

MONKS AND HIERARCHY IN NORTHERN THAILAND

by

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and

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One of the most perplexing problems in Buddhist studies involves the fact that historically the Theravada monkhood has been found to have an organizational structure in many societies, but the *Vinaya*,² or ancient code for monastic behavior, gives no basis for such ecclesiastical

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- 2) *Vinaya*: one of the three basic holy books of Theravada Buddhism, containing the 227 rules governing monk's behavior. It also includes detailed commentary on each rule. This text is the foundation of monastic life,

structure beyond the simple device of seniority. The question thus arises as to how the organization of the Sangha³ or monkhood comes into being and how it articulates with the larger society, in particular royal institutions.⁴ Study of the Sangha in Thailand offers unique opportunities for the investigation of that problem due to the existence there of a clearly defined Sangha organization in conjunction with a viable and active kingship which has remained free of direct colonial control. Thus the Thai Sangha structure can be studied ideally and actually as it exists within the only country in Southeast Asia that has retained both its monarchy and its ecclesiastical organization.

Thai monks today live under a clearly defined monastic structure that is basically hierarchical in nature, and they are clearly supported and surveyed by a Buddhist king in Bangkok with the aid of his lay and monastic representatives. Even in the countryside this structural patterning can be clearly found, and our study concentrates upon the monkhood at the provincial level. Some anthropologists (Moerman, 1966) and other observers of Thai culture have commented, in passing, upon the impact of the Bangkok-based hierarchy at the village level, concluding that the hierarchy is fairly distantly related to community concerns, and at least one anthropologist (Bunnag, 1973) has touched upon the urban dimensions of the situation outside of the capital. What we feel is missing and needed, however, is, first of all, a detailed explanation of what the "hierarchy" ideally is defined as being, and then, how the ecclesiastical system actually works between bureaucratic Bangkok and the urban and rural areas of the province, and finally, how the monks themselves in the province understand matters affecting ideal and real.

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- 3) Sangha: the monkhood as a whole, including different sects as well as novices, but not including laymen or nuns. The latter have no discoverable formal organization or hierarchy. White-robed men and women who may spend time in *wats*, particularly on holy days, are also not included in our use of the term.
 - 4) For a full discussion of the relationship between the Sangha and the kingship see Reynolds (1971 and 1972) and Bechert (1970). For the articulation with society, see Evers (1968).

In this paper we propose to concentrate upon the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the northern province of Chiangmai with particular emphasis upon the city district (*Amphur Muang*) itself. Because the North has had a vivid history of resistance to religious centralization (Keyes, 1971), this type of study may, we feel, also shed some light upon the success of the Bangkok leadership and their local representatives in transmitting their particular point of view to this northern section of the kingdom. Our methodology was to study available written materials on the monkhood in Thai and English and to interview 16 out of the 18 commune heads (*Chao Khana Tambon*) in Chiangmai city district, 16 out of the 19 district heads (*Chao Khana Amphur*), all the provincial officers (*Chao Khana Changwat*), and the regional head (*Chao Khana Phak*) for the region. For the sake of comparison, interviews were held with a district head monk and a provincial head monk in Mae Sariang and Lampang, respectively. To discover the lay point of view, we interviewed the lay provincial head of the Education Department of Religion in Chiangmai. We also talked frequently with lay Buddhists in the province, particularly those active in *wat* affairs, members of lay committees, former monks, and young people at the high school and college level. The major emphasis of the study, however, was upon interviewing monks directly at all levels of the provincial hierarchy.

Roots of the Hierarchy in History

Some historical background is necessary to understand today's patterns of Sangha organization. Details regarding monastic hierarchy are not plentiful for the periods before the present dynasty (Reynolds, 1971:186), but royal patronage is evident from the Sukhotai period, starting with Rama Khamhaeng's 13th and 14th century support of reformist forest monk groups (who traced their orthodoxy to Ceylon) and continuing with the royal promotion of relics enshrined at important chedis (Damrong, 1926:6-21 and Dhani Nivat, 1965:5-8). In Chiangmai Province at least five monasteries have traditions that trace their relics back to that period. Thus royal interest in the Buddhist religion is nothing new to Chiangmai.

Later, in the Ayuthaya era, the forest monks and village or town monks became divided into two separate groups, the former stressing solitary meditation and austere practices, the town monks giving more attention to monastic education and community relationships. Regional differences complicated Sangha affairs during this period, for by 1592 we find that there was a separate "Supreme Patriarch" with the title of "Somdet" for the North (he had Burmese Mon connections) and one for the South of Thailand (Dhani Nivat, 1965: 16-17). Whether there had ever been a single leader of the Thai Sangha before that time is not clear. Since the competing political centers of power shifted so constantly, it is unlikely that the Sangha leadership could transcend such political divisiveness to produce a single head of the order for "Thailand." Put simply, there was yet no "Thailand," and thus there was no unified Thai Sangha either. To our knowledge, no Sangha organization in Southeast Asia has ever anticipated or preceded modern territorial statehood on a political basis. One suspects that even as late as the Taksin period in the 18th century, the "Supreme Patriarch" that we find demoted for failure to adore his ruler's claims of Buddhahood—even such a monk—only controlled the Sangha within the range of Taksin's secular powers. In summation, up until the present dynasty the monkhood was divided because of forest-town rivalries, ancient regional loyalties, outside reformers from Ceylon and Burma (Mons), and territorial fluctuations of secular centers of power. For these reasons, we believe that unity in the Sangha did not precede the unification of the Thai state.

If such a reading of Thai history is correct, it suggests a very important consideration in terms of the basic nature of the Theravadin monkhood: if there is to be any hierarchical ordering of monasteries and monks that is responsible to the secular state and is willing to implement secular policies, such a hierarchy must be created by the state itself, not by the monks, who, by nature seem in the Turner (1969) sense more naturally devoted to anti-structure or freedom from lay control than to anything else.⁵ Left to itself, the Sangha, following its ancient guide

5) See also E.M. Mendelson's *Sangha and State in Burma* (in press at Cornell Press) for Burmese parallels.

lines and laws in the *Vinaya*, builds its minimal sociological structures on the basis of seniority, honor due to teachers and ordinator, and charismatic qualities of particular monks who attract followers. A rational, bureaucratic monastic administration—in the Weberian sense—if ever such is to be found, is likely therefore to be more the product of secular administrative compulsion than monastic propensity. Kings and political rulers alike create such ecclesiastical organizations both to keep control of such potentially powerful elements of society as well as to purge the Sangha of corruption and undesirables that are often tolerated by the *laissez-faire* monastic system. *Vinaya* ideals alone are not enough to preserve the Sangha's reputation in society. The rulers of the present dynasty have clearly understood this point.

The Sangha Under the First Rulers of the Present Dynasty

It is with considerable understanding of royal responsibility for the welfare of the monkhood that Rama I faced the disorganized, disheartened monkhood after the depredations of the Burmese at Ayuthaya and the senseless purges of monks by the deluded Taksin. Rama I laid the foundations for the present ecclesiastical hierarchy with the following procedures: the requirement of identification papers for monks; the keeping of registers by abbots of all monastery residents; the classification of abbots into four grades; the appointment of officials with the title of *Somdet* for the South, Center, and North of Thailand, each with his own staff; the creation of an independent organization for the Mon monks; establishment of a Supreme Patriarch with "Right" and "Left" officials under him; and even the creation of a governmental Ecclesiastical Department (Dhani Nivat, 1964 and 1965: 21-28; Damrong, 1926: 30-31). These are the essentials for state control over the Sangha. He furthermore expelled 128 monks for offenses including drinking and unseemly behavior with women, illustrating the principle that the state in Thailand insists upon the right to consider certain types of behavior as sufficient cause for disrobing (more on this later). The hierarchy can thus be seen as a means by which the king and thus the State can discipline its monks when necessary.

Rama I also furthered the process of unification and centralization by gathering monks together to revise the Buddhist scriptures, and he distributed authorized texts to attempt a return to orthodoxy after the period of laxity following the fall of Ayuthaya. This interest in Pali scholarship and monastic learning was a distinguishing mark of royal support in the 19th century, with Rama III using state funds to support monk scholars who passed Pali exams, while the King himself made significant contributions to Buddhist literature (Rong Syamananda, 1973: 104-6).

It was under Rama III that a major development took place, when in 1833, he allowed his scholarly brother, Prince Mongkut, who was then a reformist monk under Burmese Mon influence, to found a new sect, first at Wat Smorai and then at Wat Boworaniwes (where Mongkut was abbot) (C. Reynolds, 1972). This new sect became known as the Thammayut Order, and by the time Mongkut had become Rama IV, another prince-monk had been appointed abbot of Wat Boworaniwes, making this *wat* one of the most powerful monastic centers in Thailand—a position it still holds due to continued royal support. From the start, the Thammayut Order had considerable organizational independence under the King's protection (Wales, 1934:241-44), almost as if it took over the Mon's independent role under Rama I, but with much more prestige added to the independence.⁶ The Thammayut Order, as we shall see later, combined several traditions—the forest austerities, meditation, Mon concepts of orthodoxy, and Ceylonese concern with Pali texts and relics. It also developed a concept of destiny as a reformist body within the larger framework of the Thai monkhood, which became known as the Mahanikaia Sect.

When the reformist monk himself became King Mongkut (Rama IV), further development of the hierarchy took place (Wales, 1934:241-4).

6) It should be noted, however, that Rama III, while supporting Mongkut, also was not in favor of divisive Thammayut practices (C. Reynolds, 1972 : III : 2) such as wearing the robe in the Mon style, and Rama IV (Mongkut) himself, when transformed from monk to king, tempered his actions so as to insure the cooperation of the Mahanikaia Sect.

A Supreme Patriarch had beneath him four Area Supervisors (see Table 1): (1) a Northern Area head—Mahanikaia Sect, (2) a Southern Area head—Mahanikaia Sect, (3) a national Thammayut Sect leader, and (4) a national head of the forest or meditation monks. Thus the Mahanikaia leaders were evenly balanced with the leaders of the Thammayut and forest groups, although each Area Supervisor had to be selected from royal monasteries, thereby giving the king, who appointed such monks, effective control of the hierarchy. The abbots of royal monasteries had helpers known as a *Phra Khru Thananukrom* and a *Palat* (see Table 2, #29 and #14). The abbots of ordinary monasteries had helpers known as *Palat* and *Samuha* (See Table 2, #14 and #60), with such abbots not appointed by the king but by the people or by wealthy nobles who supported the monastery. An interesting feature of royal concern for monks during King Mongkut's reign was the system of Pali examinations with honors and monthly stipend given by the king and with the highest appointments in the hierarchy having a tendency to fall to those monks with the highest grades. Significantly, forest or meditation monks did not sit for such exams.

The new sect, created and popularized by royal support and later headed by prince-monks, soon began to effect monastic reforms not by hierarchical decree alone but by the power of example. One can thus quite profitably evaluate the Thammayut Sect in terms of this paper as an alternative channel through which royal power and influence may flow out to the monkhood at large or as a means whereby the State's ideals for the Sangha are often imitated as exemplary by other monks.

On the eve of the major definition of the hierarchy made by Rama V in 1902, we can note two important points. First, the Thammayut Sect had achieved formal status in the hierarchy. Second, the criteria of using abbots of royal monasteries and successful Pali scholars would work eventually to the detriment of the forest or meditation monk's participation in monastic government, leaving the field to the Mahanikaia and Thammayut.

The Sangha Administration Acts of 1902 and 1941

The 1902 Act on the Administration of the Sangha (Mahamakut Educational Council, 1963) confirmed the existence of a Supreme Patriarch as head of both the Thammayut and Mahanikaia Sects. Under the Patriarch were three monks with the title of *Somdet* who controlled the North, South, and Central Mahanikaia regions, as well as a fourth *Somdet* who was responsible for all of the Thammayut monks in the country. Each *Somdet* had a deputy, the total thus being eight monks, who, with the patriarch, comprised the Maha Thera Council or "Supreme Council" as we shall call it in this paper. Below this Council were Provincial, Town, and District officials, and still below them were ranked the abbots, sub-abbots, monks, and novices. Each of the officials in the hierarchy had a royal title, and each could appoint a staff or retinue of assistants, the number of such being two for district heads and increasing to six for a provincial leader.

After the constitutional reforms of 1932, democratic concepts affected much of Thai social life, and the Sangha was influenced by these ideas when in 1941 a new Act was passed, establishing another council below the Supreme Council, this new one composed of the Department Heads responsible for Administration, Education, Propagation, and Public Works—four areas of ecclesiastical responsibility still very much the topic of conversation with monastic officials today. The 1941 Act also created a Sangha Parliament of not more than 45 monks, in an attempt to introduce some democratic voting procedures into an otherwise strictly fixed chain of command from above. Interestingly, under the 1941 Act there were joint administrative units combining Mahanikaia and Thammayut monks even at the provincial level, but the hierarchies for the two sects became completely separate below the Supreme Council after the 1963 Act. Both the new second Council and the monastic "parliament" fell victims to Sarit's decrees embodied in the 1963 Act, restoring Sangha structure to a purely hierarchical system below the level of the Supreme Council. This 1963 Act, with modifications, represents the basic law under which Thailand's monks now exist. A review of the official positions will illuminate the basic features of the modern hierarchy.

The Highest Levels of the Present Hierarchy

The upper echelons of the Sangha hierarchy (See Table 1) are now composed of the Supreme Patriarch, the Supreme Council, and the Area Supervisors (*Chao Khana Yai*), one each for the Mahanikaia Central, North, East, and South areas, and one for the Thammayut Sect as a whole. It is interesting that all of the Area Supervisors (*Chao Khana Yai*) have a *Somdet* title and are members of the Supreme Council, except for the one for the North, who has neither that title nor Council membership. Also noteworthy is the fact that *all* the Area Supervisor officials reside in Bangkok monasteries—a pattern in which regional officials live not in the areas they supervise but in the city where their superior in the hierarchy resides. We will find such a tendency towards urban centralization even at the provincial level.

Below the Area Supervisors are the Regional Heads (*Chao Khana Phak*) for the 18 regions of the kingdom. Regions are groupings of from three to six provinces under one monk's leadership. The Head for Region Seven (the provinces of Chiangmai, Lamphun, and Mae Hong Sorn) is located at Wat Hariphunchai in Lamphun. Over the entire country only three of the eighteen Regional Heads reside within the areas they control—the centralization pattern we observed above for Area Supervisors. Regional Heads are quite remote administratively to the monk's world as we found it. While we were interviewing officials in the province, the Regional Head was referred to rarely, mainly in reference to a pending decision on having a Chiangmai school established to train monks for the hierarchy.

Below the Regional Head for Region Seven, of course, are the three Provincial Heads (*Chao Khana Changwat*). In Chiangmai Province, this is the highest hierarchy office, and the Provincial Head's name and powers came up frequently in our interviews with monks. His rule may be benign but it is omnipresent. It is interesting that his monastery,

Phra That Doi Suthep, perched high upon the mountain of the same name that overlooks the city of Chiangmai below, often seems symbolically to dominate both the Sangha and the skyline as well, its lights visible at night. Before, however, we discuss his specific powers and concerns, we should digress a bit to explain that in our portrait of the hierarchy so far, we have left out any discussion of a system of royal honorary titles that complements but does not always exactly parallel the administrative hierarchy. The *Chao Khana Changwat*, for example, while holding the highest office in the province, also holds the highest honorary title (*Thep*), sharing this mark of royal favor only with his Thammayut counterpart at Chiangmai's Wat Chedi Luang. A brief explanation of the Thai monastic honorary system at this point will serve to reveal some of the further complexities of Sangha organization and the symbolic representations of basic monastic values which are reified in the levels and types of honors given.

The Royal Honorary System of Fans

Every year on the King's birthday, announcements are made awarding ecclesiastical honors to monks, such honor being in the form of special titles, certificates, and ceremonial fans which by shape, color, and design reveal to any informed observer the status of the monk holding such a fan. Actually very few laymen would be able to tell which one of the 62 different fans ranked over another, but most monks could do so, with less difficulty. These honorary fans must not be confused with ordinary fans presented to monks by common laymen on many types of occasions (to honor an ordination, a deceased monk, a layman's birthday, a bank opening, etc.). These latter fans can be purchased in monk's supply stores and can be lettered as the donor wishes, but their shape is never allowed to imitate that of the honorary fans. Monks then use these common fans for ritual purposes, such as when sermons are given or when special chanting is done. At such times the monk holds the fan before his face to block it from his audience's view.

Honorary fans, however, are only given by the King or his representative, and they are always accompanied by the award of a title that involves a change of name for the monk— the new name usually chosen

to mirror the qualities for which the honor is given.⁷ These special fans are only used by monks at ceremonies involving the King's presence himself or the designated substitute for him. At Chiangmai, for example, monks invited to rituals at the King's Phu Phing Palace must use their honorary fans, and they sit in order depending upon the rank their fan represents in the honorary hierarchy, *not* according to rank in the administrative system and *not* by seniority.⁸ Thus we can see that the King may bestow honor upon monks that can add a new dimension to the monastic status system, transcending at times the ancient principle of seniority, tempering if not necessarily superseding the ranking in the regular hierarchy, and mixing the monks of both sects according to royal ranks at royal functions.⁹

Basically one can conceive of three major divisions of honorary titles: *Somdet*, *Raja Khana* and *Phra Khru* (See Table 2). As noted above, *Somdet* is a prestigious term traceable at least to the 16th century. Today, the Supreme Patriarch himself incorporates the title into his name, and the other full *Somdet* monks are called *Somdet Phra Raja Khana*, with all six of these monks being members of the Supreme Council by definition. Ranking next in line are twelve deputies (*Rong Somdet*), some of whom are likewise on the Supreme Council. There seems to be a custom of appointing Mahanikaia and Thammayut monks to these titles in somewhat equal proportions, but places on the Supreme Council over time will tend to favor somewhat the numerically superior Mahanikaia Sect. At the Chiangmai provincial level, there are no monks with

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- 7) Thus a monk high in the hierarchy has used a number of names by which he is officially known over his career; this process makes biographical research on Thai monks most complex. The one boon granted to the researcher is that, with a few exceptions, the new title is incorporated into the name itself, and the number of syllables in the monk's name is a further clue to his honorary rank.
- 8) Monks told us that honorary fans are also used, for example, when official functions are held by the Provincial Governor.
- 9) If one accepts the hypothesis that sects are royally engendered, then it may be interesting to speculate that what the king has separated he can also bring together when he wishes.

this high a title. All nineteen of the full and deputy *Somdets* in the country reside in Bangkok.

The next four titles in the honorary system are introduced by the terms *Phra Raja Khana Chan* and end in *Tham* (20), *Thep* (45), *Rat* (108), and *Saman* (287), the numbers in parentheses representing the total of such title holders in the entire Thai Sangha of some 175,000 monks.¹⁰ In Chiangmai Province the highest title held, *Thep*, has been given to the Provincial heads (*Chao Khana Changwat*) of the two sects. *Rat* titles are held only by two monks; one is at Wat Chedi Luang (Thammayut), the other at Wat Phra Singh (Mahanikaia). It is worth noting that both are royal monasteries; that is, they are singled out for royal support and the resulting prestige because they meet some or all of the following criteria: they are historical monasteries of considerable importance, often with relics; they have a large number of monks and novices involved in a monastic education program; and they play an important role ritually for many laymen and often are pilgrimage sites. The four royal monasteries in the province are, in order of rank, Phra Singh, Phra That Doi Suthep, Chedi Luang, and Sri Chom (all in Chiangmai city, except the last, which is in Chom Thong District). It is noteworthy that of the eight holders of honorary titles from the *Saman* class up to *Thep* in the province, five reside at royal monasteries.

When we study the four holders of the *Saman* title in the province, we find one is at Wat Phra Singh, one is at Wat Fai Hin (located adjacent to Chiangmai University), and the remaining two are the two deputy Province Heads (*Rong-Chao Khana Changwat*). Explaining why these awards were given will help to elucidate the hierarchical system further. The abbot of Wat Fai Hin is, to our knowledge, the only monastic holder in the entire province of a Parian 9, the highest possible award for Pali scholarship, and his advanced skills as a teacher of Pali are not readily available in the north. The honorary title of *Saman* may be (and often is) awarded to all who reach the Parian 7 level of Pali excellence, and it

10) Figures on honorary ranks from Department of Religion Winter Fair Exhibit at Chiangmai, 1973. Figure on total monks in Sangha is the 1965 figure (Thailand: Official Yearbook 1968: 532).

is one way that the King promotes and honors monastic learning *per se*. Thus, at royal functions, it happens that bright young Pali scholars who have surpassed their elders educationally sit above their teachers, holding their fans that symbolize their higher status. One well educated monk said it felt odd indeed to sit ahead of his revered and ancient teacher at a royal function, yet such is the emphasis placed upon success in the Pali exams by the honorary system. Interestingly, once a monk accepts a title at the *Saman* level or higher, he is expected to sit no longer for Pali exams, almost as though further promotion must come from other accomplishments. Pali can take one only so far.

Another principle which seems to play a significant part in the theory of arranging an ecclesiastical hierarchy is that a deputy to an official ranks higher in the honorary system than the full-grade officer below. Thus a Deputy Province head (*Rong-Chao Khana Changwat*) ranks higher than a District Head (*Chao Khana Amphur*), and not only the honorary system follows this pattern: monks interviewed in the province feel that there is a line of succession ideally that descends from the Province Head to his #1 Deputy, then to #2 Deputy, and then to the most important District Head (*Chao Khana Amphur*) in the province—*Chiengmai Muang* or the city itself. Secretaries to such officials and personal staff do not apparently count in such succession lines. Historically, after the first Provincial Head was appointed (at Wat Fai Hin) around the turn of this century, he was succeeded by his Deputy. This pattern, however, is more of an idealized scheme than any rule that has to be followed in every case. Thus, we find at the *Saman* level two principles at work—promotion of Pali scholarship and the recognition of a chain of power through Deputies—both patterns evident throughout all the levels of the hierarchy.

A close inspection of the honorary system detailed in Table 2 also shows that royal recognition is given at the *Saman* and *Phra Khru* level for meditational achievement as well as for more general accomplishments (See ranks #8 and #10 in Table 2). Of the four kinds of *Saman*

fans, two involve meditation, suggesting a royal concern with such monastic emphasis that dates clearly to King Mongkut's personal interest in meditation as a monk and involves Thammayut interest in meditation today, as we will note later in this paper. Such concern with meditation can be traced even further back to royal fascination with forest monks centuries before King Mongkut. This type of patterning suggests the idea that complex hierarchical honorary systems tend to act as a type of cultural memory bank, preserving in the grandeur of symbols the luminosity of ancient traditions. We can see traces of such a process in the titles (See Table 2) such as *Palats*, *Baidika*, *Samu*, and *Phra Khru* itself—all of these titles having once been the names of actual offices in the 1902 Sangha Act, with specific administrative functions, but now remembered through the language of honor. In other words, and honorary system can have a backwards dimension to its meaning in a conservative sense of retaining memories of the past, but it can also have a forward dimension as well.

It is the latter aspect of the system that we notice particularly as we turn to the *Phra Khru* category of the lower 51 levels of honor—"forward" in the sense that the King encourages the Sangha to develop in these three basic areas: (1) Pali scholarship (Parian 3-9); (2) positions of leadership at royal monasteries (Levels I-III); and (3) actual positions held in the administrative system. Some interesting subtleties in the ranking of *Phra Khru* titles involve the promotion of abbots of royal monasteries (#13 in Table 2) to ranks of only one grade below the top ranking administrative monk in the province, the *Chao Khana Changwat* (#12). Actually, the royal monastery's deputy abbots and even the "helpers" (#32, for example) rank very high in comparison with the regular administrative officials such as Commune Heads (*Chao Khana Tambon*) (#37). There is also a tendency for a halo effect to occur with respect to the highest positions in the system so that the personal staff of such prestigious monks often out-rank administrative officials at quite a high level. For example, the *Palat* of a *Somdet* (#14) outranks all the

officials in the provincial Sangha except the *Chao Khana Changwat* himself (#12). Also noteworthy is the fact that the rewards for Pali scholarship help a monk advance to really significant heights in the system only after he has passed the 7th level; thus achievement of only the last three Parian levels really enables one to outrank an abbot with a *Phra Khru* title. It should be noted, however, that only a few abbots in any distant province receive the *Phra Khru* titles, and thus the award of any of the royal titles singles out a monk for honor, no matter at what level the title and fan are given.

Interviews with monks and laymen produced a general consensus regarding the criteria for awarding honorary fans and titles. It was felt that success or achievement in the following areas would contribute significantly toward royal recognition: the education of self through success in taking Pali or Thai exams in religious subjects; contributions towards the education of others (perhaps through teaching); a record of social service projects; the ability to inspire laymen in the "development" areas (usually construction of monastery buildings or even secular structures); a reputation for administering one's monastery as an abbot and for carrying out responsibility well and eagerly; talent in preaching, writing, or even medicine—if such talents create faith among the people; and, naturally, public respect for living a correct and proper life as a Buddhist monk. These are the "correct" answers, so to speak. But some informants added, with a smile, that coming from a royal monastery surely did not hurt one's chances, nor did having influential friends in high places. Not unexpectedly, provincial informants were sometimes ready to tell mildly scandalous accounts of friendship and ecclesiastical politics priming over rejection for administrative incompetence.

In general, however, monks who had received royal honor were very proud of their certificates and fans and showed them to us with considerable relish and excitement at times. One exception was a highly honored monk who saw the entire honoray system as "bait used to disguise a hook which monks should be strong enough to swallow bare."

Perhaps one could look at the extremely modest monthly stipend given to holders of *Sanyabat* honors and above as more bait for the "hook," but realistically, the amount [30 Baht (\$1.50) a month] is too insignificant to attract many fish in today's world. One really does conclude that, after all, the honorary titles and fans are truly symbolic in the sense that they stand for or recognize values and status in Thai culture but are themselves intrinsically not valuable in a material sense or "functionally" vital to the administration of the Sangha, particularly at the provincial level. Honor itself, however, is a strong motivator of men and monks, and it is an important ingredient in Sangha affairs.

Before leaving the subject of monastic honor, we should note that supplementary means of showing respect also exist. After one has passed level 3 in the Pali exams, one can add *Maha* to one's name, or after 10 years in the Sangha, one may be called *Athikan*, or a monk who is a commune (*tambon*) head may use *Chaoathikan* in his formal name. These terms are part of the language of respect that is so characteristic of Thai concepts of hierarchy.

To sum up the honorary dimension of the Sangha's ways of ordering itself, we can say that by offering fans and titles, the King, through the Department of Religion, can elevate to special honor those monks who promote and stand for certain principles and projects important to the kingdom and to the monkhood. Theravadin kings have always been the most generous of the rich lay supporters who, as solar luminaries, enable the religion to shine brightly like the moon in the sky, yet kings have also been the stern disciplinarians whose royal solar eye can peer into the recesses of every monastery in the land to discover bad monks and evil practices. The honorary system can be usefully seen as a positive aspect of the King's attempts to perform *both* of his roles. His fans are granted to those who cause the moon to shine brightly; those monks who do not join the administrative hierarchy, or do not serve as assistants to royally titled monks, or do not enlist at royal monasteries, or do not become Pali scholars—such monks the King and his honorary system formally ignore, their virtues notwithstanding.

At the provincial level, it is difficult to determine just how important the honorary system is. There are not many advanced Pali scholars for the King to reward. In 1970, of the 516 abbots for whom information is available in the province, only one had achieved a Parian 7-9 level in Pali studies (the three highest grades), fourteen had Parian 4-6, and only two had Parian 3 (Dept. of Religious Affairs, 1970: Table 18). There were thus only a total of 17 of the 516 reporting abbots who qualified for royal attention in the educational area. There are also only four royal monasteries in the entire province with its total of just over 1,000 *wats*, although the influence of these four is considerable, as noted above. The abbots of three of these royal monasteries in Chiangmai certainly have great prestige that involves a high honorary rank and a fairly high leadership position in the administrative hierarchy. The main opportunity, thus, at the provincial level, for the state to distribute honor is through recognition of the regular Sangha administrative positions. The following Table gives a rough estimation of the relationship between the two systems and the number of monks involved (all Mahanikaia):

<i>Administrative Position</i>	<i>Honorary Title Range</i>	<i>Number of Monks Holding Hierarchy Position in Chiangmai Province</i>
Province Head (<i>Chao Khana Changwat</i>)	<i>R. Thep</i> (#6)	1
Deputy Province Head (<i>Rong Chao Khana Changwat</i>)	<i>R. Saman</i> (#8-11)	2
District Head (<i>Chao Khana Amphur</i>)	<i>P.K. Sanyabat</i> (#19-27)	19
Commune Head (<i>Chao Khana Tambon</i>)	<i>P.K. Sanyabat</i> (#37-41)	139
Abbot (<i>Chao Awat</i>)	(no particular title)	932

The Provincial Administrative System

One of the most interesting aspects of the Mahanikaia hierarchy is that all administrative officials, without exception, are *first* abbots and *then* officials. In other words, their most demanding responsibility is to their own monastery and its constituents, and this priority is based more on local needs than national ones. As abbot, a monk is responsive first to the leading laymen and women of the monastery; it is they who had to approve his being abbot first, and without their support, hierarchy office would be a rather empty matter. Local support fills the alms bowls, provides the necessities, and gives life to the monastery. Being an administrative officer does not produce more than a nominal "salary" -- a gesture really; the monasteries of Thailand are basically self-supporting, and the leadership of the abbots is the key to the Sangha's survival.

The nature of the abbot's role has undoubtedly changed over the last three-quarters of a century in this area of Thailand. A number of monks, particularly those with over 40 years of experience (*phansa*), referred to the days when the abbot's word was the law from which there was no appeal and with which there was no interference. We were told that, justly or unjustly, the abbot handed out his decisions, but now his traditional power has been slowly but surely modified. Many key monks have been drawn into the Bangkok-based hierarchy as part of a network of officials taking direction from above. It was said that in the not-so-distant past, the *Vinaya* laws ruled alone, but today the State supplements these ancient monastic rules.¹¹ If, for example, monks from a given monastery are reported to a District Head (*Chao Khana Amphur*) for drinking, gambling, or taking heroin, the present Sangha rules require the disrobing and expulsion of such monks, whereas *Vinaya* procedures would involve confession for such matters and penalties of a much milder sort. There is thus a disciplinary justification for the administrative system in terms of its enforcing the modern rules for monks. The

11) This monastic vision of the autonomous monastery of the old days ruled by *Vinaya* alone is certainly a challengeable view historically. One suspects that political leaders since the 13th century have periodically asserted their supremacy over manastic attempts at overmuch independence.

hierarchy also serves as an appeals system of sorts, since a monk dissatisfied with a decision from his superior can refuse to accept it, and in such a case, the matter will be sent to the next highest level for review. Attempts to go over the head of one's superior are not uncommon but seldom work. Cases where hierarchy officials impose national rules on abbots are rare in the province, but their very existence now and then relates to an important change in the abbot's power, an attrition that adds to the severe damage to his position that modern secular schools have slowly but surely caused. Despite these changes, for a majority of those concerned, being abbot is still more important than being a hierarchy official, at least at the lower levels of the system.

For some monks, being abbot is enough; they actually refuse attempts by the hierarchy to incorporate them into the system. The reason given for rejecting office or resigning seems to involve always the administration of their own monastery, often including an extensive teaching role or a busy life of meeting the needs of a devoted group of lay supporters. One monk who was temporarily serving as a Commune Head (*Chao Khana Tambon*), clearly did not want the job, and the reason was obvious. He was the most popular monk in the area in terms of a type of astrology that was combined with good common-sense counseling, if necessary. His life was filled with more requests from the laity than he could handle now. He hoped the monkhood would find a replacement for him soon. Another monk who had resigned from a secretarial post gave his reasons as focusing around his unwillingness to spend so much time on recording data and keeping records. He would rather be active in community affairs. Most monks, apparently, are willing to serve, however, if they are qualified, and most Commune Heads said they had little trouble finding abbots. What trouble they did have relates more to the chronic shortage of older monks in the northern Sangha (an average of 2 monks and 8 novices per *wat*).¹²

12) Dept. of Rel. Affairs (1970): Table 12). There were (in 1970) 1,069 *wats* in the province, with 2,142 monks and 8,067 novices. More significantly, only 851 monks have 10 years standing in the monkhood, and there are 991 *wats* to be staffed with abbots!

More indicative of the general attitude is the comment made by one young Chiangmai abbot that he would gladly accept a position in the hierarchy if they thought he were qualified. The reasons he gave indicated a conviction that one could be a better abbot if part of the hierarchy. He said that schools were often connected with *tambon* and *amphur* monasteries and it would be easier to find pupils and funds, for he was, like many monks, interested in education as the life blood of a continuing monkhood. He also said that monastery discipline was better because as a hierarchy official one's words carried more authority, and young monks, novices, and temple boys (*dek wat*) paid more attention. It also seemed to us quite obvious that the honor and excitement of the position itself appealed to this young, bright monk; it opened up a world beyond the confines of the monastery walls -- an outside world that increasingly contrasts sharply with the timeless nothingness of a tiny monastery, ignored in a forgotten neighborhood in a modern city.

Of course, there are other monasteries in Chiangmai that are so important that being abbot of one of their kind really overshadows a position held in the hierarchy. For example, the abbot of Wat Prah Singh in Chiangmai holds an administrative position at only the district (*amphur*) level (the district of Chom Thong), but as abbot of this prestigious royal monastery he is honored by the King's presence at formal occasions (such as the funeral of the former abbot), and he controls over a hundred monks and novices at the monastery itself, the largest monastic population in any monastery in the province. As another example, the abbot of Wat Suan Dok, is only a Commune Head (*Chao Khana Tambon*), but his monastery with its rich historical connections with Chiangmai royalty, its associations with the charismatic northern monk, Kru Ba Sri Wichai, and its strong and prestigious lay supporters remains a very important monastery in Chiangmai. There is no doubt that duties as an abbot of such monasteries take more time than do the administrative responsibilities as a member of the hierarchy.

Our point is clear, therefore--that before one attempts to understand the provincial hierarchy, one has to realize that each official is first and foremost an abbot. There are a number of prestigious monasteries in

the area which so far have tended to control the administration of the Sangha. When a monk becomes abbot of one of these, he is in a favorable position to bid silently for power. Often we found that when monks were appointed as abbots of such monasteries, they were given administrative posts at the same time or shortly after. Some of these monasteries can be very impressive establishments, with huge worship halls (*wiharn*), pagodas (*chedi*), libraries (*ho trai*), ordination halls (*bot*), bell towers (*ho rakhang*), and many modern monks dwellings (*kuti*), equipped with all the modern conveniences lavished upon the Sangha by the faithful. Some have Land Rovers or manicured automotive museum pieces such as a 1952 Chevrolet Sedan. Other monasteries are historical landmarks and are visited by a steady stream of tourists or, on holidays, by bus loads of merit-making Thai from Bangkok or by throngs of pilgrims, as at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. These abbots thus have their monasteries at the center of their sacred realm, but it is the hierarchy position that defines the boundaries of their mandalas.

The Provincial Head (Chao Khana Changwat)

Before the 1963 Sangha Act, the Provincial Head (*Chao Khana Changwat*) was responsible for four areas which he was required to delegate to subordinates. The Departments were as follows: (1) Government (administration), (2) Education, (3) Propagation of the religion (including missions to hill tribes, etc.), and (4) Public Welfare (development, building construction). Today the Provincial Head by law is required to watch all of these areas by himself, delegating specific jobs as necessary, but in practice, some degree of specialization still occurs, the Provincial Head retaining areas # 1 and # 3, delegating to his first deputy area # 2 and to his second deputy # 4. It is interesting that the second deputy once held the same duties under the old law, and under the new law he was given the same job but a new title. Also aiding the Provincial Head is a provincial secretary who keeps the records and is himself the abbot of the monastery formerly run by the Provincial

Head.¹³ Since the latter lives up the mountain at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, he commutes almost daily to his former monastery in town, where the secretary now lives. With such delegations of duties, the Provincial Head manages to perform his responsibilities.

In addition to carrying out the orders he received from those above him in the hierarchy, the Provincial Head also must communicate his orders to the 18 District Heads (*Chao Khana Amphur*) below him. In an area where only a few Chiangmai monasteries have telephones, such communication can consume time. One solution to that problem is to arrange that the residences of seven of the District Heads be in Chiangmai. The five most distant districts to the south of the city are administered by monk officials who live in Chiangmai.¹⁴ All the nine central districts have district heads that live there.¹⁵ There are two districts fairly far north of the city administered by monks living in Chiangmai city, but the two districts the farthest north are staffed by resident District Heads.¹⁶ Opinion among the district officials varies as to the balance of the good and bad in this system. Clearly, it is easier for the seven centralized District Heads to communicate to the Province Head, but it is also quite clear that it is difficult for the monks and laymen in the districts to deal personally with their head monk.¹⁷ One District Head said he was ready to leave his quite prosperous monastery in Chiangmai that he has put a whole career into promoting and to go out permanently

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- 13) It is interesting that the teacher of the present Provincial Head (*Chao Khana Changwat*) was not only abbot of this same monastery (Wat Thungyu) but also a *Chao Khana Changwat* as well. We can see in this instance how monastic power is clearly related to abbotship of key Chiangmai monasteries.
- 14) The districts are Mae Chaem, Omkoi Hot, Chom Thong, and San Patong.
- 15) These districts are Hang Dong, Chiangmai, Saraphi, San Kamphaeng, Doi Saket, San Sai, Mae Rim, Samoeng, and Mae Taeng.
- 16) The two Chiangmai based *amphur's* are representing Chieng Dao and Phrao, and the most distant districts with home rule are Fang and Mae Ai.
- 17) The Regional Head (*Chao Khana Phak*) told us that he occasionally receives complaints from Chiangmai Province that the *Amphur* Heads (*Chao Khana Amphur*) are not available enough to the people and monk in the districts. But he seems to accept the situation as unavoidable for the present.

to stay in the district he represents any time the Province Head asks him to go. One gets the impression that despite Bangkok policies stating the advisability of having district heads live in their districts, the Province Head uses liberally the exception to the rule which allows the Province Head to appoint an outside monk if a qualified monk cannot be found from the district. In any case, the Provincial Head has beneath him seven Chiangmai abbots as District Heads.

The Province Head calls his District Heads together with his Provincial Deputies officially at least three times a year. A gathering of all these Sangha officials takes on a semi-official tone, although full authority under present law rests completely with the Provincial Head. In practice, however, he consults with the District Heads on many issues. A smaller group he meets with monthly is composed of his two deputies and the provincial secretary, the latter being his personal secretary as well as the abbot of Wat Thungyu, the city base of operations for the Provincial Head. The secretary acts as the one who reads and studies communications from Bangkok to the province, and he types out the messages that flow out from the Provincial Head to the District Heads. He also receives all reports from the Districts, and he sends the Province reports to Bangkok. Everything has to be typed, for no duplicating machines exist. Such are the basic mechanics of governance. In essence, it is a hierarchical chain of command according to laws, but the system is greatly modified by the quest for consensus and peace. One high ranking monk described the philosophy of Sangha governance as follows :

Sangha law, unlike secular law, is not strictly enforced if it is not suitable for the specific occasion.

The ability to know the "suitable" would seem to be the most important and valuable administrative talent an official can possess. A brief review of the Provincial Head's career will suggest how much necessary talent may be developed through a succession of positions held in the monkhood.

Like most of the officials in the Province, he began his career as a monastery boy (*dek wat*), and like *all* the officials, he has been in the

monkhood continuously since ordination as a novice. Like all the hierarchy members but one he is a native of the Province—in his case, San Sai (born in 1903). He became a monastery boy at 9 years of age and a novice at 12, being fully ordained at 20. He studied the Thai Thamma but could not pass the exams. Therefore he decided to move to better educational opportunities at Wat Thungyu in Chiangmai, where he became a student under the abbot, who was District Head for his District of San Sai. He succeeded in his studies there, passed, and returned to his district to teach for a while. The District Head invited him to return to help with administration and to teach. He passed more Thai Thamma exams (*Tho* level) and then was appointed to his first administrative post in 1927 as a member of the personal staff of the District Head of San Sai.

He continued to study but failed to pass the Pali exams at the Parian 3 level. Such difficulty with Pali studies is common in the biographies of hierarchy officials: out of the 18 District Heads, only four monks have passed Parian 3 (their grades are 5, 5, 4 and 3), and not one of the Deputy Provincial Heads or the Provincial Secretary was successful either. Undoubtedly the explanation for the pattern is simply the lack of adequate educational opportunities in Pali at the provincial level. In any case, when his teacher became province head, he remained a member of his personal staff, and by 1939 his talents won him the prestigious position of acting District Head for the city of Chiangmai (*Muang*), followed two years later by achievement of the full office. It will be remembered that this post is seen today as a key stepping stone in the path to the position of Provincial Head.

After he had been made an ordinator (*upatchaya*) in 1944 and had been given a special fan as District Head (#17, Table 2) three years later, he was appointed as abbot of the prestigious royal monastery, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. After four years he was appointed as one of the four officials directly under the Provincial Head according to the 1941 Sangha Act. His duty was propagation. This important position was noted, so to speak, by the award of a *Raja Khana Saman* (#11, Table 2) fan and certificate in 1953. In those days it was possible for him to

be both a provincial officer and a District Head, and he held both posts simultaneously until 1956. His work as propagation officer for the province was followed in 1962 by appointment as acting Province Head and by the full title in 1964. As is usual, the royal fan and certificate follow rather than precede administrative achievement, and he was awarded his *Raja Khana Rat* title (#7, Table 2) in 1966. His active monastic life spans almost two-thirds of a century, and we found it significant that the dominant personality characteristics one notes from talking with him are not the sophisticated habits of bureaucratic power but a natural kindness mellowed by age and experience. When we came for our first interview with him, he was busy sharpening expertly the monastery's knives on an ancient whet stone. Chewing betel and conversing easily and naturally about most complex monastic matters, he seems to epitomize the traditional provincial leadership. Honor paid to him much transcends the natural respect paid by all to his 51 years in the monkhood (*phansa*).

The Provincial Head remembers the days when he was on the personal staff of the former Provincial Head and when his leader's desk was piled high with papers dealing with the controversial Kru Ba Sri Wichai, the Northern monk who resisted strongly in the twenties and thirties the very controls from Bangkok that are accepted so easily today. His memory of the Kru Ba Sri Wichai affair is interesting as both an historical matter and as counterpoint to today's prevailing attitudes in the North.¹⁸ We transcribe directly from our field notes:

Kru Ba Sri Wichai had his own point in standing up against Bangkok. He followed the traditions and patterns the people follow in the North—particularly in ordination. To him, ordination was a tradition to be followed, not a rule from Bangkok. Ordination brings merit to the ordained and his family. Sri Wichai did not care what the rules were. He emphasized the ordination itself, not rules 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. In the North parents would bring

18) For sympathetic portraits of Kru Ba Sri Wichai, see Sanga (n.d.) and Luang and Nang (1964). For some anthropological considerations of his position in terms of national integration see Keyes (1971).

a boy to be ordained as a novice because they wanted somebody to discipline him. Sri Wichai said he would take that boy and he need not know the Pali wording of the request to join the monkhood, parts of the life of the Buddha in Pali, and the 10 precepts in Pali, but Bangkok insisted upon these three things and required that the whole ordination procedure be memorized in Pali. Sri Wichai disagreed: if the ordinate could not do it, Sri Wichai would let him repeat it after the ordinator. Bangkok said the ordinate had to memorize all 227 Vinaya rules. Sri Wichai said you did not have to.

Sri Wichai was a "doer" more than a "thinker." There is the road to Doi Suthep, the monasteries he built! Sri Wichai did not like the Central Thai language in spoken or written form. He used Lanna Thai (Northern Thai). The support for him in Chiangmai was really strong—a large group of laymen and monks. Some even declared they were not under the Bangkok Sangha any more. Bangkok sent someone up here to take Sri Wichai to Lamphun and then he agreed with what Bangkok wanted him to do, but some of his followers would not stop resisting. It took months and months to settle the disputes. The file of reports was three feet high at the office of the Provincial Abbot.

As we have noted already, today's northern Sangha in this province resists Bangkok, if at all, in a manner too subtle to be directly discoverable. No longer does the Provincial Head have to contend with the national integration problems of the twenties. No monk we could find was willing, at least, to admit to any anti-Bangkok sentiments.¹⁹ The

19) At the funeral of the late abbot of Wat Phra Singh in early 1974, we did talk to one layman who was quite bitter that the royal cremation of the north's highest ranking monk was done in Bangkok style. Thus there was no customary procession with the coffin around the city and the use of the crouching, upright position in a royal type of coffin was deemed "unnatural." He further complained that the entire funeral pyre should have been ignited and that fireworks were sorely missed. Both were deemed dangerous for the King, who attended the ritual. This layman, from a very powerful Chiangmai family, was quite upset at the imposition of Bangkok culture upon what he considered his native traditions.

few conflicts we found were local and personal ones. In the decades since Kru Ba Sri Wichai the national Sangha hierarchy has become an accepted part of the Chiangmai world, as much as civil service officials and governors.

The District Head (*Chao Khana Amphur*)

The province of Chiangmai is divided into 18 secular districts (*amphur*), and ecclesiastical districts must follow in due time the boundaries of their lay counterparts, even though the Supreme Council must "approve" each new district.²⁰ As we have noted above, 7 of the 18 District Heads do not reside in their district but in Chiangmai. All District Heads are full officials except for Mae Ai District, but the promotion for that monk in the newest district was in process. Ten out of the group are natives of the districts they administer, and all but one are from the province. They represent basically, then, locally based monks who have aligned themselves with the central Sangha leadership.

We found that District (*Chao Khana Amphur*) have been in the monkhood for an average of 37 years (*phansa*). They thus have considerable seniority over other monks. All have at least a *Phra Khru* title (See Table 2), and all are qualified to ordain; therefore they have been to the Sangha's training school in Bangkok where certificates are issued. If they have over 50 monasteries in their district and have a minimum number of monks and novices to supervise, then they may appoint two (but no more than two) deputies. In the majority of cases the deputy or deputies live in the district, an important factor for the seven District Heads who live in Chiangmai city. Most also have a secretary who keeps the records and sends out announcements. All seemed to be abbots of rather prosperous and impressive monasteries. In these ways one can see a certain regularity to the position of the District Head.

In terms of actual administrative methods and approaches, we found considerable variety. In reference to their hierarchy duties, most

20) We interviewed 14 out of the 18 District Heads. Of the 4 missing officials, one was too sick to talk with us, and the other three were too far away, considering the time we had available,

felt that governing took the most time, but some would meet monthly with all the Commune Heads (*Chao Khana Tambon*) and all the abbots, while others brought only the Commune Heads together two or three times a year. Some seemed to stress their role as monastic policeman and defrocking of bad monks, while others said discipline problems were rare. While the average number of monasteries per district is 60, the range is great between 10 (for Omkoi) and 117 (for Chiangmai *Muang*); thus the degree of responsibility represented by their office varies considerably also. Some administer prosperous districts and say that laymen are eager to give whatever the monks need, and others note that in the rural areas inflation has made it difficult for many to feed monks and therefore some monasteries were constructing kitchens to be used for preparing the food no longer available on morning rounds. Some took great pride in teaching Northern (Lanna) Thai to their novices and in continuing Lanna rituals, where others taught no Lanna Thai at all and performed no Lanna language rituals.²¹ Some were in favor of more secular education for the Sangha, while others bemoaned the resulting loss of Pali learning and the lack of respect for tradition that modern ideas bring. Some District Heads find it extremely difficult to find qualified abbots (particularly in rural areas) and others have no trouble. Our own figures obtained from the monks show that 413 abbots out of 1089 in the province are "acting abbots," usually because they have not the five-year minimum service in the monkhood to qualify, but some districts have no acting abbots and others have 50% in that category. In a few districts there are half a dozen monasteries with no abbot at all. One thus has to be prepared for great differences in the District Head's realms and concerns.

Some officials stand out in one's memory as individualists. One had a fine little museum and was deeply interested in the arts of Buddhism. Another was a sophisticated follower of the nationally famous

21) A ritual which suffers particularly from the failure to teach Lanna Thai in the monasteries is the Tet Mahachat, the recital of the Vessantara Jataka. This intricately beautiful ritual which reached the peak of its popularity before the last World War depends upon the training of special chanters (monks) to tell the story.

Buddhadasa, the unorthodox monastic reformer with visions of religious unity among world religions.²² Another was deeply committed to meditation. One felt the decoration of modern worship halls with murals was "dirty"; another felt they were so beautiful he was going to put them on *both* floors of Chiangmai's first two story worship hall-ordination hall combination. One lived in the jungle in a restored monastery at the end of a long mountain road; another lived in a plush urban apartment complete with stuffed chairs. Some are urbane and sophisticated, while others are unpretentious and natural. But despite all these important differences, there is one characteristic they possess in common, and that is an ability to relate quickly and meaningfully to people. One is impressed with them as natural leaders. They have confidence and social presence, often combined with a good sense of humor. We also noted that, by and large, they were open and frank and were impressively loyal to their ecclesiastical hierarchy. We noted general satisfaction with the dispensations that the monkhood offers, and they appeared quite willing and sometimes eager to explain their duties and attitudes. They would seem to form the core and the strength of Sangha leadership at the provincial level.

The Commune Heads (*Chao Khana Tambon*)

The Commune Heads (*Chao Khana Tambon*) are officials of ecclesiastical not secular areas. A Sangha commune must have at least five monasteries in it but can have no more than ten. If the number falls below five, the commune is merged with another, and if it has more than ten monasteries, it is merged and then divided so as to have the proper number. A Commune Head, therefore, is limited to controlling a maximum of ten monasteries, whereas theoretically there is no limit to the number a District Head may supervise. The difference between the two offices is further underlined by Sangha law that requires a Commune Head to live in the district he administers. To understand their position

22) For details on Buddhadasa, see Swearer (1970: 105-114) and (1968), Sulak Sivaraksa (1967) and Buddhadasa (1970).

better, we interviewed 15 out of the 17 Commune Heads for Chiangmai *Muang* in order to study an urban administrative system at work.²³

We found that the average number of years of experience in the monkhood (*phansa*) was 35 for the Commune Heads, and most of them had seniority in their commune, although in a very few cases older monks had refused the position, and a younger monk was given the post. All were abbots in their communes except one who lived outside his commune and another who lived at the commune's most prestigious monastery but under the abbot who was the most senior monk in the commune. This monk without seniority was clearly nervous about his role, even though everyone grants that in the hierarchy, ability can take precedence over seniority. But in this case, the Commune Head restricted his role to receiving and sending reports, and he did not presume to tour his area as one who sets the discipline and leads the others. The usual situation, however, was that the Commune Head had seniority and was the abbot of a prestigious monastery as well.

Two of those we interviewed were acting Commune Heads, and neither wanted to stay in office, one more interested in teaching and the other too busy as an abbot famous for astrology and counseling. All the monks interviewed were natives of Chiangmai Province, and all but three were natives of Chiangmai *Muang*. It is important, however, to realize that some of the religious communes of Chiangmai *Muang* reach out into the countryside several miles like spokes from a hub, and thus one Commune Head may live among rice fields and deal with farmers in a rural, conservative area, while another Commune Head may be in the heart of the modern city and have the royal and progressive Wat Phra Singh in his domain.

The majority of the Commune Heads felt that the most time-consuming of their official duties was that of governing. They, of course, have to meet with the District Head at least three times a year, and some said they did so monthly. There was considerable variety in how often the Commune Heads met with the monasteries in their commune. The

23) One of the two monks we were not able to interview was in Malaysia, and the other was in the hospital.

most intensive contact seemed to involve meetings with commune abbots twice a month, and the most loosely structured relationship involved no formal meetings at all but only casual conversations at religious functions. A few of the more authoritative types of monks spoke of actually touring their monasteries to speak firmly about matters of good discipline, and they seemed to rule with tight reins, while others seemed to relax and let matters take care of themselves. In some of the more rural communes there were definitely problems concerned with staffing the monasteries with full abbots, but in the more prosperous urban communes no such problem exists. It clearly takes much work to keep young monks in the rural communes, as they tend to migrate to the better educational opportunities in the center of Chiangmai. Some of the rural Commune Heads were very impressive leaders, however, and some have the conviction that the rural laity deserve good monks and that the rural monasteries may be "out of it" but stand for important traditions in Northern Buddhism that must be preserved.

In general, the Commune Heads are typically the most senior monks who have a long career and a strong following in the area that they administer. They are only one step removed from regular abbots in the hierarchy and thus look more toward their commune than to Bangkok. Not all even want to be qualified to ordain, and two have refused requests that they go to Bangkok for schooling to get the required official certificate. Only four have honorary titles at the *Phra Khru* level. Commune Heads are thus perhaps best understood as officials who communicate both ways between the District Heads and the regular abbots. They are as varied as the communes they represent.

Below the Commune Heads (See Table 1), of course, are the abbots (*Chao Awat*), deputy abbots (*Rong Chao Awat*), monks (*Phra*), and novices (*Nen*). The hierarchy stops there, but below that point are the monastery boys (*dek wat*) who, in gratitude for free room and board, serve the

monastery as the abbot requires. Monastery boys perform many tasks that make life a bit easier for monks and novices, and many a Thai male would never have been able to afford a secular education were he not able to be a *dek wat* for some understanding monk. One could continue to account for other laymen and women who have important roles to play at monasteries, but such are beyond the scope of this paper.

The Thammayut Hierarchy

As noted earlier, we have been discussing the hierarchy for the majority of the Thai Sangha, who are in the Mahanikaia Sect. A similar system exists for the Thammayut Sect but since it has only slightly more than a thousand monasteries to more than 24,000 for the other sect, there is no need for so many officials in the Thammayut organization.²⁴ At times when the Supreme Patriarch is Thammayut, he may act himself as the Area Supervisor (*Chao Khana Yai*) for the entire country (See Table 1). Whereas the Mahanikaia Sect has 18 Regional Heads (*Chao Khana Phak*), the Thammayut have 7, telescoping regions so that Chiangmai Province, for example, is grouped in with three others. A similar telescoping occurs at the level of the Provincial Head (*Chao Khana Changwat*), who, for this area, is the abbot of Wat Chedi Luang.

We have already mentioned this monk above as co-holder of the highest honorary title held in the province—*Raja Khana Thep* (#6, Table 2), and his monastery is the third most prestigious royal monastery in the province. His jurisdiction as Thammayut *Chao Khana Changwat* covers the secular provinces of Chiangmai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiangrai, and Mae Hong Sorn. Thus a Thammayut "province" includes five Mahanikaia ones. The District Head (*Chao Khana Amphur*) for the Thammayut also resides as deputy abbot at Wat Chedi Luang, from which he controls 10 *wats* in the (secular) provinces of Chiangmai (9 *wats*)

24) These figures are based on data from 1970. See Dept. of Rel. Affairs (1970: 168).

and Lamphun (1 *wat*). So far there are no Commune Heads (*Chao Khana Tambon*) for the Chiangmai, Lamphun, and Mae Hong Sorn Provinces. The Thammayut hierarchy for this area is therefore located at Wat Chedi Luang in the heart of the city of Chiangmai. How this monastery became a Thammayut *wat* is symbolic of the history of the sect as a whole in the Province.

In 1928 Wat Chedi Luang, with its huge pagoda damaged by an ancient earthquake, was a deserted Mahanikaia site. The last king of Chiangmai invited from Bangkok a monk by the name of Upali to come and restore it.²⁵ With that monk came another named Achan Man (who hailed from the Northeast and was famous for his meditation prowess as a forest monk). At the same time the present abbot of the monastery came there as a novice. Achan Man spent most of his time doing austerities and meditation in the forest, returning just before the rainy season to honor Upali. But when Upali, after successfully starting the Thammayut monastery, returned to Bangkok, Achan Man became abbot for about a year before going out to the forest again, returning eventually to the Northeast permanently around 1937. From the time of Upali and Achan Man, the monastery has prospered. The latter monk trained an important Thammayut monk for Chiangmai, Achan Sim, who also came from the Northeast, and this monk, after staying at Wat Chedi Luang a while, also went out to stay in the forest to practice, but he eventually returned to start the new Wat Santitham after attempts failed to take over after World War II the deserted Mahanikaia monastery, Wat Suan Dok. By 1948, with help from the mayor of Chiangmai, Wat Chedi Luang had inspired this second Thammayut monastery in the city. The present abbot of Wat Santitham is also from the Northeast. The whole process took exactly twenty years—from founding monastery to the production of its first offshoot.

25) Phra Khru Upali was actually originally from the Northeast and was a good friend of Achan Man from their early days in the Northeast (personal communication from Dr. Charles F. Keyes).

A number of factors are worth noting. First, all the monks involved are from the Northeast, whereas it will be remembered that all but one in the Mahanikaia hierarchy come from Chiangmai Province. The Thammayut also moved into deserted Mahanikaia monasteries (the site of Wat Santitham had been a monastery long before). In both cases, top political leaders (the last Chiangmai king and then a mayor) act to promote the establishment of the Thammayut Sect. Finally, it is important that at the very beginning in Chiangmai Province the Thammayut movement is definitely associated with forest Buddhism, that is, a stress upon disciplined meditation in quiet surroundings far from the urban noise and attractions. In this province the sect is still missionizing in the sense that it moves into districts and seeks a following within what is always exclusively a Mahanikaia area at first.

There appears to be a definite sequential process in Thammayut pioneering in the province. The first stage is the settling in of a few monks who live according to the strict forest monk traditions of Achan Man. These traditions involve emphasis upon meditation rather than formal education, the austerity of eating only one meal a day (as opposed to the normal two), the collecting of morning food alms in a line of monks arranged in order of seniority (as opposed to individual quests), and, usually, the wearing of the darker orange, almost brown, robe of the meditating monk. In the first stage, the monks have no religious building to stay in but improvise shelter as best they can, either in the *thudong* tradition of living under an umbrella and robe (Khantipalo, 1965) or in temporary quarters as a deserted monastery or other structure. These monks report to the Thammayut *Chao Khana Changwat* directly and need not report themselves yet as a monastery to Bangkok. It is highly significant that *all* the unregistered Thammayut monasteries in Chiangmai Province follow the Achan Man tradition. They may follow Achan Man even when they move into the villages or towns, as long as they observe the traditions described above. Thus, whether the unregistered monasteries are located in the "forest" (i.e., outside villages and towns) or not, they may follow the Achan Man principles.

In the second stage, a monastery has the hierarchy's permission to build religious structures, and it becomes registered with central authority in Bangkok, to receive a full name when all construction is completed. The third and final stage involves a fully developed and registered monastery, complete with name and official standing. Whether it remains a monastery in the Achan Man tradition is then up to the abbot, actually. Wat Santitham, in Chiangmai *Muang*, is a good example. The abbot is a pupil of Achan Sim, who in turn was a pupil of Achan Man. Thus there is a monastic "lineage" involved. When the monastery was first built after World War II, one could technically call its property "forest" in the sense it was on the undeveloped outskirts of the city, but it is hardly so today, as Chiangmai has grown outwards to incorporate it into the Thai version of suburbia, and it now borders significantly on the mayor's magnificent home. While the abbot began with a strictly meditative regimen, he now sends his students to study at Wat Chedi Luang and they meditate when not studying. Thus Wat Santitham is neither "forest" nor exclusively meditation-oriented any longer. But it is still an Achan Man monastery, according to the abbot.

At Wat Santitham they have a large photograph of Achan Man just to the right of the altar in the worship hall. Novices speak with awe and great respect of Achan Man. One even said his bones were found to be glass after his death (a sign of arahatship). The monks collect alms in a line every morning, according to seniority. They stress meditation and self-discipline at the monastery, and monks and novices are encouraged to eat only once a day. It is a spirit and a tradition—almost a memory—that they follow, but they have also changed slowly into a town monastery and from *wipatsanathura* (meditation) to *khanthathura* (study). Thus it is our conclusion that the forest monks of Achan Man are the pioneer ground breakers who evolve into more traditional Thammayut monasteries in a few decades.

Perhaps now it is clearer why we asserted that the Thammayut Sect, like the honorary fans and the hierarchy itself, can be thought of as an extension of royal and thus governmental lay interest in the monkhood's affairs. The Thammayut Sect was founded in Chiangmai by provincial outsiders and then helped by the local government officials to

get started. To some Mahanikaia monks, the Thammayut are "parasites" living on the huge Mahanikaia tree. Its enemies accuse it of catering to the politically powerful, the wealthy, and the *farangs*.²⁶ Its friends see it as symbolizing a purer Buddhism that is an exemplar for its more popularly supported competitor. In any case, the Sect is dynamic in its search for new footholds in Mahanikaia territory, and in the province it has won powerful supporters just as it has always done since its royal inception over a century ago.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the history of the hierarchy in Thailand to stress the royal role and then the governmental role in supporting and controlling what would otherwise be an independent monkhood, living on local support and guided mainly by the *Vinaya*. We have suggested that the monkhood naturally, according to its traditions, accords leadership to seniority and depends upon the silence of unanimity to govern. The abbots were already established, supported, and maintained by a loyal laity long before there was a national hierarchy, which we view as something superimposed. The presence of an administrative system in its present form we attribute to secular interest in control, not to a monastic propensity toward hierarchy.

We have reviewed the organization of the hierarchy in detail in order to explain how it works out at the provincial level. Our conclusion is that it is a rationally neat system that is applied gently, not harshly in terms of strict imposition of all its rules, with ample room for exceptions when necessary. By the time it reaches down to the commune level, its presence on a daily basis is not too demanding, for the wording of national Sangha laws leaves ample room for local freedom of movement within their spirit. That is not to say that people are not excited or deeply involved when honors from the hierarchy are given or administrative rituals take place. The hierarchy has a certain beauty as a system, and since the monks are Thai, they, like the rest of their countrymen seem to enjoy the hierarchy for its own sake as a symbol of an ordered society functioning under a highly respected monarch.

26) *Farang*: a term usually used to describe any non-Asian foreigner, usually focusing on Caucasians due to their omnipresence.

The honorary system, we also concluded, modifies and supplements the hierarchy, enabling the King and his representatives to temper seniority traditions by rewarding monks for administrative ability, as well as to encourage certain desired ends, such as Pali scholarship, meditation, or leadership. The honors, we feel, are symbolic rather than material in the sense that they stand for values and traditions important to royalty and to the Sangha.

The Thammayut Sect was presented in this paper as a pioneering, missionizing movement that seeks footholds in Mahanikaia territory. The sequential movement from the Achan Man regimen to emphasis on regular Thammayut learning is seen as one way in which the Sect establishes itself and yet is incorporated eventually into the national hierarchy. In Chiangmai Province, the Sect has benefitted from the aid of certain figures in the government. The question of whether there is a fascination of political power in all of Thailand with the Thammayut Sect is a matter needing of more research. All we suggest is that the Thammayut Sect at the provincial level is possibly an alternate avenue of royal and governmental influence over the monkhood, in addition to the channels available through the hierarchy and honorary system.

There seems little doubt that the days of the monastic rebellion of the now legendary Kru Ba Sri Wichai are gone in Chiangmai Province. The province seems to have accepted gracefully Bangkok's right to rule its monkhood. Yet the Province has retained much of its basic nature. Certainly each abbot no longer reigns like an absolute ruler in the old style, but he retains the powerful support of his laity. The life blood of the monastery in terms of the manpower to join it and the physical necessities to support it come from the neighborhood, not Bangkok. Thus the ability of the Sangha to be self-supporting affords it a certain healthy independence and preserves the freshness of difference under the system.

We do not find as Dumont (1966:243-58) has proposed, that hierarchy as a system or principle co-exists with egalitarian behavior in a somewhat contradictory fashion. Instead we find that the concept of hierarchy, which the Thai apparently enjoy very much because it implies order and harmony, is applied to real life situations in the Sangha with

a tolerance and sophistication that prevents bureaucratic, impersonal reason from triumphing over the needs of individuals and small groups. Thus the notion of "suitableness" tempers any tendency towards administrative zealotry that might actualize too severely the hierarchy's system and rules to the detriment of monks and laymen. The Sangha administrative structure as an ideal system is certainly not "loose",²⁷ Its "tight" system co-exists, however, with a much more prestigious one codified in the *Vinaya* and sanctified by thousands of years of sacred traditions which preserve the humane quality of the Sangha as ultimately as a local institution responsive more to the neighborhood of believers than to national secular power. The hierarchy, the honorary system, and even the polite rivalry of the two sects all represent a cultural system that is honored as a respected edifice by all. The monkhood, however, does not let it become a Weberian iron cage of bureaucracy (Weber, 1958: 181). Such an outcome would just not be "suitable."

With reference to the larger problem we introduced as to how the ecclesiastical structure of the Sangha has come into being, we suggest that the hierarchical control of the monkhood is the product of royal and governmental control, with Sangha organization following closely upon political consolidation of the country. It would seem that the monkhood, if left to its local lay supporters, will organize itself in relatively small local groups based upon seniority and charisma. One is forced, however, to conclude that monks and laymen recognize a need for more order and control than the ideal rules of the *Vinaya* provide. Thus, in actuality, the Theravada Sangha accepts a degree of "suitable" lay control from legitimate authority. The actual degree of control is mild enough so that the ideals and values represented by the monkhood for the society are strongly supported while, at the same time, threats to those symbolic ideals are removed or prevented by the national Sangha organization under government control. This articulation seems to work best when the necessary lay control comes from another highly idealized symbol of government—the King himself. Thus the ideal monkhood allows the ideal king to exert a degree of symbolic control that in actuality benefits both the Sangha and the nation.

27) See Evers (1968) and (1969) for development of the concept of the "loosely structured" system. See also Kirsch (1969) for a rejoinder,

Table 1

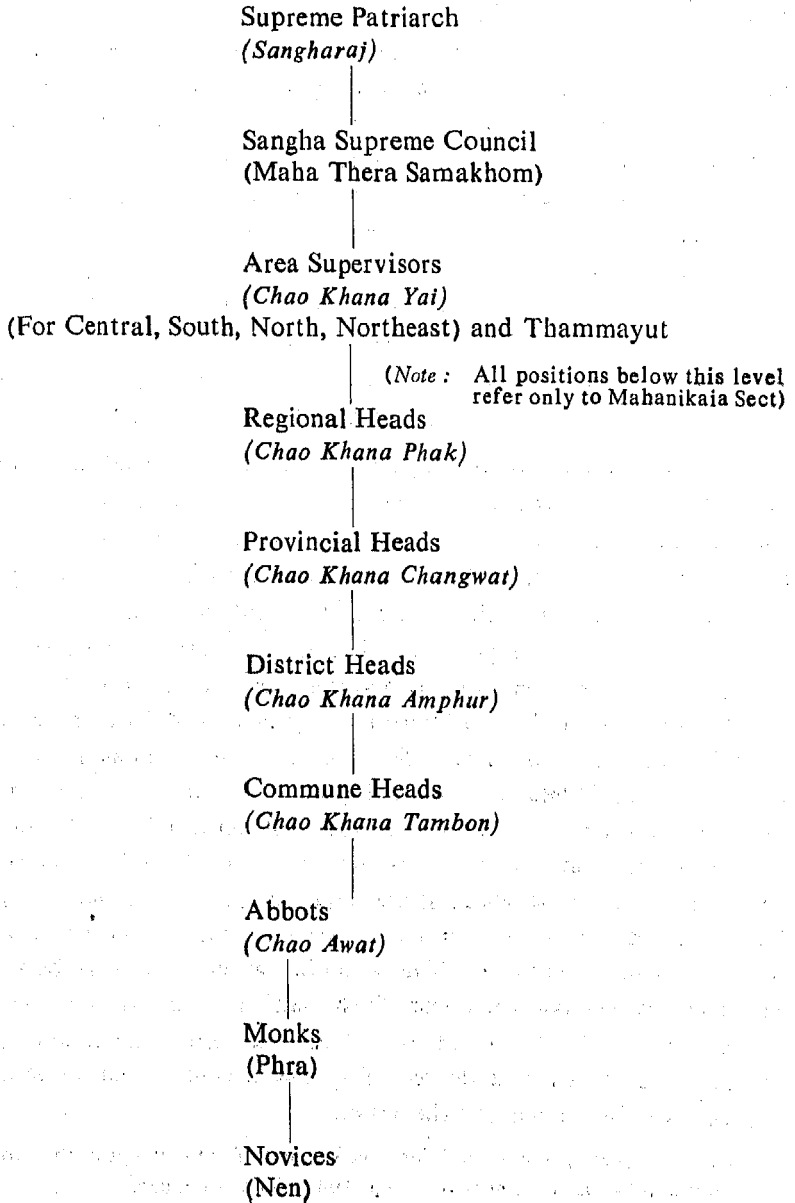
Sangha Hierarchy (Sanghathikan)

Table 2
Simplified Honorary Titles Hierarchy*

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education: Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
1	Somdet Sangharaj	Supreme Patriarch			
2	Somdet	Supreme Council			
3	Raja Khana Deputy Somdet	Some on Supreme Council			Silver Plate Level
4	Raja Khana Deputy Somdet	Some on Supreme Council?			Certificate Level
5	Raja Khana Tham				
6	Raja Khana Thep				
7	Raja Khana Rat				
8	Raja Khana Saman			#9	Meditation
9	Raja Khana Saman			#9	
10	Raja Khana Saman				General Achievement + Meditation
11	Raja Khana Saman				General Achievement

* Based upon data in Sawangboon (c. 1972), an illustrated book on ceremonial fans in the Thai Sangha.

Table 2 (cont.)

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education: Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
12	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Province Head Changwat			
13	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Level I Abbot		
14	Phra Khru Palat of #2	×			(Personal Staff)
15	Phra Parian			# 9	
16	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Deputy Province Head (#12)			
17	Phra Khru Sanyabat	District Head Amphur (Special)			
18	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Level II Abbot		
19	Phra Khru Sanyabat	District Head Amphur (Level I)			
20	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Deputy to Level I Abbot		
21	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Helper of Abbot of Special Level		
22	Phra Khru Palat of #3	×			(Personal Staff)
23	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Level III Abbot		
24	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Deputy to Level II Abbot		

Table 2 (cont.)

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education: Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
25	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Helper of Level I Abbot		Meditation
26	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Helper of Level I Abbot		
27	Phra Khru Sanyabat	District Head Amphur (Level II)			
28	Phra Khru Palat of #4	×			(Personal Staff)
29	Phsa Khru Thananukrom of #1	×			(Personal Assist.)
30	Phra Parian			#8	
31	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Deputy to Level III Abbot		
32	Phra Khru Sanyabat		Helper to Level II Abbot		
33	Phra Khru Palat of #5	×			(Personal Assist.)
34	Phra Khru Thananukrom of #1	×(2nd Level)			(Personal Assist.)
35	Phra Parian			#7	
36	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Deputy District Head (Rong Amphur)			
37	Phra Khru Level II (Tambon)	Commune Head			

Table 2 (cont.)

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education : Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
38	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level I			
39	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level II			Meditation
40	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level II			
41	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Commune Head Level III (Tambon)			
42	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level III			
43	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Deputy to Abbot Level III			
44	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Helper to Abbot Level III			
45	Phra Khru Palat of #6	x			(Personal Staff)
46	Phra Khru Palat of #7				(Personal Staff)
47	Phra Parian			#6	
48	Phra Khru Winai Thorn				(Personal Staff)
49	Phra Khru Thammathorn				(Personal Staff)
50	Phra Parian			#5	

Table 2 (cont.)

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education : Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
51	Phra Khru Khu Suat				(Chanting Partner)
52	Phra Parian			#4	
53	Phra Khru Palat of #8-#11				(Personal Staff)
54	Phra Parian			#3 Sai Saman Bueksa	
55	Phra Parian			#3	
56	Phra Khru Deputy Khu Suat				(See # 51)
57	Phra Khru Sangharak				(Personal Staff)
58	Phra Khru Samuha				(Personal Staff)
59	Phra Khru Baidika				(Personal Staff)
60	Phra Samuha				(Personal Staff)
61	Phra Baidika				(Personal Staff)
62	Phra Phithitham				(Personal Staff)

Table 2 (cont.)

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education: Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
38	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level I			
39	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level II			Meditation
40	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level II			
41	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Commune Head Level III (Tambon)			
42	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Abbot Level III			
43	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Deputy to Abbot Level III			
44	Phra Khru Sanyabat	Helper to Abbot Level III			
45	Phra Khru Palat of #6	×			(Personal Staff)
46	Phra Khru Palat of #7				(Personal Staff)
47	Phra Parian			#6	
48	Phra Khru Winai Thorn				(Personal Staff)
49	Phra Khru Thammathorn				(Personal Staff)
50	Phra Parian			#5	

Table 2 (cont.)

Rank No.	Honorary Titles Simplified	Position in Administrative Hierarchy	Position in Royal Monastery	Pali Education: Parian Level	Other Qualifications or Explanations
51	Phra Khru Khu Suat				(Chanting Partner)
52	Phra Parian			#4	
53	Phra Khru Palat of #8-#11				(Personal Staff)
54	Phra Parian			#3 Sai Saman Bueksa	
55	Phra Parian			#3	
56	Phra Khru Deputy Khu Suat				(See #51)
57	Phra Khru Sangharak				(Personal Staff)
58	Phra Khru Samuha				(Personal Staff)
59	Phra Khru Baidika				(Personal Staff)
60	Phra Samuha				(Personal Staff)
61	Phra Baidika				(Personal Staff)
62	Phra Phithitham				(Personal Staff)

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