back during the day. It is usual for two or three monks to *doen thudong* together, though they should talk to each other as little as possible, proceeding in single file along the road during the day and separating at night when they pitch camp, so that each may meditate in solitude.

Despite the contention frequently made that only an exceptional individual

⁶ A personal communication from Mrs Freda Wint, who has spent some time in North-Eastern Thailand, suggests that this may not be the case all over the country. Indeed the climate of opinion in Ayutthaya may to some extent be a reflection of the more complete institutionalization of the *Sangha* of Monks in Bangkok and the towns of the Central Region. See fn. 7 for new trends and attitudes towards meditation.

⁷ There is some evidence of a trend towards extending the *bhikkhu's* pastoral role, by encouraging the householder to take a more active part in religious activities. One manifestation of this new emphasis is that some monks are starting classes to teach laymen how to meditate, as it is felt to be easier for them than scriptural study. This ruling also applies to *mae chi* or nuns who are encouraged to join these meditation courses, some of which are set up by *bhikkhus* sent by the Department of Religious Affairs from the Buddhist Universities in Bangkok.

⁸ See below, p. 74.

⁹ See Khantipalo (1965, p. 10).

can sustain the loneliness and physical hardship involved in making such pilgrimages, which may involve making a journey of several hundred miles, punctuated by sedentary interludes of four or five days at each shrine on the itinerary, nevertheless most of my informants when questioned indignantly denied ever having gone on pilgrimage; only 2% of my monk informants admitted to such experiences and were willing to talk about it.¹⁰ The remainder described the *dhutanga bhikkhu* as being concerned only with *wiphasana-thura*, an activity which was compared unfavourably with *kantha-thura*, their own chief concern. The Thai word *kantha-thura* is derived from a similar Pali term *gantha-dhura* which literally translated means 'Book-work or study', but most of its self-confessed exponents took it to refer to the administration of the affairs of the *wat* community, and to performing merit-making ceremonies for the householder. According to this usage a monk proficient in *kantha-thura* is one with the ability to 'build up the *wat*' (*sang wat*) both literally and figuratively in that he attracts new *bhikkhus* to the monastery, and at the same time wins the respect of the householders, which is made manifest in the form of sizeable donations. By comparison, the *dhutanga bhikkhu* is regarded as selfish and lacking in public spirit.

In his article on certain aspects of Theravada Buddhism, with special reference to Ceylon, Obeyesekere discusses the difficulties inherent in the condition of the monk who tries to 'escape from the society of the monastery by isolating himself from the world . . . as pious laymen are attracted by the special charisma' which surrounds these *bhikkhus* and pursue them with gifts of alms, attempt to build living quarters for them and so on (Obeyesekere 1968, p. 31).

Thai attitudes to monks who choose not to live in orthodox fashion in a monastery are rather ambivalent; whilst it is true that some monks who lead the life of a hermit, living in isolated caves and forests, are highly revered, the *thudong bhikkhu* whose way of life ideally corresponds most closely to the mendicant ideal of the early Buddhists is regarded with great suspicion; not belonging to lay society, nor being properly integrated into a monastic community, *dhutanga* monks are frequently regarded as being on a par with tramps, beggars and other kinds of social derelicts.¹¹ Laymen also

¹⁰ The Abbot of *Wat Tuk* said that when he had *doen thudong* in the North-Eastern Region he had wandered in the forest for several days without food.

¹¹ The *thudong bhikkhus* of whom I speak leave the monastery only temporarily, most usually for a period of a few weeks in February or March. The phenomenon of monks who leave the *wat* on a more permanent basis to live a more isolated life in a forest or cave appears to be absent from Central Thailand although 'hermit' monks of this type are to be found in the remoter areas of the North-East Region and in the Southern Provinces of Thailand.

fear that monks who are seen wandering over the country and are thus not clearly attached to any particular *wat* may not have been properly ordained, and may be laymen who have falsely assumed the yellow robe.

According to traditional practice in Thailand those monks who intend to *doen thudong* leave their monasteries at the beginning of February and travel to pay their respects at one or more of the well known places of pilgrimage (Wells 1960, p. 37). Laymen and women also go by car, train and coach on 'day-trips' to the various shrines, where they offer candles and incense sticks before the Buddha images and press small squares of gold leaf to their surfaces; some particularly pious householders visit the *thudong bhikkhus*, encamped in special enclosures in the vicinity of the shrines, and make merit by presenting them with food. The rest of the day is spent in picnicking, taking photographs of each other and in general generally having a good time.

Some thirty miles north of Ayutthaya there is a shrine known as Phraphutthabat (Footprint of the Buddha) which consists of a complex of buildings and *cetiya*¹² built on a rocky hill-side around the 'footprint', a large shallow depression believed to resemble the imprint which might be left by a giant human foot, which is decorated with an elaborate relief design in gold. The *dhutanga* 'season' at Phraphutthabat in 1967 lasted from 9 to 24 February and on some days as many as 600 *bhikkhus* from all parts of Thailand were encamped there. An increasingly vigorous attempt has been made in recent years to regularize the activities of monks who choose to *doen thudong* and this movement was made manifest at Phraphutthabat by the establishment of a committee of senior ecclesiastical officials from Ayutthaya *Changwat* and the adjacent Provinces (*changwat*) of Angthong and Lopburi. The members of this committee, who themselves stayed in the living-quarters of the *wat* attached to the shrine, made arrangements for the *thudong* monks to encamp in certain specified areas, and checked that each new arrival had received permission to 'go on pilgrimage' from the Ecclesiastical Head of the *Amphoe* (District) where his monastery was situated. Proof of official approval took the form of the signature or stamp of the *Chao Khana Amphoe* (Ecclesiastical District Head) entered in the identity card, which is carried by every Thai monk. Each *dhutanga bhikkhu* was allowed to stay at the shrine for five days, to enjoy the offerings made by lay visitors before moving on to the next stopping-place, or in some cases returning to the *wat*. When I visited Phraphutthabat a young monk who had already spent the statutory period of five days encamped at the shrine was discovered trying to gain access for a second term, and was turned away in tears. Observations of monks at the 'Footprint', several of

¹² *Cetiya* or *stupa*. See p. 7, n. 3.

whom I talked with at length, show popular assessment of the *thudong bhikkhu* to be fairly accurate; or rather show that the shadow and the substance go hand-in-hand, in that the *dhutanga* role is not highly respected and consequently only those monks with little interest in earning the good opinion of society will assume it. The *thudong* monks at Phraphutthabat appeared to belong to one of two types, being either elderly men who had retired into the Order, or younger *bhikkhus* out on a spree; and many of them, far from leading an austere life, accepted lifts in cars or gifts of train tickets from the faithful.

It was clear that in Ayutthaya at least, meditation, the religious action which it is most difficult if not impossible for an outsider to assess in that its techniques are directed towards improving the inner spiritual state of the practitioner, is regarded as being the speciality of *bhikkhus* who themselves occupy a somewhat ambivalent position; either because they *doen thudong* and thus, temporarily at least, cannot be identified with a particular monastic community, or else because they specialize in certain unorthodox techniques of healing and astrology (*saiyasat*) about which I shall have more to say in the paragraphs dealing with pastoral affairs.¹³

The other activity which was earlier categorized as 'personal', namely the study of the *Dhamma*, is rather more amenable to institutionalization than is *wiphasana-thura*. As was remarked in chapter 1, study of the *Dhamma* means in the Thai context studying for the *Nak Tham* or for the *Buriyan* courses of examinations. *Nak Tham* (*Dhamma* Scholar or Student) studies were introduced at the beginning of the present century by the Abbot of *Wat Baworniwet* in Bangkok, who later became the Supreme Patriarch (Wells 1960, p. 14). It was intended that all monks should take this course, which is divided into three stages (Grades 1-3) with an examination at the end of each year of study. The syllabus, which includes instruction concerning the previous lives of the Buddha and the basic tenets of his teaching, as well as upon the rules of conduct set out in the *Vinaya-pitaka* (Monastic Code), is designed to inculcate a general Buddhist education rather than to produce scholars of a high standard of academic expertise.¹⁴ The texts

¹³ In speaking of Burmese monks Nash reports (1965, pp. 148-9) that 'as a monk proceeds in inner wisdom, in fuller understanding and in self-purification, there should be some manifestations in his daily life, and in his ability to handle the universe'. He lists ten 'marvellous powers...earnests of progress' along the road to *Nirvana* to which monks may lay claim. In Thailand, on the other hand, any *bhikkhu* who possesses anything approaching 'marvellous powers' for healing or prophesy, is careful to state that these talents which he regards as magical (*saiyasat*) can be learnt from the relevant textbooks by any person monk or lay, and that they have no relation to his role as a Buddhist monk.

¹⁴ See *Sangkhomsatporithat* (The Social Science Review), Special Edition no. 4, August 1966, pp. 53 and passim, for the complete syllabus of both the *Nak Tham* and *Buriyan* courses of ecclesiastical study.

prescribed are published by the Ministry of Education and the papers for the annual examinations are set and marked by the *bhikkhus* in the two Buddhist Universities in Bangkok.

In Ayutthaya, most of the younger monks seemed to study fairly regularly though not necessarily to any great effect; the fact of studying appeared to be more important than its fruits for many *bhikkhus*, whilst older monks or those who had official duties to perform usually renounced all academic pursuits. Approximately three-fifths of the monks whom I interviewed however, had passed one or more of the *Nak Tham* grades, although only one third of the candidates who were examined at *Wat Monthop* (Ayutthaya) in December 1967 were successful.¹⁵ The examinations which were organized by the *Chao Khana Amphoe*, were held on three successive days and provided an excuse for *bhikkhus* from all over the District to get together and exchange news. Indeed many of those in regular attendance at *Wat Monthop* had not come to take the examination but merely to meet old friends and renew acquaintance.

The *Barian* course of more advanced studies (Grades 3-9) is attempted by comparatively few monks in Ayutthaya, and the teachers at the ecclesiastical schools of *Wat Phanan Choeng* and *Wat Senasanaram* are capable of teaching Grades 3 and 4 only, which means that any *bhikkhu* with serious academic intentions must go to Bangkok to receive instruction.

Students of the *Barian* course are required to learn sufficient Pali (and at the higher levels Sanskrit also) to be able to translate simple sentences into Thai, as well as to gain a real understanding of the texts and chants in general use. In addition to this a deeper understanding of the metaphysical issues debated in the Pali canon, and in the *Abhidhamma-pitaka* in particular, is required. In Ayutthaya academic monks are sufficiently few in number for their talents, and in some cases their precise academic status, to be fairly generally known: any *bhikkhu* who has passed even the lowest *Barian* grade is entitled to use the term *maha* (meaning 'Great') in front of his name, to write his scholastic status after his name (e.g. *Barian 5*) and to carry a particular fan which also indicates his academic rank.¹⁶ During

¹⁵ See Appendix 3 for results of *Nak Tham* and *Barian* examinations in Ayutthaya, 1967.

¹⁶ His fan is used by a *bhikkhu* only on certain occasions: when he pronounces the Three Refuge formula or gives the Five Precepts to the laymen present, prior to a merit-making ceremony; when a recitation begins; when he expresses thanks in a formal manner; and at certain stages of the cremation ceremony (see Rajadon 1961, p. 87). Some fans are presented by the King to monks who hold high positions in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or to those with honorific titles; such fans, which are insignia of rank, may be used only in a Royal Ceremony (*phithi luang*) when the King or his deputy is present. All *bhikkhus* own at least one fan which has been presented to them by the *chao phap* on the occasion of their ordination.

my period of fieldwork there were only twenty *bhikkhus* in the whole of Ayutthaya District (i.e. the municipality and surrounding rural areas) who could use the title *maha*, and of this number, the two monks most highly qualified had passed *Barian* examination Grade 6.

Although certain monks were known to be 'clever' and well-educated in ecclesiastical terms, academic qualifications alone were neither necessary nor sufficient to earn the respect and support either of monks or of laymen, and only five of the monks who were office-holders in the National Church hierarchy had *Barian* grades.¹⁷ As will become clear in subsequent chapters abbots, at least up to the provincial level, are appointed largely on the basis of their popularity with monks and with laymen; the *bhikkhus* who are most revered have personal charisma independent of their formal academic qualifications though it should be stressed that study of the texts, unlike meditation, is regarded as an honourable pursuit for any monk and like all educational pursuits highly respected by the Thais.

PASTORAL SERVICES

As far as the monks of Ayutthaya were concerned, however, the time and effort expended upon study or meditation was insignificant when compared with that which was devoted to pastoral activities of various kinds. These pastoral transactions which take place between *bhikkhu* and householder consist in essence of the monk's conferring merit upon the layman who in turn expresses his gratitude and respect by presenting offerings of money, food and other items traditionally included, such as a pair of candles and a lotus-bud.¹⁸ The ascetic routine adopted by the individual who enters the Buddhist *Sangha* gives him a higher spiritual status which enables him to confer merit upon those still enmeshed in the sensory world.

Any *bhikkhu* can serve as a 'field of merit' for any layman and as the highest ethical evaluation is placed upon giving without thought for oneself it is believed to be more meritorious for a householder to present alms to a

¹⁷ One young monk (25) who had been appointed Acting Abbot of *Wat Nang Plum* was felt by some informants to be unsuitable on the grounds of his tender years, although it was admitted that he was clever enough as he had passed *Barian 5*.

¹⁸ Some pastoral transactions, that is to say those between a *saiyasat* monk and a householder, are not primarily concerned with the making of merit, although merit is a necessary by-product of any activity between monk and householder, wherein the latter presents an offering of some kind to the former. Those *bhikkhus* who are also *saiyasat* (magical practitioners) specialize in healing or in telling horoscopes. Although most *saiyasat* are *bhikkhus*, as these magical activities are traditionally associated with the monkly role, in Ayutthaya at least, very few monks were *saiyasat*. Consequently throughout this chapter, unless otherwise specified, the term pastoral activities refers to more orthodox transactions between monk and householder, whose manifest intention is to make merit.