

THE SECRET OF THE PAGODAS

(Religion and Politics in South-East Asia)

P.L. Silverwood-Cope

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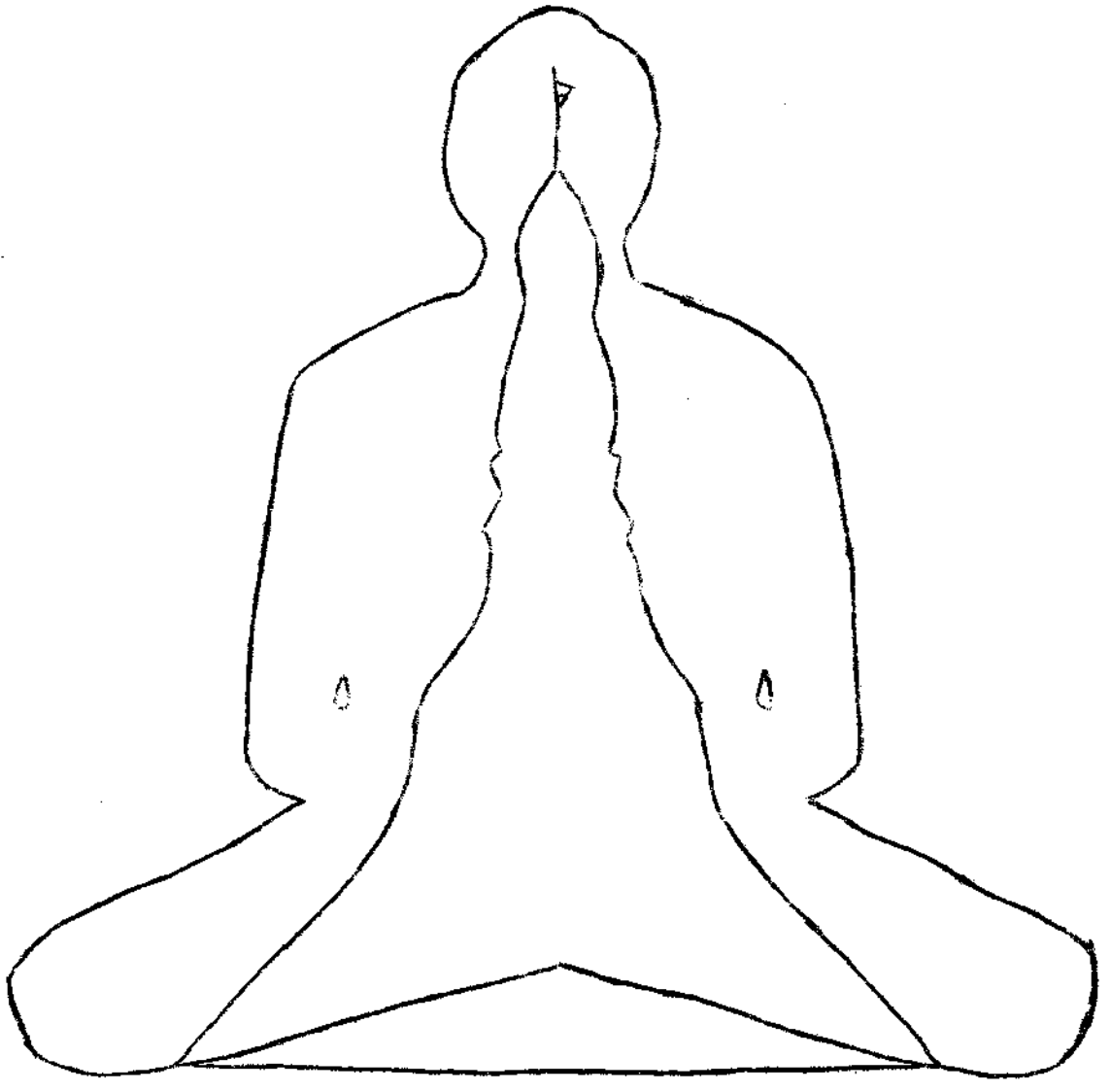
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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that this is crucial for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods and tools used to collect and analyze data. It highlights the need for consistent and reliable data collection processes to support effective decision-making.

3. The third part of the document focuses on the role of technology in data management and analysis. It discusses how modern software solutions can streamline data collection, storage, and reporting, thereby improving efficiency and accuracy.

4. The fourth part of the document addresses the challenges associated with data management, such as data quality, security, and privacy. It provides strategies to mitigate these risks and ensure that data is used responsibly and ethically.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the importance of data governance and the role of leadership in establishing a strong data management framework. It stresses the need for clear policies and procedures to guide data handling across the organization.

6. The sixth part of the document explores the benefits of data-driven decision-making and how it can lead to improved performance and competitive advantage. It provides examples of successful data-driven initiatives and the impact they have had on the organization.

7. The seventh part of the document concludes by summarizing the key findings and recommendations. It emphasizes the ongoing nature of data management and the need for continuous improvement and adaptation to changing business requirements.

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THANKS AND RECOGNITION

In causal and temporal sequence, the following people helped me to compile this study, and I wish to express my thanks to them:

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I dedicate this study to all these people, with deep gratitude.

P. L. Silverwood-Cope
The 3rd of April, 1981.
Brasília

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Foreword

Unlike most anthropological research carried out today, made possible by institutional support in the form of financial assistance and freedom of time and movement, this study has been made possible only by the moral and material support of my friends and my family, and by the difficult measure of using my own savings, resources, and spare time.

Gordon and Sheila Baker encouraged me to learn more about South East Asia and helped me with the use of their considerable library and archive material. Norwood Warwick, with his trusting generosity, made it possible for me to travel. Ana Gita de Oliveira, Martin Wragg and Bill Deeter all helped in different ways, as did my mother, sister and father, M.A.C. Silverwood-Cope and his wife. At Harvard University Mariza Peirano and Professor S.J. Tambiah gave me much useful help and guidance, and my former Director of Studies at Cambridge University, Sir Edmund Leach, was, as always, generous with his advice and encouragement. Special thanks are also due to Dr. Howard Reid of the B.B.C., comrade of other campaigns in the Amazon forest, and Dr. Michael Madha of Cambridge University.

It must also be pointed out that this is an entirely un-original piece of work, based as it is, on the writings of scholars and specialists in the field of Religion and Politics in South-East Asia. Rather than paraphrase the original authors, I have chosen to quote them extensively. Invariably they are more knowledgeable, succinct and precise than I could ever be. My own knowledge of South-East Asia is, at this stage, most superficial, and the main purpose of this study is to organise my reading on the area and to lay out some of the connections which stand out from my particular and peculiar viewpoint.

Nor is my reading on the topic and area by any means adequate. Amongst the several works which I have not been able to obtain, here in Brasil, is Sarkisyanz's "Buddhist Backgrounds to

the Burmese Revolution", 1965, and there are many indications that this would be essential reading for my research.

This mimeographed version of my study is intended only for limited distribution in order to invite criticism, comment and guidance. Before proceeding towards any kind of publication I shall seek permission from the authors and publishers of the several works I have so extensively cited, notably Lama Govinda and Professors Tambiah, Leach, Ling, Manning Nash, Silverstein, Smith and Spiro. Since I have not yet had any opportunity to carry out intensive or prolonged fieldwork in Southeast Asia, I have had to work from these published works.

One of the several purposes behind this study is to pave the way towards institutionally supported research, both in Southeast Asia and in the various Southeast Asia centers in the U.S.A and in Europe.

Finally, I must explicitly prohibit any quotation, copying or translation of any part of this study, without my written permission, due to its entirely preliminary and tentative nature.

Introduction

This work studies some of the relations between the fields of religion and politics in the scenario of South East Asia. More specifically, I propose to study the confrontation between Buddhist philosophy and Marxist ideology in recent times, in Burma. The ethnographic context and recent historical record must be summarised and the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the area sketched out. The recurrent theme in the political history will be struggle between centralised kingdoms or States, and their efforts to either subdue or at least hold in check large ethnic minorities on their outlying borders. Another theme, closely related to the former, is the role of systems of religious belief and practice in furnishing legitimacy for rule by particular elite groups. Divine sanction for the legitimacy of government is achieved through the superimposition of religious, political and economic hierarchies, and the doctrine of Karma and rebirth.

The title, "The Secret of the Pagodas", is neither as misleading or frivolous as it might seem, since we shall see that pagoda-building is an ancient and continuing tradition which creates fundamental ideological premises and symbolises them in material form, whilst also having empiric functions, both political and economic, in the creation and perpetuation of social and ritual hierarchies of relations. The confluence of the sacred, the precious and the powerful is manifest in the gold and jewels which embellish the main pagodas, and their donation denotes an equal accumulation of merit and prestige.

This study began by asking the wrong question - Does Marxism gain ground in traditional Theravada Buddhist countries such as Thailand and Burma? The question sprang from a misconception of Buddhism as it is practised - or not - in these countries, a misconception popular among occidentals who assume that world renunciation and nirvana are the common and unique goals of all Buddhists.

This misconception has already been the subject of scrutiny and criticism in Leach (1968) Tambiah (1968 and 1970) Spiro (1970) and Manning Nash (1965). From Leach and Tambiah we learn that "practical" or popular religious practice is largely concerned with the control of spirits, nat in Burma and phii in Thailand, and the practice of Buddhist rituals, meditation and scriptural studies is limited to a small minority of Monks. Furthermore, Spiro explains how most practising Buddhist laymen, and even a large proportion of the Monks, are not concerned with world renunciation or what Spiro calls nibbanic Buddhism, but with merit making in the hope of a more comfortable reincarnation, or what Spiro calls Kammatic Buddhism. On a brief but inquisitive visit to Burma and Thailand a second set of question arose, questions which apparently have no immediate relation to the first but turn out to be part of the same problem. Why should the people of these lands build so many pagodas? This breaks down into two questions: why should they build anything at all, and why do they build nothing else? Why do their constructions maintain, over hundreds of years, the constant and classic form of the pagoda; the large quadrilateral base which supports above it a sphere which in turn culminates in a point or spire over the center of the whole?

Having confirmed the view put forward by Leach, Tambiah, Spiro and Manning Nash, that the people of these countries are as materialistic and this-world oriented in their religious practice as occidental populations, and that transcendental goals and world renunciation are the pursuit of only a minority of monks, it will be necessary to review the fundamental role of the doctrine of Karma and Rebirth in justifying and maintaining social and material stratification and Inequality. The doctrine of Karma and rebirth explains the existence of social and material differences in well-being, and at the same time offers the possibility of social mobility and ascension. If an individual accumulates sufficient merit, he may be reborn in a higher strata of society; thus he has a interest in maintaining the status quo of the stratified society.

Therefore, if the Buddhist laymen pays little heed to a marxist ideology of revolution leading to social and economic equality, it is not because he is devoted to renouncing this world and all its material appeals, as our western misconception of the Buddhist would suggest, but rather because he has a vested interest in the maintenance of a social and economic elite in which he hopes to be reborn.

Just how fundamentally inter-related are the doctrine of Karma and Rebirth and the stratified and unequal social system becomes apparent in the analysis of the pagodas. I shall demonstrate that pagoda building is not only the supreme manner of accumulating merit, but is also a material construction of a model for both a perfect cosmological system, and a perfect social structure. For the individual member of the ruling elite of the ancient feudal system, the accumulation of merit through building a pagoda required the marshalling of labour and taxes. A broad base of labouring serfs and taxpayers was necessary in order to elevate the pinnacle or spire representing the merit and pre-eminence of the feudal Prince or King. The pyramidal form of the pagoda, a perfect Spire support by a quadrilateral base, is not only a model of feudal society but also a cosmological model with mount Meru as the central axis of the universe, bounded by the concentric circles of oceans and continents.

Finally, I shall also show that the form of the pagoda also represents a symbolic model of the individual's spiritual development towards the ultimate goal of nirvana, through world renunciation, meditation and the successive acquisition of mindfulness (satipassana), insight (vipassana) and wisdom (nama).

The study begins with a short section dealing with the ancient history of Pagodas, Palaces and Kingdoms, followed by a longer section in which the recent political and religious events, principally in Burma, are resumed. Religion and politics in South East Asia is a topic which is dominated by the conflict between the centralised government of Kingdoms or modern States and the

large ethnic minorities, usually hill tribes, and this conflict has been expressed in issues of imperialism and colonialism challenged by nationalism, and by rebellion and separatism of the ethnic minorities. In the post colonial period the same conflict continues, but the main issues involve the confrontation between Buddhism and Communism.

A third long section deals with the Pagodas, based on the examples of a village Pagoda studied by Manning Nash in Upper Burma, and my own observations and We Pin's book on the great Shwedagon Pagoda at Rangoon, as well a few days on a hired bicycle among the extraordinary concentration of Pagodas in the valley of Pagan. I shall show that the economic, social and political aspects of the Pagodas, as well the analysis of their symbolism in myth and ritual, are important keys to understanding the more general aspects of religion and politics in South-East Asia.

Finally, a short conclusion will compare the issues of religion and politics in several different countries; Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, as well as brief references to India, Tibet and China.

PART ONE

Pagodas, Palaces and Kingdoms

Throughout SouthEast Asia the pagodas are a constant presence, in every hamlet, village or town, dominating the main squares and public places of the cities, the abandoned ancient capitols of Pagan, Sagaing, Ava, Amarapura in Burma, Ayutthya and Sukothai in Thailand, Angkor in Kampuchea, Borobudur and Negri Sembilan in Indonesia and Bodh Ghaya in India. - Pagodas, cetis, zedis, stupas - the terms change as do the forms and styles with different places and times but always there remain constant the structural principles of a slender spire rising from a sphere which in turn is supported on a broad base, square or octagonal in shape. The two principles of an apex and a centre are combined and find their perfect expression over and over, raised to the sky until at the tip of the spire they vanish into infinity.

The same principles of apex and centre are present in the greetings and reverences which the peoples of these places exchange several times a day, the hands are joined at the fingertips, in front of the face or forehead and the body is inclined in a bow beneath the "pagoda" of the hands, which is offered to the person or object of reverence.

In some places the pagoda is an ancient and eroded ruin, standing silent and serene in the overgrown jungle near a village, or surrounded by fields where only an occasional ox cart and a few peasants pass. And there are pagodas as large and populous as cities, such as the Great Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon which for two and a half thousand years has been the home of religious learning and devotion, the centre which today includes also several religious schools, prayer halls, shrines to saints and spirits, shops selling books, souvenirs and all kinds of crafts as well as refreshments. Rebuilt time and time again after earthquakes and pillage by first Portuguese and later British colonial armies, the

Shwedagon pagoda houses the sacred Hair Relics of the Buddha. Today the Pagoda concentrates a great wealth of gold and jewels contributed by the devotees; the entire lower portion is covered with gold leaf, and above the mouldings the lotus petals, and the banana bud are covered in gold plates. Above these the hti is not only plated in gold but set with 1100 diamonds, totaling 278 carats, and 1383 other precious stones, and above this is the diamond orb - a hollow golden sphere studded with no less than 4351 diamonds weighing 1800 carats in all. The very top of the orb is tipped with a single 76 carat diamond. (Wheeler 1979:64)

The principles of hierarchy and centrality characterise not only the generalised form of the pagoda, but are also evident in the historical record of the royal capitols which were the religious and political centres of South East Asia. Tambiah (1976 Ch.7 "The Galactic Polity") shows how both principles, centrality and hierarchy, are the link between the cosmological structure and the political structure

"... It is widely known that the Buddhist and Hindu polities of SouthEast Asia were modeled on cosmological notions and on the basis of a parallelism between the supra human macrocosmos and the human microcosmos. The Kingdom was a miniature representation of the cosmos, with the palace at the center being iconic of Mount Meru, the pillar of the universe, and the king, his princes, and ruling chiefs representing the hierarchy .. in heaven."
(p.109)

Tambiah traces the application of various mandala formulas in the architectural layout of several temples and palaces in the region. (*) He shows the same pattern at work in the political and administrative organisation of the Kingdoms.

"Nevertheless, I wish to dwell briefly on a more general implication of the spatial representation of the polity in geometrical relations, which are at the same time overladen with political, territorial and cosmological values. These

(*) According to common Indo-Tibetan tradition, mandala is composed of two elements - a core (manda) and a container or enclosing element (la). Tambiah, 1976.

representations are shared both by Thai and Burmese (and other) traditional polities and imply a close linkage between political authority and Buddhist place of worship, as, for example, in modern Thailand, between the lak muang (the "pillar" of the town) of the metropolis and provincial capitals, and the parallel series of wat centers and seats.

In other words, whether organized as 5, 9, 17, 33, or larger unit systems, the mandala schemes mirrored a cosmos that was deployed first and foremost topographically. And since this topography represented a cosmic harmony, there was good reason to pattern the state after it. The pattern conjoins a certain kind of physical cum spatial relationship with a distinctive conception of social and political relations among humans; moreover, these relations inform the attributions to the pantheon of deities and demons. The topographical grid is closely linked to a temporal scheme as well, when, for instance, seasonal cosmic rites are orchestrated so that a rite is first performed at the capital by the king or his delegate, to be followed in time by the provincial rulers, and then by their lesser district heads, and so on - a scheme of activation "from the center to the periphery in successive waves". (p. 110)

As Tambiah goes on to explain, these kingdoms were defined more by the power of their center, rather than by strongly defined or closely controlled borders.

"Not only in Java but also elsewhere in Thailand, Burma, and so on, it was commonly the case that the names of Kingdoms were those of capital cities (e.g., Sukhodaya, Ayutthaya, Pagan, Pegu, Madjapahat, Singhasari). This concept of territory as a variable sphere of influence that diminishes as royal power radiates from a center is integral to the characterization of the traditional polity as a mandala composed of concentric circles, usually three in number.

The concentric-circle system, representing the center-periphery relations, was ordered thus: In the center was the King's capital and the region of its direct control, which was surrounded by a circle of provinces ruled by princes or governors appointed by the king, and these again were surrounded by more or less independent "tributary" polities. But note that the capital itself was ordered as a mandala, the palace at the center surrounded by three circles of earthen ramparts, with four gateways at the cardinal points. This we have already described as the Sukhodaya scheme. Let us now explore how the layout of the capital was replicated in the arrangement of the kingdom.

Our first interest is in the constitution of the central or capital region and its provinces, and their mutual

From Tambiah, 1976. p. 104-107

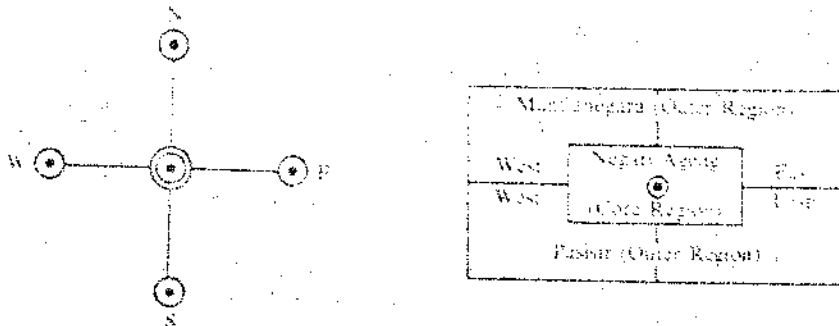


Figure 7.1. (a) The mantjapat. (b) The Mataram state: a five-unit system through successive bipartitions. Source: After Schneke.

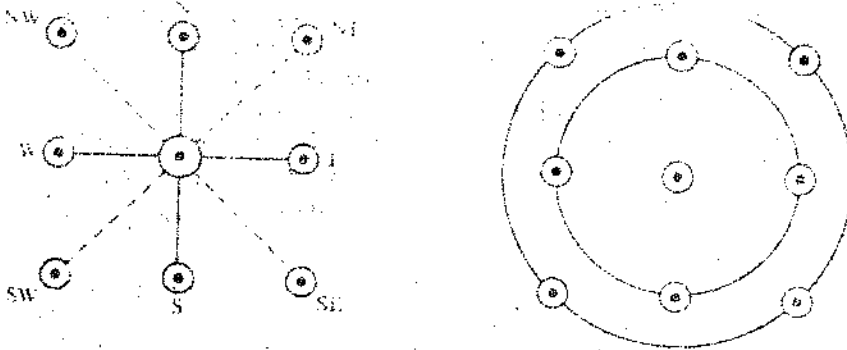


Figure 7.2. (a) Nine-unit system: radial pattern. (b) The King's council: two concentric circles.

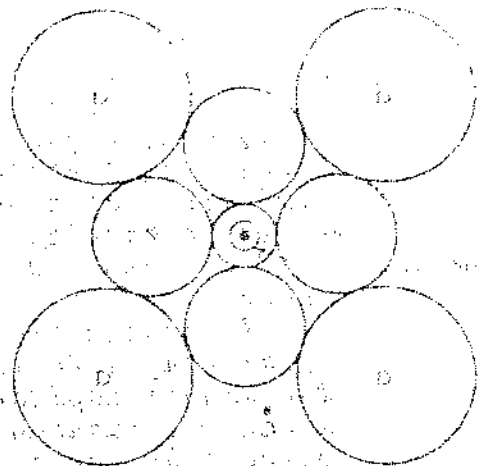
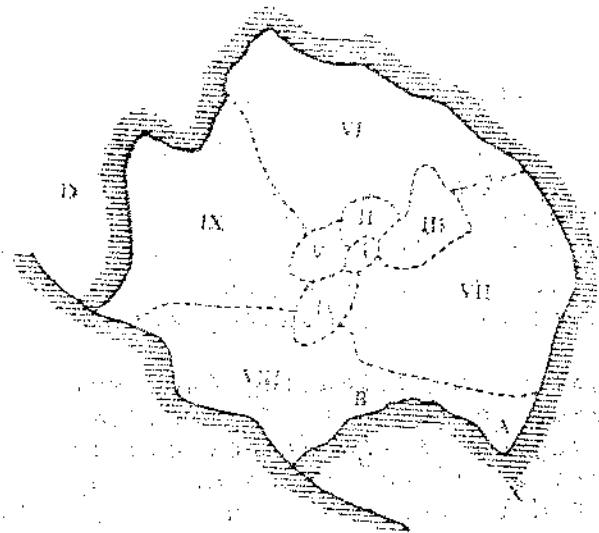


Figure 7.3. (a) Negri Sembilan. Source: Josselin de Jong (1952).

Figure 7.3. (b) Schematic design of Negri Sembilan polity as a nine-unit system. D = District, s = Serambi (verandah).

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|--------------------|----------------|
| I = Sri Menanti | A = Gementjeh |
| II = Ulu Muar | B = Tampin |
| III = Djempol | C = Nanning |
| IV = Gunung Pasing | D = Klang |
| V = Teratji | E = Segamat |
| VI = Djelebu | X = Mt. Ledang |
| VII = Djohol | |
| VIII = Rembau | |
| IX = Sungai-Udjong | |

From Tambiah, 1976. p. 104-107

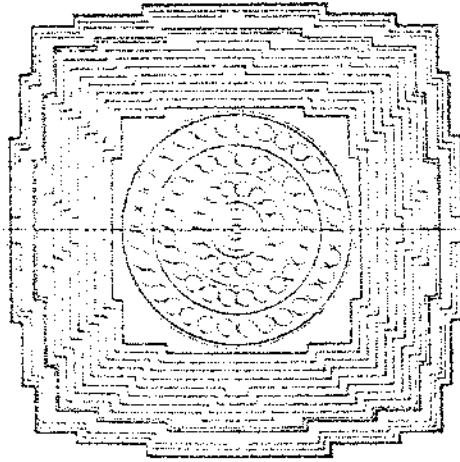


Figure 7.4 (b) Plan of Borobudur. Source: Stewart (1970).

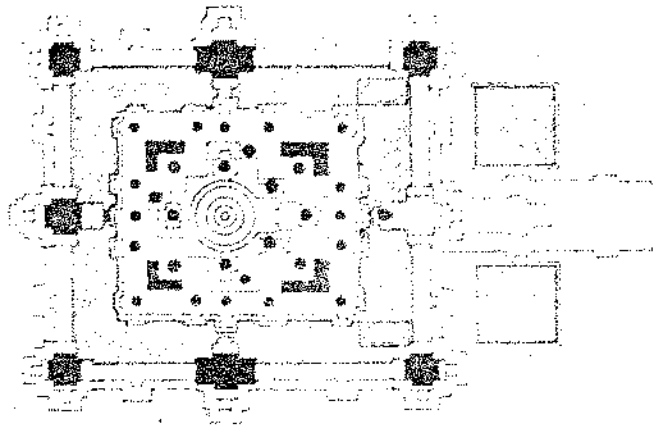


Figure 7.4 (b) Plan of the temple at Bayon. Source: Stewart (1970).

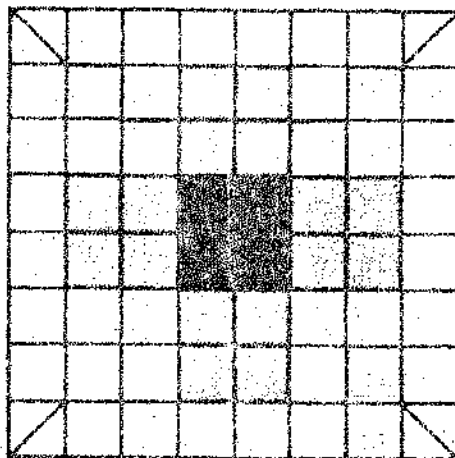


Figure 7.4. (c) The mandala of 64 divisions. Source: Stewart (1970).

relations. If we keep in mind the expanding and shrinking character of the political constellations under scrutiny, a central, perhaps the central, feature to be grasped is that although the constituent political units differ in size, nevertheless each lesser unit is a reproduction and imitation of the larger. Thus we have before us a galactic picture of a central planet surrounded by differentiated satellites, which are more or less "autonomous" entities held in orbit and within the sphere of influence of the center. Now if we introduce at the margin other similar competing central principalities and their satellites, we shall be able to appreciate the logic of a system that is a hierarchy of central points continually subject to the dynamics of pulsation and changing spheres of influence".

Tambiah 1976. p.112

Buddhists at War and Pillage

The formal Mandala, a center or core, enclosed by a circle, which Tambiah has shown to be present in the architectural design of Palaces, Temples and Kingdoms, becomes a living and pulsating system when transposed to the historical record of the political struggles and aspirations of the ancient kings of South east Asia. In those times, and perhaps today also, Buddhist moral precepts taught by the Buddha in the Dhamma, and codified by the vinaya, or disciplinary rules for the monkhood, were not always fulfilled in action. But this chasm between morals and ideals on the one hand, and actual behaviour and motivations on the other, seems to be one of the basic principles of the human condition, or, as the Buddhist would put it, this is the nature of samsara.

Trevor Ling (1979:138) summarises the ancient history of relations between neighbouring Buddhist Kingdoms as follows.

"Buddhist kings in Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos (to name no others) had throughout the history of these nations been much concerned with their armed forces not only as instruments of national defence, but also for conquest and expansion. From the Burmese King Anawrahita's campaign of expansion in Mon territory in the eleventh century onwards, the list of battle honours gained by the armies of the many Buddhist Kingdoms is one which would not disgrace such great shrines of military glory as Canterbury Cathedral or Westminster Abbey. As occasion demanded, and sometimes when it did not, Burmese fought Mons, and Pyus, and Thais, and Laos. Similarly the Thais fought the Laos, and the Malays, and the Khmers and the

Burmese. The story is a long one, with some more notable moments, such as the unscrupulous massacre carried out by the Burmese at Pegu, and their savage and complete destruction and burning of the beautiful Thai capital city of Ayudhaya in 1767. The Thais for their part had on various occasions attempted to conquer large parts of eastern and southern Burma, and before that had expanded their Kingdom far southwards from Sukhodaya into the Malayan peninsula. The Burmese Alaungpaya dynasty had cherished dreams of empire stretching far beyond the western borders of Burma towards India, and in the eighteenth century their armies occupied not only the southern parts of Bengal and Manipur, but advanced far into Assam and occupied the Brahmaputra valley. It was, from the Burmese point of view, unfortunate that this very promising empire building campaign of the late eighteenth century brought them into conflict with what was at that time another large and, as it turned out, superior empire-building nation, namely Britain.

These were not wars of religion. More often than not the armed forces of Buddhist kings in Indochina were fighting those of other Buddhist Kings; but occasionally, when necessary, they would fight Hindus, Muslims, or Christians. There was no religious partiality about them. They would fight man of any religion or non, if opportunity or the occasion demanded it".

It would seem then that the Buddhist principle of ahimsa, non-violence and not harming any being whether in thought, word or action, was not often followed.

Nor can the renunciation of worldly goods and cravings of the senses, moral principles which lie at the foundations of the Buddhist way of life, have guided these ancient Buddhist Kings. For as Tambiah points out:

"The attraction of booty was an essential ingredient of warfare: this was the primary means of rewarding the army, the king and other participating generals and rulers getting their share of the most valuable prizes. In this context one must face the brute fact that although attacker and attacked were members of Buddhist polities, they mercilessly and rapaciously demolished each other's temples (and palaces) and took away famous Buddha images and relics together with jewels and other treasures. (The rubble to which the Burmese reduced Ayutthaya in 1767 was, as we have remarked before, a furious act of demolition.) But such an aggressive orientation was an integral aspect of the ideology that linked kingship and Buddhism with

the destinies and histories of particular "peoples", that is, it represented the Buddhist polity in its particularized and localized expression." (Tambiah 1976:122)

In recent times these historical trends which we have seen commented above by Tambiah and Ling appear to continue. Today, relations between the neighbouring Buddhist states of Burma and Thailand are still dominated by differences of political ideology and practice, and in the case of Thailand and its neighbours, Cambodia and Laos. Cambodia has been invaded and taken over by the Communist Vietnamese, and during 1980 Thailand suffered brief but savage invasions by Vietnamese troops deployed in Cambodia, as well as sporadic but fierce mortar and rocket attacks. And in the case of the recent war between the neighbouring Communist countries of China and Vietnam, we see once again the ancient political principle at work, that yesterdays allies are the enemies of tomorrow, and vice versa, yesterdays enemies are tomorrow's allies.

On a broader scale this has been the case of the alignments between the U.S.A, China and Japan. Before the second world war, relations between the U.S.A. and China were remarkably peaceful and mutually profitable. The Foreign Service of the American State Department had a large and extremely talented body of diplomats who lived for very long periods in China, and often became experts in Chinese politics, language and culture. American Missionaries were also active in China. At the outbreak of the Sino Japanese war, the Americans provided massive aid to the Chinese in the form of armaments and supplies, and Claire Chennault led a group of American volunteer pilots - or mercenaries, -depending on one's point of view- to carry out aerial warfare against the invading Japanese. Stillwell was given command of large Chinese ground forces, and had the confidence of Chiang Kai Shek. After World War Two, the old "China Hands" of the American service were never restored or replaced, leaving a vacuum of expertise on China which was both a result of, and responsible for (at some levels), the complete collapse of Sino-American relations during the Cold War. It was not until Nixon's visit and the "historic" Ping-Pong match,

that America resumed diplomatic relations with Mainland China, and the absence of China experts in the State Department was sorely felt. Today Chinese Studies Centers are sprouting and flourishing all over the U.S.A. At the same time, the Japanese, defeated in the Pacific theatre of the Second World war only after some of the fiercest actions in the military History of both countries and finally brought to conclusion by use of the Atomic Bomb, soon became the staunchest allies and trading partners of the Americans in the post-war period.

Another historical trend, of the constant struggle between the centralised government, kingdoms and States, on the one hand, and the hill tribes and other large ethnic minorities, usually with distinct languages and cultures, on the other, can also be seen to continue today. Several modern nations in South East Asia continue to live in conflict with their peripheral hill tribes and ethnic minorities regardless of the dominant ideology of the centralised government. Thus we see that socialist Burma, monarchist Thailand, and Communist Vietnam and Cambodia have not quelled the separatist tendencies of their hill tribes and ethnic minorities, even if these conflicts have been reformulated in the modern ideological idioms of socialism versus communism (Burma), monarchism versus communism (Thailand) and factional divergences within communism (Cambodia).

I shall take up this latter theme again in more detail in the section "Ethnic Rebels Today", which closes Part Two of this study.

PART TWOKingdoms and Colonies

To better understand the present political and religious behaviour in Thailand and Burma, it is necessary to review, even if only briefly, the recent history.

Many characteristics are shared in common: lowland rice growing populations lived in feudalities and kingdoms, waxing and waning in the extension and duration of their control over their neighbours, hill tribes and various different ethnic groups. In each case, reigning kings produced many offspring by their several wives, thus ensuring a large measure of fierce competition for the thrones and for control of provinces. Royal cities were built as the influence of their kings spread and grew; sooner or later, whether from attack and invasion by a neighbouring king, or through internal collapse of authority between competing princes at the death of the king, the royal city was sacked or declined to a ruin, whilst a new dynasty arose at a new royal center.

Throughout the area trade with India and Ceylon brought religious and cultural influences for many centuries, resulting in the adoption of the Buddhist religion by the royalty and its dissemination down through the administrative aristocracy as the divine legitimation of power. For the present study, the most significant differences between Burma and Thailand proceed from the fact that whilst Burma became a colony of the British in India in the mid-nineteenth century, Thailand maintained its independent sovereignty despite the rapacious contest for colonisation in the area by the French, Dutch, Portugese, British and Americans as well as by the Chinese and Japanese.

We shall see how the colonial interference in Burma stripped the royalty of power, favoured the peripheral hill tribes, marginalised the Buddhist Sangha and, with the four years of Japanese occupation, created all the conditions for the emergence of a strong nationalist movement which, for its anti-imperialist

functions, readily acquired a socialist orientation.

Burma (*)

"Burma's political history between the Pagan dynasty (1044-1287) and the British conquest (1824-1886) was characterised by endless struggles among at least four of the indigenous groups inhabiting the area of modern Burma and between them and their outside neighbours. The predominant groups in the internal struggle were the Burmans, whose home was in the Irawaddy Valley, the Mons or Talaings, who lived in the South, the Shans from the North, Central and Eastern parts of the hills surrounding the Irawaddy Valley, and the Arakanese, whose home was the isolated Western area that bears that name". (Silverstein 1977:4)

The first of the three periods of unification, prior to British conquest, lasted for two centuries with the rule of the Burmese dynasty at Pagan, and saw the adoption of Theravada Buddhism. The Mongol armies of Kublai Khan, with the help of the Shans, destroyed the Pagan Dynasty in 1287, and for the next two hundred years the Shans were dominant, with their royal seat at Ava. A new Burmese dynasty arose in Toungoo and from 1486 to 1752 Burma was Unified, the Shans were subdued and wars were waged against the Kingdom of Siam in the south.

Between 1752 and 1886 the Burmese Konbaung dynasty conquered the Mons and the Arakanese, and waged wars against Siam, Manipur and Assam. With their royal seat at Pagan, and also at Mandalay, they repelled four invasions from China. The Burmese forays into the peripheries of British India soon provoked retaliation. In a climate of increasing colonial competition between European nations in Southeast Asia, the British waged three separate campaigns against the Burmese, culminating in the annexation of Burma in 1886.

(*) This entire section is taken from Silverstein 1977, Smith 1972 Leach 1952 and others.

The effects of British colonial rule in Burma were far reaching and irreversible. From a subsistence agriculture to the world's greatest rice exporter, prior to WWII; the introduction of western schooling and also concepts of government and politics; the coming of several million Indian labourers and merchants; changes in land tenure systems and the introduction of money - all these factors came into play together with those already mentioned such as the emasculation of the hereditary royalty, with their divine claim to political legitimacy, and the disconnection of the Buddhist sangha as the holy sanction of ruling authority.

During the twentieth century, between the world wars, political awakening among Burmans grew to open demands for self rule. In 1921 the India Act was applied to Burma, and an assembly elected. The Colonial governor continued to appoint the more important ministeries, such as defence, foreign affairs and frontier areas.

At the same time British policy and practice had served to deepen the already existing ethnic and cultural divisions within Burma. The Indigenous minorities, such as the Shans and the hill tribes (Chin, Kachin, Karen etc.) who occupy the borders of Burma and almost half of its total area, were favoured by a separate and somewhat paternalistic policy which also recruited them into the colonial army, whilst excluding Burmans. Also, the Indians and some Chinese were readily admitted to many urban occupations and given special seats in the representative assembly. With Buddhism in decline, since its tie with ruling authority was suspended, Hindu and Moslem religions were allowed to take root in the primate city, whilst in the distant hills some tribes were encouraged to continue their animist beliefs and headhunting practices whilst others were converted, with varying degrees of success, by competing catholic and protestant missionaries.

With the defeat of the British in Burma by the invading Japanese, and the withdrawal of British forces to India, the Burmese lowlanders once again gained political ground, as the

administrators of the government of the occupying Japanese Army. The Japanese never established control of the hill tribes and the distant peripheries of the country where ethnic groups such as the Chins and Kachins, of their own accord or supplied and coordinated by the British, continued to fight.

At the outset of Japanese occupation, the Burmese were sympathetic to the Japanese as their liberators from colonial rule. Although the British defeat was due to British incompetence and lack of preparation, it is also true that at first the Burmese were eager to collaborate with the Japanese. Before the war, the Japanese had secretly recruited and trained a cadre of thirty Burmese, among them Aung San, which now played the part of command structure of the Burmese Independence Army, which followed the Japanese Army invading from the South. In 1943 Japan allowed Burma to proclaim independence and a government was formed under the former prime minister Dr. Ba Maw.

But, at the same time, Japanese excesses and brutality, together with the declining Eastern Co-Prosperity Sphere and the inevitable comeback of Allied forces, there began an anti-Japanese resistance movement - the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), open to all the peoples of Burma, regardless of ethnic group or religious creed.

When in the spring of 1945 the Allied Forces - British, Indian, American and Chinese drove the Japanese out of lower Burma and into Siam, the nominally independent government went with them. However, Aung San, former trainee and collaborator of the Japanese, in March of 1945 when the tide of events was quite clear, revolted against the Japanese with his army, and declared support for the Allies.

Rebel Monks and Nationalism

It is apparent that from the very earliest times the distribution of power, or the legitimacy of the dominant royal elite, has been based as much on divine sanction as on tradition

and physical might. With the introduction of Theravada Buddhism into Burma, social structures based on differentiation and hierarchy were justified and also compensated for by the Doctrine of Karma.

The period of British colonial rule brought a separation of roles between Buddhist Sangha and Burmese State, the Buddhist sangha fell into decline and the royal family was exiled. The British colonial regime was based on military conquest, its lack of legitimacy clearly revealed by the repeated rebellions of the Burmese, led by such monks as U Ottama and later Saya San, who in 1930 was even coronated in a traditional ceremony, and whose rebel forces were armed with amulets, charms and tatoos of the galon (or garuda) bird, and were allied with the nat spirits. Even though the tatoos did not make the rebels invulnerable to British bullets, the rebellion spread, carried by itinerant monks, and was only suppressed after operations lasting eighteen months by the colonial army.

Already organisations such as the Young Mens Buddhist Association (YMBA) assumed political roles, and later the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA), General Council of Sangha Sametggi (GCSS), and Young Monks Association, were political parties in which monks took leading roles, and whose activities were increasingly nationalistic and anti-colonial.

As the anti-colonial aspect of the national movements became more urgent, there began to emerge a second secular front which sprang from the amalgamation of two student groups, and was called Dobama Asiayone (We Burmans Society) and is referred to by Smith (1965) as the Thakin movement. In the late 1930's several marxists and communists joined the Thakin movement, but its ideology continued to be heterogeneous and its cohesion forged by the fight for independence from colonial rule.

This secular nationalist movement of pre-war days, the Thakin movement, grew in following whilst the leadership and authority of the Sangha declined as a result of sectarian fissions and the absence of royal or State control of monastic activities.

Former members of the Thakin movement became, in 1943, supporters of the anti-Japanese resistance movement, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL).

Neither in its antecedents in the Thakin movement, nor in the ideological context in which it arose, did religious matters concern the AFPFL, but with the end of the war and Independence from British colonial rule in 1948, the AFPFL became Burma's dominant political party, and fission over religious and ideological matters soon followed.

The AFPFL, formed in a unifying climate of resistance to the Japanese, was a loosely knit coalition including, among other groups, the Socialist Party. Within six months the communists had broken away, and various ethnic groups and leftist rebels continued insurrections throughout 1949. By the end of 1950 the AFPFL was shaken by a deep ideological and organisational split in the Socialist Party, one of its constituent units. The Marxist extreme of the Socialist Party broke away to form the Burma Workers and Peasants Party (BWPP). U Ba Swe, leader of the remaining right wing element of the Socialist Party and proponent of a common ideological ground between Buddhism and Marxism, condemned the BWPP, and U Nu, leader of the AFPFL, did the same. The AFPFL took formal action, expelling all members of the BWPP from its ranks.

Independence: Buddhism and/or Marxism

We have seen that during the colonial period the traditional basis for legitimacy of political leadership, based on divine sanction, was interrupted by a foreign regime established by conquest and maintained by the threat and application of physical force.

After a little over two generations of colonial intervention, the independent government of Burma began by seeking to establish its legitimate right to authority whilst at the same time adhering to the Marxist principles acquired in the long

struggle against imperialism. In this way the government sought to create support from the traditional Buddhists, and the rural population, whilst continuing to maintain its political basis amongst the various components of the secular nationalist movement including the socialists, marxists and communists as well as other tendencies among the urban intellectualised population.

During the three years following independence in 1948, both Premier U Nu and U Ba Swe, secretary of the Socialist Party and later minister of defense and mines, made several public statements which sought to demonstrate the compatibility, or even parity, between Buddhist principles and Marxist ideology.

"Marxism is the guide to action in our revolutionary movement, in our establishment of a Socialist Burmese State for workers and peasants. Our revolution can only be achieved with Marxism as a guiding principle". U Ba Swe, The Burmese Revolution. 1952

*"Marxist philosophy rejects the theory of creation; but it does not oppose religion. In point of fact, Marxist theory is not antagonistic to Buddhist philosophy. The two are, frankly speaking, not merely similar. In fact they are the same in concept. But if we want to have the two distinguished one from the other, we can safely assume that Marxist theory occupies the lower plane, while Buddhist philosophy occupies the higher. Marxist theory deals with mundane affairs and seeks to satisfy material needs in life. Buddhist philosophy, however, deals with the solution of spiritual matters with a view to seek spiritual satisfaction in life and liberation from this mundane world". U Ba Swe. *ibid*.*

In the late 1930's U Nu had written an article "I am a marxist" in which, in the form of a fictional dialogue with a friend he stated that communism addressed itself to the problem of man's basic material needs which had to be met before he could devote himself to the practice of religion.

These statements of ideology by the leaders of the government were out of step with political events. As we have seen, during these three years following Independence, the communist and rebel ethnic groups were already eroding the cohesion of the

eclectic AFPFL coalition, which was finally severely shaken by the expulsion of the pro-communist BWPP.

The reassertion of traditional forms of legitimacy for government, the support and sanction of the Buddhist Sangha, began with U Nu's announcement of convening the Sixth Great Buddhist Council, in 1951. A vast artificial cave was constructed near the Kaba Aye World Peace Pagoda, Rangoon, and here two and a half thousand monks from all Theravada Buddhist countries - Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Ceylon - as well as Burma - recited and confirmed the entire Pali Canon. This task took two years, and in 1956 the closing ceremonies, coinciding with the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's death, were marked by the release of two thousand prisoners from the jails, the mass initiation of 2,500 youths into the monkhood, birds and animals intended for slaughter freed, religious plays were staged, pagodas were repaired and gilded. Even the Burma Air Force dropped leaflets proclaiming the success of the council and the Buddhist celebrations.

This Sixth Great Buddhist Council was the outstanding event of a more general Buddhist revival which took place throughout U Nu's premiership.

Resurrecting a tradition that had fallen with King Thibaw in 1885, the Burmese government had taken up the role of promoter of the Buddhist faith. Apart from restoring ancient pagodas and monasteries, the Buddha Sasana Council also published Burmese translations of the Buddhist scriptures, and Buddhist missionary monks began intensive programs amongst several of Burma's ethnic groups, such as the Chins, Kachins, Nagas, Karens, Shans and other people. By 1959 a total of 131,322 converts were claimed in these areas.

The role of the personality of U Nu himself is an important element in these events; as a devout and disciplined Buddhist, well versed in the scriptures, he carried out a number of public acts and gestures of obvious Buddhist merit, whilst also venerating and propitiating the nat spirits. U Nu gave public

lectures on Buddhism, both in Burma and abroad; he took a public vow of celibacy; on several occasions he personally released birds and other animals.

This pre-eminent role of Premier U Nu as defender and restorer of the Buddhist faith was extended to all levels of government leadership and administration. As Smith (1965) has pointed out,

"...government officials assumed an almost indispensable role in the opening ceremonies of practically all religious festivals. On such occasions high officials usually deliver red little homilies on morality or the significance of the festival, narrated Buddhist legends, and urged the people to greater devotion and merit making. Participation in religious ceremonies by the president, prime minister, chief justice and others in their official capacity were frequent and sometimes ostentatious, always in the form of traditional practices - praying at pagodas, offering alms food or robes to monks, planting sacred Bo saplings, pouring scented water on Bo trees, and hoisting ornamental spires into place atop pagodas". (p. 166)

As the promotion of Buddhism by the State grew, so the reconciliation of Buddhism with Marxist doctrine of the first days of Independence deteriorated and in 1958 U Nu made a speech at the third all Burma AFPFL congress in which he stated:

"It is entirely impossible to take the attitude that both Marxism and religion are in the right, and that therefore both can be accepted".

"When we were younger, we had not studied Marxism in detail and in all its aspects. Neither did we know Buddhism in detail or with any exactness. At the same time, more or less on hearsay and cursory reading, we impetuously and loudly claimed that Marxism was the same as Buddhism. We are still very remorseful for having made at one time such ill-considered and unfounded claims".

"As the AFPFL does not believe that Marxism is a doctrine that is infallible and is true without reservation, the AFPFL approves of only some parts of the economic doctrine of Marxism, and rejects Marxism as a guiding philosophy or as the ideology of the AFPFL".

The economic doctrine of Marxism which remained acceptable was that "Commodities should not be produced for profit making, but

for the consumption and use of the people!

In 1959 U Nu stated that "the reason why an average Buddhist concerns himself not with the final release from samsara (endless rebirths) but with the acquisition of property is to be found in the economic system that prevails in the world".

Smith (1965:133) summarises his discourse to the effect that "a truly socialist state, however, would promote economic equality, discourage the acquisitive instinct in man and provide sufficient leisure so that virtually everyone in the entire society could devote time to meditation in the quest for nibbana. Socialism was thus regarded as the means for the attainment of religious goals."

Without doubt, the Cold War dominating international relations throughout the decade of the fifties, and the proximity of the USSR and China to Burma's borders, created a climate in which Socialism, rather than Marxism, was better able to maintain Burma's non-aligned position in the world.

In 1958 personal differences and rivalries, rather than any major differences in policy, led to a split among the leaders of the AFPFL. Both of the ensuing factions continued to use the old coalition's name, one formed round the leadership of U Nu calling itself the Clean AFPFL and the other the stable AFPFL, formed round the leadership of Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein. In the elections of 1958 U Nu's Clean AFPFL won with the support of the National Unity Front (NUF) and the several ethnic minorities. However this winning coalition was far from cohesive, and U Nu, fearing a vote of no confidence in the forthcoming budget session, asked General Ne Win to take over with a caretaker military government to restore order in preparation for further elections in 1959.

During General Ne Win's caretaker government, his Psychological Warfare Department was responsible for the publication and dissemination of a document called Dhammataraya ("Buddhism

in Danger"), in an effort to mobilise public opinion against the danger of the communist insurrections. This document pointed out the dangers to Buddhism from the Burmese Marxists and their communist ideology. It was based on notes taken during a communist indoctrination class, which had fallen into government hands by infiltration or seizure, and included statements such as "Buddhism is opium of the worst kind", and "...the Buddhas teachings, beginning and end, are dead wrong. The ideology of deleverance from suffering by escaping to nibbana is among all fantasies the most extravagant". In addition to this propoganda war, mass rallies of monks and laymen were held at which public resolutions were made to defend the Buddhist faith from the attacks of the communists. The Young Monks Association, supportive of General Ne Win's campaign, published a pamphlet in 1959 in which they stated

"The communists believe that in this world, only the physical form (matter considered as an object of the senses) is the main and basic factor; and the idea of spirit and mental powers involved only due to the presence of form or matter. Therefore, the spirit is of minor consideration. Since they believe that human beings are only made up of physical form or matter, they believe that in death the body decays and that is the end for them all. Hence their belief in one existence only, they do not believe in the transmigration of the soul or in reincarnation".

In using the threat to Buddhism as ideological tool to rally support against the threat from the communists, General Ne Win's Psychological Warfare Department inadvertently created support for U Nu's Clean AFPFL which had already made the promotion of Buddhism as state religion one of its dominant policy features. At the time General Ne Win's government was more simpathetic to the Ba Swe Stable AFPFL faction, and as later events of Ne Win's military rule of the late sixties and seventies show, the promotion of Buddhism as state religion was quite contrary to his political and ideological objectives.

U Nu, Religious revival and Buddhism as the State Religion.

In the elections of February. U Nu's Clean AFPFL won a clear victory and changed its name to the Union Party. The dominant features of his government's policy were to result in fundamental contradictions which would later lead to its downfall.

Above all, U Nu's promotion of Buddhism as State Religion secured the support of the Buddhist Sangha and the Buddhist Sangha conferred legitimacy, in the tradition of the pre-colonial monarchs, to his government. But at the same time U Nu also made public and official propitiations of nat spirits, which caused criticism from many of the more orthodox monks, and also was met by ridicule from the secular groups in the political arena.

Smith writes,

"The governmental promotion of Buddhism in Burma, like U Nu's personal practice of religion, made practically no distinctions. If the study of the Pali scriptures was encouraged, so was the veneration of relics. If emphasis was placed on the observance of Buddhist ethical principles, an equal emphasis was put on the building of pagodas and other acts of merit. If facilities for the practice of meditation were provided, shrines were also built for the propitiation of the nats (spirits). U Nu's religious revival was a movement without any particular direction, it was essentially the undiscerning promotion of existing traditional Burmese religion, and U Nu personally found value in all of these heterogeneous elements of religious tradition, and the government accordingly promoted them all." (p. 144)

Opponents to the State Religion Commission, appointed to tour the country and submit a report before the close of 1960, were the Muslims, the Christians (both Catholics and Protestants), the Hindus (Indian immigrants) and several animist ethnic groups such as the Chins, Kachins, as well as the Federalist Shans and the separatist Karens or Kayah.

The army, led by General Ne Win, was also strongly opposed to the state religion proposal.

The issue aggravated and brought into open conflict all the ethnic, religious and regional differences which make up the heterogeneity of Burma.

The Third Amendment to the Constitution, made in August of 1961, established Buddhism as the State Religion of Burma. "Prime Minister U Nu freed 540 animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, ducks, fowls, pigeons, crabs and fishes in a special ceremony of comemoration." Ninety eight prisoners were spared execution and many others released. (Smith, p. 268).

But at the same time, in the face of such intense criticism and opposition from the various non Buddhists and ethnic minorities, U Nu decided to push through another (fourth) Amendment. "All persons were to have the right to teach religion, but school children could not be taught a religion different from their own without the parent's consent. All religions were to be protected by the government from insult or misrepresentation" (Smith, 1965: 271).

Several different bodies of monks saw in this amendment a threat to the Sangha and Buddhism, and the various non Buddhists and ethnic groups were not very pleased with it. Their ethnic and regional differences, their centrifugal tendencies at the periphery of the control of the centralised government and dominant culture, remained unchanged.

With vioent demonstrations by massed monks in Rangoon and the provincial capitals, as well as armed insurrection and rebellion in the border regions by the ethnic rebels, the country was ripe for the military coup of General Ne Win's Army.

Socialist Military Dictatorship and the Buddhist Sangha

On March 2, 1962, General Ne Win effected a military coup, siezing power and arresting all potential opposition leaders. Government took the form of a Revolutionary Council, manned by military officers. The Buddhist Sasana Council was abolished, and decrees

which promoted the Buddhist faith in many different ways were repealed. Within a year all banks were nationalised, followed by all import and export, and production and distribution of goods. Rigid censorship on all news informations was established, both on news of the rest of the world disseminated in Burma, and on news of Burma allowed to reach the foreign press. Strict control of travel prevented foreigners from entering Burma and Burmese from leaving the country.

Two months after the coup, the military government set out its objectives and policy in "The Burmese Way to Socialism" and later in "The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment". The military government set as its aim

... "a prosperous and affluent society free from exploitation or oppression of man by man, where there is no profiteering ... no class antagonism that threatens human welfare and where man's physical well being and happiness are assured".

Its immediate economic goal is to expand production so that the general standard of living can rise, unemployment can disappear, and everyone will be assured of a means of livelihood. To gain these objectives, agriculture, industrial production, distribution, communications, and external trade will be nationalised in various ways. During the transitional period, state ownership will form the main basis of the economy. During this period however, there will also be a place and a need for private capital and enterprise; but these will be in Burmese hands and reasonably restricted. After socialism is attained, private capitalists will be assigned new tasks. All individuals will contribute according to their ability and will receive according to the quality and quantity of their work. Neither the transitional nor the new society will be egalitarian because men differ both physically and mentally; the aim of the government will be to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor.

To realise these socioeconomic goals the political system must be altered during the transitional period. A socialist democracy will replace parliamentary democracy because the latter failed to produce a truly socialist society. Under the new system, democratic centralism must be introduced and must respond to existing conditions and ever changing circumstances by being flexible and non-dogmatic.

(Burmese way to Socialism, as summarised by Silverstein 1977:85)

In contrast to the policies of U Nu's government, the new military regime stressed its rational and scientific approach, that these goals can be achieved by man through hard work and the use of his own intellectual and moral capacities, without dependence or reference to any supernatural powers or agencies. Man alone is the master of his own destiny. This outspokenly secular view made no mention of, or allowance for, the working of the law of Karma.

The governments measures to curb the power of the monkhood began with practical measures; apart from the abolishment of the Buddhist Sasana council, they ended the observance of Buddhist sabbath days and lifted the ban on the slaughter of cattle. In the interests of public health the plague of rats and infestations of mosquitoes, which had flourished under U Nu's non-violent policies, were quickly countered with poison gas and DDT.

But when in 1962 the government ordered that monks should register themselves, a large part of the monkhood refused. The military regime renewed its attempt to control the monkhood through registration, and through reforms of religious education. The monks responded with violent protests and in 1965 the government arrested 92 monks and closed several monasteries. In the same year General Ne Win repealed the laws which had been established by U Nu to strengthen and purify the Sangha, namely the Ecclesiastical Courts Act of 1949, the Pali University and Dhammacariya Act of 1950, and the Pali Education Board Act of 1952.

For over a decade it seemed that the Buddhist Sangha in Burma had been stripped of all its support by the State, and relegated to its marginal and powerless condition as during the sixty years of British Colonial rule. However, in June 1980, there was convened a Hluttaw between Sangha and government which may indicate a coming change in relations.

Opposition to the Military Regime

In addition to the monkhood, other sectors of the Burmese people to manifest their disagreement with the Ne Win government were the students and also, the various ethnic minority groups, and the communists.

Student protests in Rangoon were harshly dealt with in 1962. Sixteen students were shot dead, several hundreds arrested, and the student Union building blown up by the authorities. The universities were temporarily closed. In 1963 the students demonstrated again, and once more the universities were closed. Similar events occurred in 1969.

In 1974 mismanagement of rice stocks created a shortage throughout the country, and the occasion of the burial of the United Nations secretary General, U Thant, sparked off incidents in which workers, students and monks openly challenged the authorities. The body of U Thant, an old political rival of Ne Win, was to be buried without any special honours. Monks and students seized the coffin, and buried it on the site of the demolished student Union building in Rangoon. The government forces took back the coffin, reburying it near the Shwedagon Pagoda, and many monks and students were arrested. City wide riots ensued, martial law was declared by the government, and several hundreds of civilian protesters were killed, wounded or arrested.

In 1975, students and workers once again protested with strikes and demonstrations, and again the government responded with force and large scale arrests. Over two hundred protesters were given long prison sentences.

In 1976 political dissent with the Ne Win regime had spread beyond the students, workers and monks, and had reached the ruling elite itself. The Minister of Defense and eleven senior army officers were charged with conspiring to overthrow the government. One death sentence and several sentences to life imprisonment were given at the trial in 1977. The conspirators

claimed to have been motivated by their dissatisfaction with the one party system, and by the failures of the governments economic policies.

Over fifty thousand members of the governments Burma Socialist Program Party were purged in 1976, and in 1977 the Party congress was followed by the resignation of the Prime Minister and several other ministers. Factionalism within the Party and the higher levels of government was met with removal of opponents by Ne Win, rather than any change in policy.

Whilst these incidents show dissent with the ruling elite in manifestations in the capitol, Rangoon, and other major urban centers, at the same time at the peripheries of the nation the diverse ethnic minorities made increasingly vigorous moves towards breaking away from the Rangoon government.

In 1962, immediately after carrying out the coup, the military also seized and imprisoned all the leaders of the ethnic minority groups.

"When the military seized power, groups from the Karens, Shans, Kachins Kayahs and Mons were openly fighting against the government. The Karens and Mons had been in opposition since as early as 1949, the Shans and Kachins since 1958 and the Kayahs since 1959 - all were seeking some degree of greater political autonomy. The Mons were eager to obtain a state of their own. The Karens were interested in redrawing their state boundaries to include more of their people and more natural resources. The Shans and Kayahs desired either a redefined federation that would give them parity with a Burmese state or the right to secede from the Union. The Kachins who had a State, wanted greater power and more autonomy from Rangoon.

While each of these ethnic groups had legal organisations struggling to achieve its desired ends through constitutional means, illegal insurgent groups were battling the government for territory and the control of population and sought to be the spokesmen for their particular ethnic constituency."

(Silverstein 1977:222)

During the two years following the coup, there was a short lived coalition of these various ethnic groups called the National Democratic United Front (NDUF), which for a time allied with the Burma Communist Party (BCP). In 1963 this coalition alliance attempted to negotiate with the central military government. When the negotiations failed to achieve any results the coalition and alliance dissolved, each group resolving to struggle for its objectives independently.

The communists themselves were also divided between the "White Flags", the Burma Communist Party (BCP) and the "Red Flags", the Communist Party of Burma (CPB).

The latter, led by Thakin Soe, was severely curtailed in its activities when as a result of army operations in 1967 and 1968, its leader was captured.

The "White Flags" or (BCP) held territory and popular support in the Pegu area of Central Burma, as well as in the northern areas of the Shan State. In 1975 the government forces claimed a victory over the communists in the Pegu area, killing two leaders and 172 of their followers. 649 other communists were either captured or surrendered. The remaining forces of the Burma Communist Party continued to operate in the northeast, near the border with communist China, where they are able to receive support and military equipment from the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China. Another current of opposition to the Ne Win regime was led, until recently, by former premier U Nu.

In the coup of 1962 U Nu was arrested and imprisoned without trial. Released in 1966 on the condition that he did not engage in politics, U Nu refused to be recruited as a kind of window-dressing to the Ne Win regime. He asked to be allowed to leave the country in 1969, and traveled extensively abroad, gathering financial and political support among Burmese exiles and other sympathisers, including funds from a Canadian oil company, until he eventually organised a rebel army - called the National United Liberation Front - which lurked in the border area between Thailand

and Burma. His forces included several political dissidents, and militants of several ethnic groups, especially of the Karens. Differences of objectives between U Nu, who throughout his political career had struggled to preserve the Union of Burma, and the ethnic minority leaders, who were for autonomy and secession, led U Nu to disassociate himself from the rebel forces in 1972.

Silverstein summarises the situation of the opposition to Ne Win's military regime as follows,

Those who opposed military rule were unable to unite, either on goals or tactics, to mount a major challenge to the men in power. The government was never really challenged because the military leaders controlled the means of violence, they remained a cohesive unit, and they retained the loyalty of their junior officers and the men in the ranks. That does not mean that the military exercised authority over the whole of Burma - it did not. It did exercise authority over the centers of population, controlled the means of communication, and was able to protect the bulk of the population from assaults by insurgents, thus it was able to survive in power.

(Silverstein 1977:119)

Ethnic rebels today - Centre and Periphery in South East Asia

As we have seen from the historical record, the conflicts between the centralised powers and rebellious peripheral groups, usually of different ethnicity, have characterised political systems throughout South east Asia.

Before briefly reviewing the activities of rebel groups in Thailand and Malaysia, and the specific manipulation of frontier situations, both geographically and politically, by the rebel groups, we shall conclude our summary of current Burmese political history with a consideration of the proliferous rebel groups in Burma.

In pre-colonial Times Burmese political history was fashioned by the struggles for dominance between Pyus, Mons, Shans and Arakanese. The Konbaung dynasty of Burmese kings, which managed

to conquer the Mons, Shans and Arakanese. itself fell when the British colonial troops took Mandalay in 1886. Following independence in 1948 all these old ethnic quarrels were revived, and the Union of Burma was also challenged by further separatist movements by the Karens, the Karen Revolutionary Force (KRF), a large ethnic group of some 3 million peoples in south Burma on the Thailand border. Other Karens formed the Kayah state, which achieved uneasy recognition by the union government. To the north, on the frontier with China, the traditionally independent Kachins, encouraged by communist Chinese, formed the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). In the north west, the Chin hills region, bordering with Assam, saw the flourishing of the Chin Pau Hau, an ethnic front for political autonomy and religious freedom. In the Northern and central lowlands the Shan peoples formed the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA), and in the province of Arakan in the west and Mon country in the south, rebel groups have at various times taken up arms against central government.

During 1980 the armed forces of Burma, Thailand and Malaysia conducted separate military operations against rebel ethnic groups in their respective mountainous border regions.

On the border between Thailand and Burma remnants of Chiang Kai Shek Nationalist army, or Kuomintan (KMT) were actively supported by the USA, whose aircraft dropped arms and money, to carry out raids into communist China during the decade of the 1950's. However, these KMT forces became too busy with the lucrative opium trade, and by the 1970's the USA was providing helicopters, technical aid and advisors, as well as funds, to the Burmese government in order to destroy the poppy fields and eliminate the KMT. By this time the KMT had also become involved with armed rebels representing several minority ethnic groups.

In April of 1978 Burmese government troops attacked rebel camps on the border with Thailand in the Loi lem area. Apart from the KMT the rebel forces included members of the Shan State Revolutionary Army (SSRA) the Shan Land United Army (SLUA), the

Kachin Independence Army (KIA) as well as warriors from the Wa, Lahu and Kohang tribes. Although large quantities of drugs, chemicals and equipment were seized and destroyed, the rebels dispersed and escaped. (Win Latt 1978).

The absence of cooperation between the Thai and Burmese authorities allowed the rebels to withdraw across the border in many such cases, however in 1980 there were some signs that concerted measures were being discussed by representatives of the two countries. In March of 1980 Burmese government troops carried out operations against Shan and Karen rebel forces in the southeast of the country, and offered an amnesty to rebels who gave themselves up. (Zaw Win 1980)

Despite visits by Thailand's Foreign Minister to Rangoon during 1980, no combined military operations were planned between Burma and Thailand. Such collaboration between Thai and Malaysian forces on the mountainous border region of Perak between the two countries has had some measure of success against the Communist Chinese forces still active in the area known as the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA). These are the remnants and successors of the Chinese communist guerilla forces which formed, and were supported with arms and equipment by the British, during the Japanese occupation of Malaya during the second world war. The Atomic Bomb led to Japanese surrender before the Chinese communist guerilla forces went into full action; however it was not long before their former allies and friends - in some cases even comrades - in arms - the British - became their bitter enemies during the "Malayan Emergency" when British colonial rule attempted to suppress the communists before granting independence to Malaysia at the beginning of the decade 1960's.

In Thailand several ethnic minority groups have also taken up arms to fight for secession from the central government. Some of them have phrased the ideological idiom of their struggle in communist or Marxist-leninist terms, and have received arms, supplies and support from neighbouring communist countries such as

Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.

According to Suksamram (1977:51 - 52), communism first germinated within the large Vietnamese and Chinese ethnic communities resident in Thailand at the end of the decade 1920 to 1930. From 1933 to 1946 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was banned by law and continued its activities underground, mainly in North East Thailand. The anti-communist law of 1952 led the communists to adopt guerilla warfare among dissident ethnic communities and hill tribes at the peripheries of Thailand; Shans and Karens on the border with Burma, Laos and Vietnamese in the north east borders with Laos and Thailand, and more recently, Vietnamese from Cambodia. In 1964 Thailand had to send in the army to control communist insurrection in the North East.

In the North, or the frontier with Burma, the Meo hill tribes, supported by the Vietnamese and Chinese communists, added insurrection to their opium growing and trading activities which had long troubled the central Thai government. In operations similar to those carried out by the British to counter the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya (Henderson 1958) some groups of Meos were hired, trained and armed by the Thai government to fight their fellow Meo tribesmen.

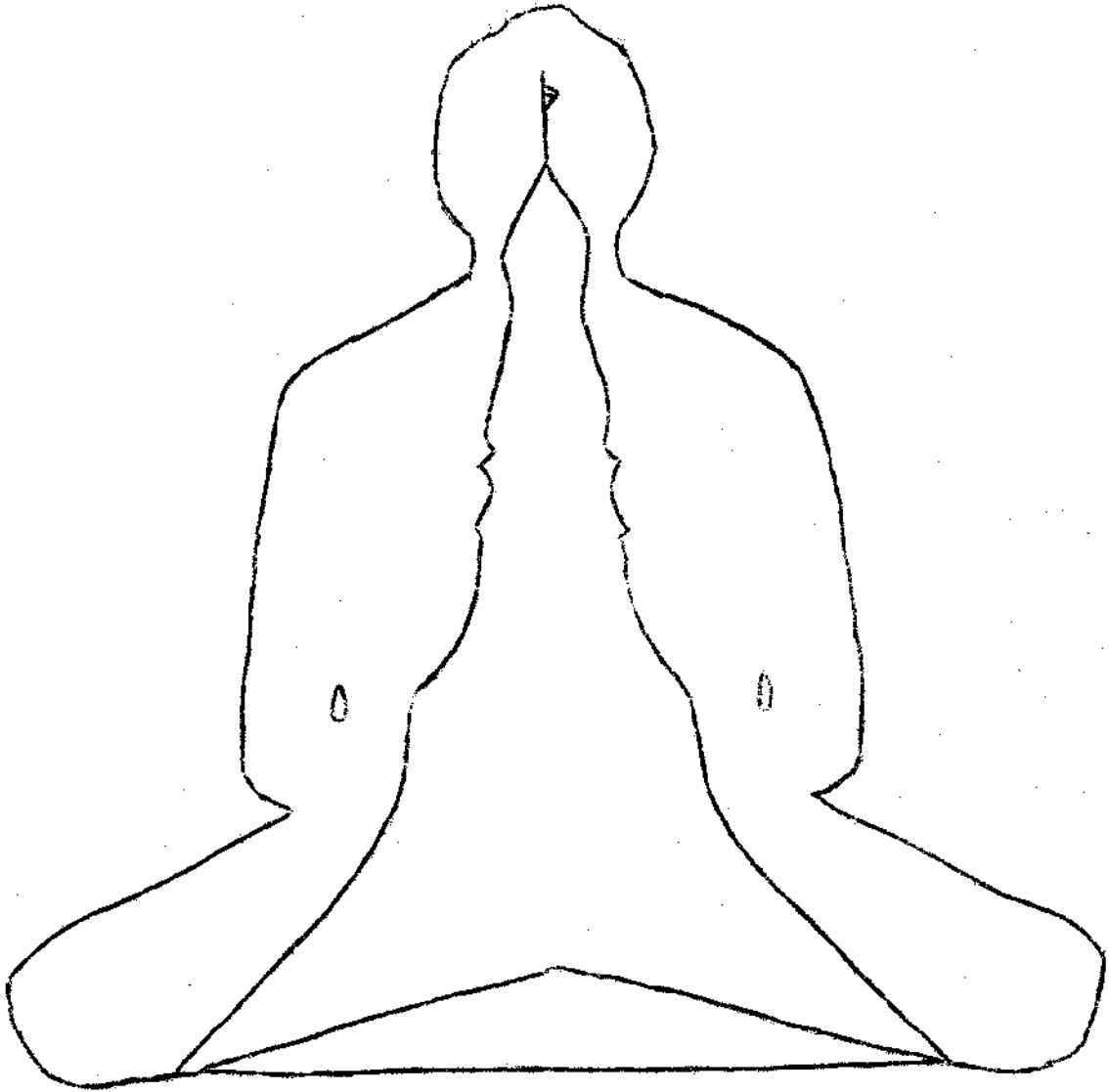
In the South of Thailand, bordering with Malaysia, several ethnic and religious groups, distinct from the Buddhist Thais, are also fighting for secession of separate religious and political conditions. Apart from the Malayan Chinese (MRLA) mentioned above, the other main group of rebels are the Muslims, who constitute 80% of the population in the southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani. During 1980 there was a merger between the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), Barisan Revolution National (BRN) and Barisan National Pemebrisan Pattani (BNPP) which consolidated over a thousand armed rebels in an attempt to win autonomy for these southern provinces. Religious differences are once again combined with ideological and ethnic issues, since Muslim militants have joined the rebels, claiming responsibility for several terrorist bomb attacks and shootings in the region.

(Bangkok Post. July 1980).

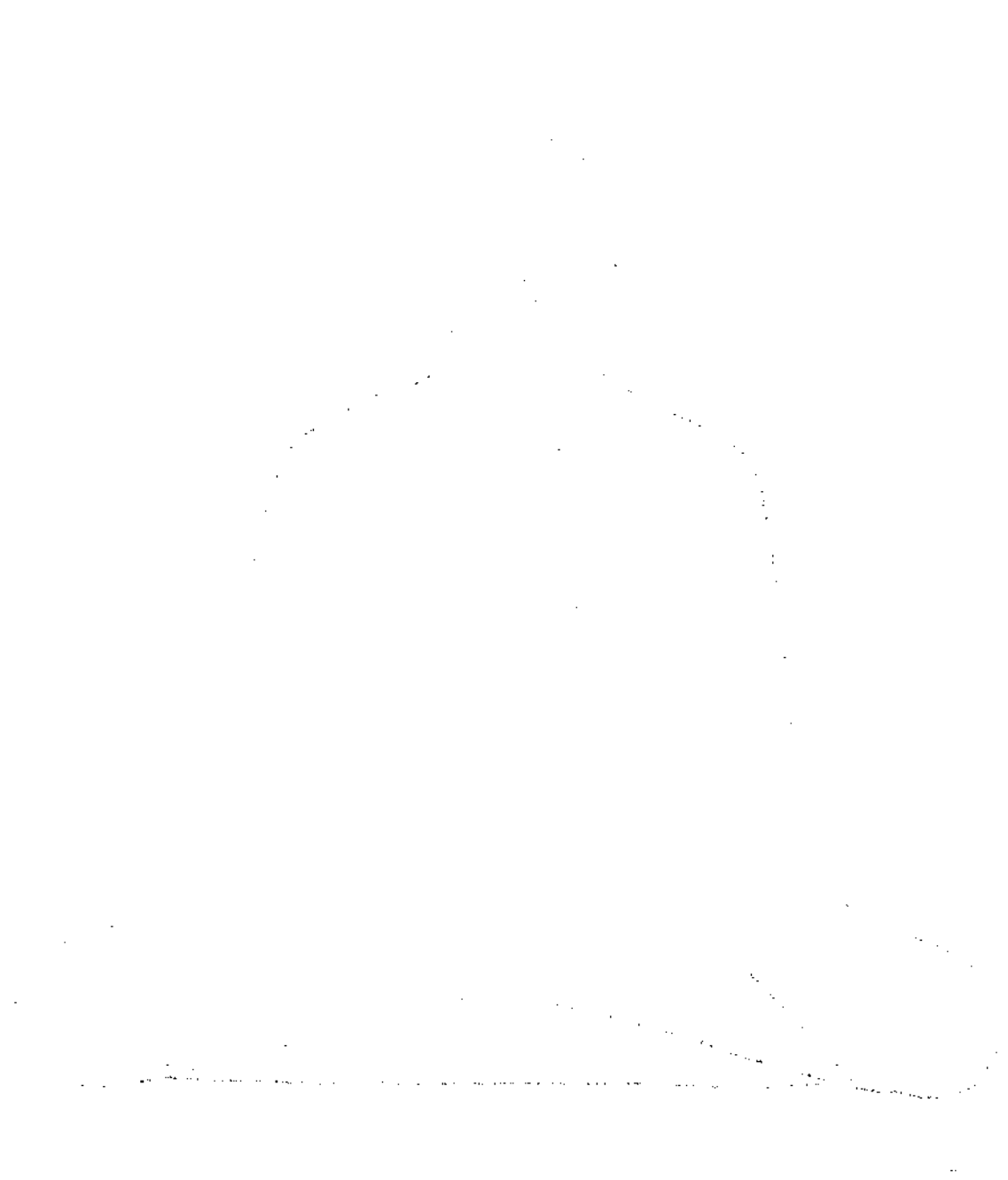
In the North East of Thailand - Isan province which includes one third of Thailand's population, there is a long history of dissidence based on cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences from the remainder of the central Thais, together with the geographical isolation of the area caused by the mountain chain which separates Isan from central Thailand. The local economy and culture of the Isan has more in common with the Laos across the Mekong river, and this river, although a frontier, is more of a means than a barrier for communist infiltration through Laos.

Finally, at Thailand's eastern border with Cambodia (or Kampuchea), large numbers of Khmer Serei ("Free Khmers - anti-communist) have used Thai territory for regrouping in preparation for a counter attack against the Vietnamese backed communist Heng Samrin regime in power at Phnom-Penh. International Red Cross camps for Kampuchean refugees within Thailand but near the border came under rocket and artillery attacks, followed by brief raids by Vietnamese troops in June and July of 1980. The Vietnamese claimed, and not without some reason, that the IRC camps were being used as bases for the Khmer Serei forces. American response, with large airlifts of arms, munitions and other equipment for the Thailand government forces was very swift. Meanwhile within Cambodia there are varying estimates of between 30,000 to 100,000 Khmer Rouge troops thought to be at large preparing a new offensive. The Khmer Rouge are communists led by Pol Pot, whose mass executions and radical social and economic programs caused the death or flight of a large proportion of Cambodia's population, and which the Vietnamese claimed to justify their invasion and installment of Heng Samrin government.

However, Hanoi Radio announcements in January of 1981, of forthcoming troop withdrawals from Cambodia may suggest that they believe that the Heng Samrin regime is capable of withstanding any new rebel offensive, whether from the Khmer Serei (anti-communist) or Khmer Rouge (divergent communist faction).



W. E. Winger



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PART THREEThe Doctrine of Karma and Social Inequality

In our introduction we pointed out the fundamental social role of the doctrine of Karma in justifying and maintaining social stratification and economic inequality. The doctrine of Karma and Rebirth explains the existence of social and material differences in well-being and at the same time offers the possibility of social mobility and ascension. If an individual accumulates sufficient merit he may be reborn in a higher strata of society or plane of existence, thus he has an interest in maintaining the status quo of the stratified society.

Such a view of society is coherent with a wider view of existence held by Buddhists, where all beings are reborn in one of six ranked planes of existence, which are:

gods
spirits (asuras)
humans
animals
ghosts
demons

(Conze 1959)

These planes are in turn further differentiated internally. To quote Spiro (1970),

"The Wheel of Existence, or the realm of rebirth (samsara), comprises thirty-one separate abodes (loka) or planes of existence. Twenty-seven of these constitute the "fortunate" planes. These include the twenty-six abodes of the gods (deva) and the human abode. The four remaining planes of existence are known as the "states of woe". Proceeding from the least to the most unpleasant, these include the planes of animals, demons, ghosts, and hell. ... Depending on one's karma, rebirth may occur in any of these thirty-one abodes, and any individual will probably have been

reborn in all of them as he wanders, over countless aeons of time, from rebirth to rebirth. In short, rebirth for Buddhism is as ineluctable a fact of existence as birth, indeed, if there were no rebirth, how could there be birth?" (p. 41)

Many students of the social implications of Buddhist cosmology have observed the justification for stratification and inequality which is supplied by the doctrine of Karma. As Spiro puts it,

"The doctrine of Karma, being Janus-faced provides any social order with a powerful moral authority. On the one hand, it promises a better status in a future life by meritorious action performed in this life; on the other hand, it explains one's status in this life by reference to meritorious and demeritorious action performed in past lives. It is the latter, explanatory aspect of Karma that renders it a salient social force. First, it establishes a moral basis for the very notion, hence the systemic differential distribution of worldly goods and values, because differences in power, wealth, prestige and so on are viewed as the just (karma-determined) consequences of differences in merit. Second, it provides moral justification for the inequalities that obtain in any actual distribution of these goods and values because it represents the karmic - and therefore just - recompense for each person's merit and demerit. In short, since (according to the doctrine of karma) everyone reaps what he sows, whatever is, is just, and whatever anyone has he deserves, in the perspective of the countless rebirths that comprise a persons total life." (p.441)

But Spiro points out some paradoxical consequences of the doctrine of karma:

"Unlike most scholars, then, who interpret the doctrine of karma as providing powerful support for the status quo - as being an agent of political conservatism and a force for political stability - it is my contention that, by ignoring the paradoxes inherent in the doctrine, these interpretations are only half true. To be sure, the doctrine of karma is a profoundly conservative force in that, converting the social order into a moral order, it militates against any structural change. In this sense it is, indeed, a powerful force for systemic or structural stability. But at the same time it can be - and in the political domain has been - a powerful force for positional

change and therefore of political instability.

To recapitulate, the doctrine of karma plays a uniquely paradoxical role in its relation to politics. On the one hand, by interpreting the political order as a moral order, the doctrine not only invests the political system with moral authority but confers legitimacy on the political regime. In that sense it is a force for positional, as well as structural, stability. But precisely because it confers legitimacy on the political regime, this doctrine is also a powerful force for positional change. For by the paradox inherent in its logic, it confers legitimacy on any political regime - not only the regime in authority, but on the regime that usurps its authority; not only on the present distribution of power but on any change in the distribution of power. Since from a karmic point of view, the usurper of power has as much moral authority as the person deposed from power, there can be no illegitimate regime. When legitimacy is based on karma, all regimes are equally legitimate."

"It is for this reason that, in certain cultural contexts, the doctrine of karma can be such a powerful source of political instability."

"Burmese culture provides such a context. Profoundly concerned with questions of power, both respecting and resenting political authority, fulsome to their superiors and arrogant to their inferiors, aspiring to power even when claiming to disdain it - the Burmese provide a context which incites to the pursuit of power, the overthrow of power, and the acceptance of changes of power. Conjoined to this cultural context of profound ambivalence about power, the doctrine of karma, I submit, has importantly contributed to the persistent instability of Burmese political history." (p.443)

There is no doubt that the historical record of Burma, and of other Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, is fashioned by the rise and fall of competing claimants to the throne and their wars of pillage and destruction against neighbouring kingdoms who are their fellows in the same Buddhist faith. The modern tourist in Thailand learns that the ruined temples and decapitated Buddha images are the work of the Burmese, and in Burma the same tourist discovers that it was the Thais or Shans who destroyed the pagodas and carried off the relics and treasures. (*)

(*) In fact, the downtown tourist shops in Bangkok are well stocked with Buddha heads, which can be bought for a considerable price, although officially they may not be exported.

But the question of an egalitarian regime poses quite different and apparently insoluble problems in relation to the doctrine of karma. Even though Spiro's view of the paradoxical or Janus-faced character of the role of the doctrine of karma in relation to the social order is sustained by Burma's turbulent history, it would seem that social and economic equality is fundamentally incompatible with the accumulation of merit and demerit, and the premise of reincarnation. If every individual member of society is born to equal status and equal opportunity, then it is impossible for reincarnation to be determined by the karma of past actions.

As one Mandalay monk put it, "Abolition of class is nonsense, as one's present existence is determined by the law of karma." (Smith, p. 199).

The wider issue of the suitability of Buddhist values and attitudes for different types of economic system is not so clear. On the one hand the accumulation of wealth, within the perspective of the karma doctrine, can be seen to be the result of accumulated merit and, since wealth permits alms giving and pagoda building, allows the fortunate to accumulate even more merit. But on the other hand Buddhists should also renounce worldly desires and material riches. Egoistic individualism, the basic attitude necessary for acquiring riches, is contradictory to fundamental Buddhist principles. As one observer writes, Buddhism comprises

"a complex set of traditional attitudes, values, behaviour patterns and social relations which are, for the most part, not conducive but are even inimical to economic development".

(Wallinsky, quoted in Smith, p324.)

The Buddhist Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Smith and other writers have recorded the failure of U Nu's proposals that Buddhist values and attitudes could cure the country's economic and social problems simply by appealing to the better qualities of individuals in general.

"Thus, in a lecture delivered in 1959, he traced all forms of conflict (in family, labor-management relations, politics, and international affairs) to the fundamental egocentricity of man. From this sound diagnosis, however, he simply proceeded to prescribe the Buddhist doctrine of anatta. To put it briefly, Buddhism is the way or the philosophy for the annihilation of causes that give rise to the "I" consciousness". However valuable this philosophy for the spiritual progress of the individual, U Nu somehow neglected to indicate how a labor union, political party, or nation could practice it"...

"The tendency to propose religious platitudes where specific policies and vigorous action are required was illustrated most notably in 1960 when U Nu's finance minister, Thakin Tin, told the press that profiteering and black marketing would be stopped by appealing to all business men to observe the Buddha's teaching concerning metta (all-embracing compassion). One year later this "policy" was abandoned, having proved a total failure, and the government announced that stern measures would be taken to control the prices of essential commodities."

(Smith 1965:146 - 147)

In Leach's view,

... (It) may be that there is something about the Ethic of Buddhism which is fundamentally at variance with the Spirit of Capitalism.

If Weber was right, then competitive capitalism finds its natural seed bed among people of cautious puritannical disposition who are savers rather than spenders, who prefer investment to conspicuous consumption, and who have confidence that they are the elect of God. But the practical (as distinct from scriptural) ethic of Theravada Buddhism is very much the converse of this. Each man is for himself alone, and there are no elect; an endless prospect of future lives of suffering is the common prospect of all. The standard pattern is to lead a wild gay life while you are young and become a sainted patriarch (upasaka) when you are old. Youth is a time of gambling and reckless speculation; maturity is a period of piety

accompanied by works of merit. One approved form of merit earning is to expend accumulated resources on spectacular public works, including temples, bridges, and irrigation channels. Building a factory for the benefit of your personal descendants quite definitely does not fall into the category of works of merit.

...Those who believe that there is a Law of Nature which declares that all underdeveloped countries will "progress" to a stage of industrialization tend to assume that all those who are so progressing must necessarily welcome the prospect with open arms. In other words, they assume that the basic Christian dogma of the coming millenium when all mankind shall live in peace and happiness in the New Jerusalem is shared by all the world. But this is not the case. A good Buddhist has no vision of a New Heaven and a New Earth; his ambitions are strictly personal and escapist, the most he is prepared to hope for is a future existence which is less unpleasant than this one.

When an ideology of the latter sort prevails, economic progress will come about only when it is the line of least resistance under pressure from uncomfortable events. And by uncomfortable I mean physically uncomfortable, not just economically precarious. For example, when judged by the criteria of the economists of the World Bank, the present state and future prospects of Ceylon are wholly deplorable and rapidly approaching crisis. Yet so far as I can judge, the average Ceylon peasant does not feel himself at all badly off. For the time being anyway, increased crop yields have eased the stresses of a rising population. So long as this situation continues there will be no sustained pressure on the politicians to act against the anti-capitalist biases of their Buddhist ethnic.

...The Burma situation seems to me very similar, but with the population pressure factor removed. In Burma there is still plenty of room for everyone. The climate is pleasant; nature is generous. Provided the gadgetry of modern technology is given low priority, a "reasonable" standard of life is available to everyone. A military government which provides a fair degree of law and order without an excess of tyranny and which allows the individual to pursue his private personal salvation is as much as can be hoped for. Ne Win does not put the revival of Buddhism very high on his list of priorities, but his regime provides a practical context in which Buddhism can flourish. In Theravada Buddhism that is a very traditional state of affairs.

(Leach 1972 pp. 49-51)

The following extracts from George Orwell's 'Burmese Days' describe the character and aspirations of U-Po Kyin, the villainous

and scheming magistrate whose wealth, accumulated by the most dishonest means, will nonetheless be converted into merit and consequently a comfortable rebirth. Although a novel, 'Burmese Days' is based on Orwell's six years of service in Burma in the Indian Imperial Police, and incorporates all of Orwell's renowned capacity for acutely ethnographic observation. Even though a tool of the colonial regime in Burma, Orwell is the most merciless and scathing critic of British Imperialism and the capitalist system. He is equally perceptive and surgical in his description of the Indian and Burmese agents of the British colonial system.

After describing the ruthless and totally devious means by which the magistrate U Po Kyin achieves power and wealth, he summarises his otherworldly aspirations.

"And even beyond the grave his success would continue. According to Buddhist belief, those who have done evil in their lives will spend the next incarnation in the shape of a rat, a frog or some other low animal. U Po Kyin was a good Buddhist and intended to provide against this danger. He would devote his closing years to good works, which would pile up enough merit to outweigh the rest of his life. Probably his good works would take the form of building pagodas. Four pagodas, five, six, seven - the priests would tell him how many - with carved stonework, gilt umbrellas and little bells that tinkled in the wind, every tinkle a prayer. And he would return to the earth in male human shape - for a woman rates at about the same level as a rat or a frog - or at best as some dignified beast such as an elephant." (p. 7)

Although events in Burma which we have reviewed briefly in Part Two, subsequent to the date at which Prof. Leach wrote the above citation, indicate conflict between General Ne Win's government policy and political manifestations of some Buddhist monks during the decade 1970-1980, I believe that in essence Leach's view's on the basically tolerant and respectful attitude of the Ne Win government is basically true, since Theravada Buddhism and the Burmese Sangha appeared to flourish and illuminate the Burmese people in 1980.

Through the world tours and lectures of the venerable

Mahasi Sayadaw, the various Satipattana-Vipassana meditation centres around the world and the Mahasi Sayadaw Sasana - International Meditation Centre at Rangoon, the Department of Religious Affairs of the Government of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, promotes the world wide practice of Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation, within Burma and abroad.

The question of the relation between Buddhist cosmology, attitudes and faith, and the diverse and different alternatives for social and economic organisation and development in Burma and elsewhere in South East Asia, is so complex and profound that I do not consider it possible to include an adequate treatment of these issues within the limited scope of this study.

A preliminary reading of Manning Nash (1965) and Trevor Ling (1979) suggests that there are several different ways of looking at these problems. In the future development of my studies on Religion and Politics in South East Asia, I hope to go into these matters in considerable detail.

Pagoda, Merit and Nirvana

At this point I must explain in more detail the motives for the title of this study. What is the secret of the Pagodas?

What significance have the pagodas in a study of the religious and political behaviour of the peoples of Buddhist South East Asia? The proliferation and ubiquity of pagodas, both in space and time, is apparent to even the most casual visitor, tourist or observer in these countries.

We have seen that Buddhism as it is practised by the peoples of these countries is principally concerned with the accumulation of merit, which in turn is governed by the dictates of the Law of Karma. Only a very small minority of meditating monks, hermits or recluses, are dedicated to the attainment of Nirvana (nibbana, or neikban). In Theravada Buddhism, the ultimate goal of nirvana, the cessation of all desire and consequently the attainment of perfection which implies never again being reborn in any form whatsoever, is reached only after countless rebirths, during each of which there must take place a progressive accumulation of merit. The perspective for the poor peasant is, therefore, somewhat bleak. At best he can hope for rebirth, once again as a human, but perhaps in a slightly higher station in life, with a little more comfort and social prestige and status. Only the most venerable senior monks, or in former times a great King or other exalted noble, could hope for a non-incarnate future as a god or possibly a Buddha. Even so, whether a poor peasant or a noble, any progress towards this ultimate goal can only be achieved by storing up more merit.

Before considering just how merit is defined, and how it can be acquired, let us put this situation in comparison with the same problem as it is defined by other forms of Buddhism, such as the Mahayana Buddhism of Tibet and Mongolia, or the Zen Buddhism of Japan.

In Tibet Mahayana Buddhism, the ultimate goal, the Great

Liberation, is considered to lie within the grasp of any person, regardless of sex, station or occupation. The poorest nomadic herdsman can achieve the Great Liberation if he is prepared to devote himself to spiritual development through the study and practice of the various Tantra Yogas. The ultimate goal can be reached within a single lifetime, as long as the seeker applies himself whole-heartedly and exclusively towards this end. Milarepa is the most famous example of such achievement within popular Tibetan Mythology. After a most inauspicious start, where he acquired occult powers for the sole purpose of working vengeance and violence against the enemies of his family, Milarepa sought various spiritual teachers who eventually set him on the Noble Path, and after many years as an ascetic hermit monk living in a cave in the Himalayas and subsisting on Prana and nettle soup, Milarepa eventually achieved perfection through the practice of the Yoga of the Great Liberation. (Evans Wentz 1954 and 1928).

In the various forms of Zen Buddhism, as it is practised in Japan, and perhaps in other places around the world, nirvana can be achieved in a momentary instant, in a flash, although it requires a totality and unity of perception which is rarely within the capacity of ordinary individuals ensnared in the desires and aversions of day to day life, dominated by duality of thought and action. The parable is often told of the man who spent his life looking for his ox, and was never able to find it because he was riding on its back all the time.

To return then to the problem of merit and its accumulation in the Theravada Buddhism of South-east Asia, we must ask what constitutes merit and how can it be acquired. In this matter, all scholars of Theravada Buddhism are in agreement that merit is defined as self sacrifice, and is characterised by the act of selfless giving. Manning-Nash, who studied two villages in upper Burma, lists the acts of giving which acquire merit as follows. (1965; 116)

"Kutho (merit) garnered from any act of giving cannot be, and is not, calculated in actual units, but there is a hierarchy for the act of giving and a hierarchy of person given to. The hierarchy of meritorious acts of self sacrifice is:

1. to build a pagoda
2. to give a shinbyu (act as sponsor for a novice monk)
3. to build a monastery (and donate it to a monk)
4. to donate a well or bell to a monastery
5. to give a hsungywe (to feed a group of monks)
6. to feed and give alms to monks
7. to feed and give hospitality to laymen."

Since the capacity to give is clearly determined by an individual's temporal wealth, and his temporal wealth is determined by his merit, and his merit is determined, according to the Law of Karma, by his actions in his previous incarnations, we can see that this hermetic circle of mutually confirming premises establishes a complete and inescapable framework of attitudes and values for the Theravada Buddhist.

It also makes quite clear that the principal means of acquiring merit is to build a Pagoda. Before continuing to cite a long and extremely significant passage of the work of Manning-Nash, and a brief description of the Shwedagon Pagoda, which illustrate the social, economic, political and symbolic implications of Pagoda building, I shall briefly review what some of the other principal authors on this issue have to say.

Of pagoda building, Spiro (1970:204) writes:

"Constructed so that their donor may acquire merit (no act confers greater merit than the construction of a pagoda) and prestige (no symbol confers greater prestige than the formal title, Pagoda Donor - Hpaya taga)..."

and also, where once again the association of merit with prestige is again reiterated,

"To sponsor an initiation, to provision a monastery, to build a pagoda - these not only assure one of pleasure in a future existence but provide immediate gratification in

present life. There is no greater prestige than that derived, for example, from the titles of "Pagoda builder", "monastery builder". These are formal titles, remaining with a person his entire life, and used in all documents and on all formal occasions." (p204)

But, as we have already seen in the case of the attainability of the ultimate goal, nirvana, which only the most exalted royalty and venerable monks can hope for, so also with the means to reach this goal through the acquisition of merit;

"Although everyone can (and does) contribute to the construction or repair of a pagoda or monastery, only the special few can afford to construct one themselves. Those who can, make every effort to do so, since this yields merit (and prestige) beyond all other things."

(Spiro 1970:458)

Therefore it is not surprising to learn that, according to Smith (1965:24):

"In promoting the Buddhist faith, all the kings, from the time of Anawratha, built and adorned pagodas. King Bayinnaung in the sixteenth century followed a royal custom when he broke up his crown and used its jewels to adorn the spire of the Shwedagon and other pagodas. ...In the early nineteenth century King Bodwipaya squandered enormous sums of money from the public revenues in the construction of impressive pagodas and shrines."

In the same tradition, Queen Shin Saw Bu contributed her own weight in gold, about ninety pounds, or forty kilos, which was beaten out into gold leaf and used to gild the upper parts of the enormous Shwedagon Pagoda at Rangoon. (We Pin, "Shwedagon". Rangoon, 1972:19)

She also donated lands to this pagoda, and established a complex organisation of artisans, musicians, watchmen, astrologers, scribes, lamplighters, doorkeepers and several other pagoda officials and attendants. This body of pagoda servants continues to this day.

The Economic and Social Aspects of the Pagodas

I shall now examine the phenomenon the pagoda in two different lights; firstly, to consider the practical implications of pagoda building for the ecology, economy and social system, and secondly to study the symbolic representation of the pagoda form and its associated myths and rituals.

As far as I know, no studies have been made of the impact of pagoda building upon the local ecology, especially in those places such as Pagan and the other ancient royal and religious centres, where pagodas and other related buildings are counted in hundreds and even thousands, and where the landscape is dominated by their forms, concentrated in a relatively small area. At Pagan, over five thousand pagodas, in varying stages of maintenance and decay, cover little more than twenty five square kilometres, and represent the accumulated work of several centuries.

The immediate ecological impact of the pagoda building activity must begin with removal of large quantities of earth from the top soil, for the manufacture of bricks, and also from the vast amount of vegetation and timber which was cut from the surrounding areas in order to provide fuel to fire the bricks^(*). Probably this removal of woodland had a greater effect on the local ecosystem than the removal of the soil, since the vegetation has the functions of retaining water and returning it to the soil, as well as protecting the top soil from the full force of the sun and rain. Without the vegetation the rain leaches and erodes the soil very fast, and the tropical sun vaporises the nitrogen content. Very quickly the soil becomes quite sterile. Other consequences are the reduction of water tables in some areas, and an increased tendency towards seasonal flooding in others. Local fauna, dependent on the vegetation for food and shelter, would also tend towards depletion and extinction.

The accumulated effect of these changes in the local ecosystem, over a period of centuries, together with the population

(*) This aspect of the ecological impact of the fuel gathered to fire the bricks was pointed out to me by Brian Burkhalter, of Columbia University, N.Y.

concentrations around the royal and religious centers, must have been considerable, and may have contributed to their eventual collapse and abandonment. Earthquakes, which periodically have devastated the pagodas throughout their history, necessitating their repair or replacement, have increased the drain of natural resources and human labour.

To this day the labour requirements for the building and restoration of pagodas have changed very little. No mechanisation is used, the bricks being fashioned and fired by hand, and transported and raised by human or animal labour. Scaffoldings for the erection of the higher structures are mostly of bamboo, and a large part of the heavy labour is carried out by women. Men appear to fulfill the roles of overseers and more specialised tasks of masonry and finishing.

Thousands or even millions of man/days of labour went into the construction of each pagoda; at times this labour may have been carried out by slaves captured in wars and raids against neighbouring peoples and kingdoms, at other times the labour would have been contributed as part of tributary obligations of subject serfs to their feudal lords or kings. It may also be that some wealthy and prominent members of the elite actually paid labourers for work on the pagodas destined to accumulate their merit. In more recent times it is clear that the labour for the building of some of the larger pagodas was contributed "freely" by several different sectors of the population at large, within the ideological framework of merit accumulation.

Major Duncan describes the rebuilding of the Shwedagon Pagoda in 1871, ruined by an earthquake.

"The labour expended must have been very great, and it was given without payment, the merit of sharing in the good deed being to the Burman sufficient reward. There were 50,000 bamboos and seventy boatloads of cane used in constructing the scaffolding, and in addition to this, there were hundreds of wooden poles, and some fifty logs of timber employed in platforms and points on which blocks and ropes were worked. During the first month there were about 300 men continually employed and for the last month fully 500 were daily at work on the great undertaking. At

the beginning the labour was merely manual, but latterly the most skilled workmen in Rangoon freely added their share, and devoted themselves to the task before them. The value of the labour may be fully estimated at Rs. 20,000; and considering it was all free, there must have been great natural capacity for organisation, for the work went on with great regularity and steadiness, the several portions being systematically allotted to particular bodies of workmen under their individual chief, and so with infinite care, but with much skill, their enterprise was completed".

(We Pin, "Shwedagon", Rangoon
1972:116)

The management and economics of the Shwedagon Pagoda

Since the reign of Queen Shin Saw Bu, in the fifteenth century, a body of officials and attendants have administered and maintained the Shwedagon Pagoda.

Today the affairs of the Pagoda are managed by a board of trustees. The nine member Board is elected by the Burmese Buddhist community of Rangoon. Three of these trustees are elected to continue in this capacity for the rest of their lives, the others for determined periods. The trustees, to be elected, must be Burmese Buddhists of between 40 and 60 years of age, must have resided continuously in Rangoon for at least three years, must either possess immovable property valued at 10,000 kyats or have resided continuously for three years in a house with rent valued at 100 kyats a month at least, must be neither insolvent nor have ever traded in arms, liquor, drugs, poison, meat or human beings, and must never have been convicted for offences involving moral turpitude. (We Pin, Shwedagon, 1979:109)

The Trustees are guided by an advisory board of nine venerable abbots.

The day to day affairs of the Pagoda are managed by an Executive Trustee selected by rotation from among the members of the Board, and employ a permanent staff of 88 officers, artisans, masons, keepers, cleaners and Pagoda Policemen.

The Pagoda obtains income from bonds donated by devotees, as well as cash donations. The financial assets of the Pagoda on March 31, 1971, were 7.3 million kyats, and land owned by the Pagoda covered 45.5 hectares (113.844 acres).

There are 32 voluntary associations whose activities are connected with the Pagoda. Some sweep and wash the platform, scrub images and shrines, whitewash the shrines and other similar jobs. Other associations regularly offer food to the members of the Sangha, or bags of rice to the monasteries. Some associations annually donate gold plate, and many hold regular religious meetings and invite monks to give lectures on the Doctrine or on meditation. Almost all the associations participate in the festivals based on the Pagoda. (We Pin, Shwedagon, 1979)

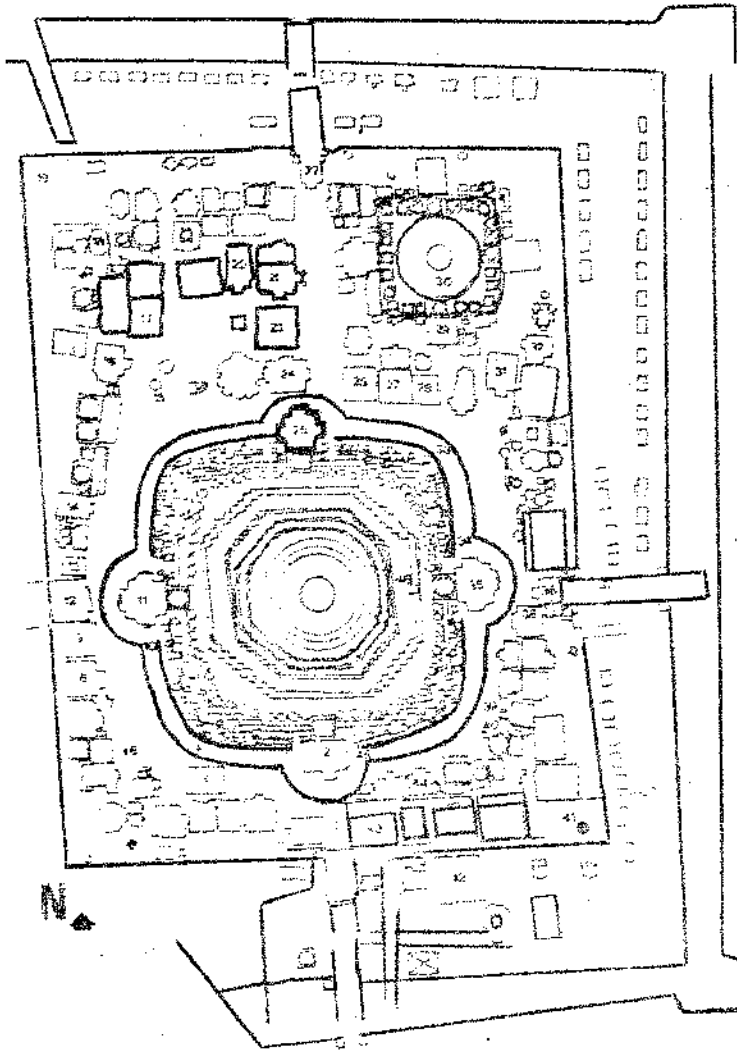
From Manning Nash - the Pagoda of a Village of Upper Burma

I shall now cite a long section from 'The Golden Road to Modernity', published by Manning-Nash in 1965, in which he gives an admirable description of the pagoda and village of Nondwin, near Mandalay in Upper Burma. In addition to the aspects of merit accumulation, which we have already considered in general terms, Manning-Nash's account allows us to see the economic, social and ritual relations which exist among the villagers and the monks in relation to the pagoda. The detailed account of the hsungywe, or feast for the monks held at the pagoda, is included as it establishes the atmosphere of the pagoda festival and illustrates the activities and pattern of relations which pertain to the village pagoda. Three words re-occur in the text which Manning Nash explains elsewhere in his book. They are Kutho, merit, Kan which "is a bundle of ideas tied in with destiny, fate, luck and life chances", and pon which is the power to achieve.

Building a pagoda is the highest act of sacrifice. The Burmese word for pagoda (they do not know the form pagoda) is hpaya. Hpaya also refers to Buddha, with the prefix Shin for lord, and may be used in address to an absolute like a great monk or a very high government official. Hpaya carries then the connotation of the highest act of self-abnegation. While it honors the sacrificer by

The Shwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon.

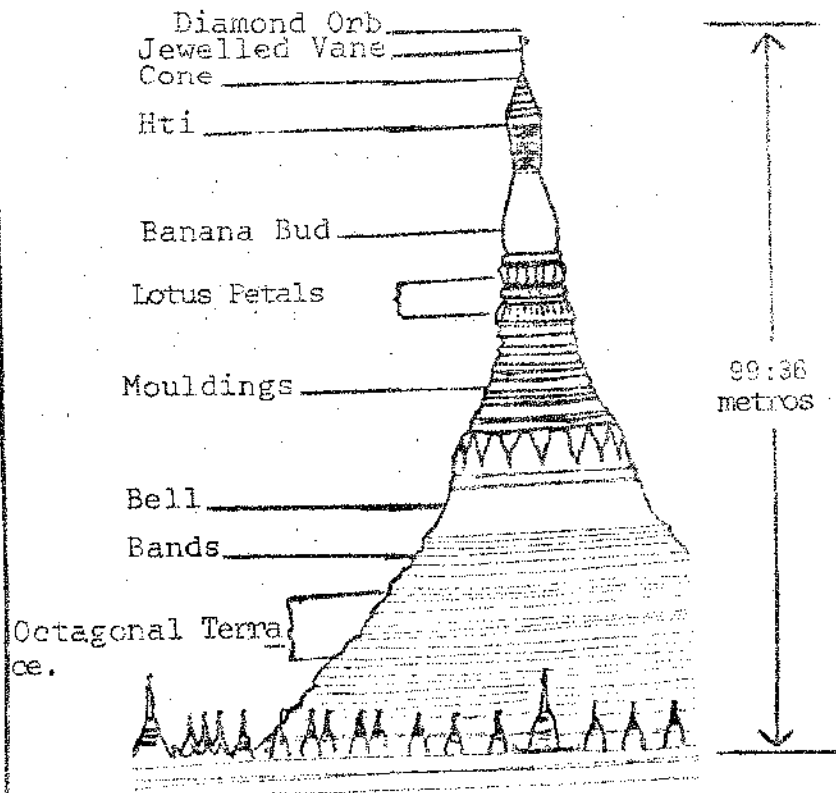
(Diagrams from Wheeler, 1979)



- 1 Southern stairway landing
- 2 Konagamana adoration hall
- 3 Planetary Post for Mercury
- 4 Planetary Post for Saturn
- 5 Prayer Pavilion
- 6 Prayer post
- 7 Guardian nat
- 8 Arakanese pavilion
- 9 Prayer hall with wood carvings
- 10 Mai Lamu & the king of the nats
- 11 Kassapa adoration hall
- 12 "Two pice" Tazaung
- 13 Low pavilion
- 14 Pavilion with tall columns
- 15 "Eight Day Pagoda"
- 16 Maha Gandha Bell
- 17 Large pavilion
- 18 "Wonder working" image
- 19 North-west corner
- 20 Chinese prayer hall
- 21 Prayer hall with Indian figures
- 22 Northern stairway landing
- 23 Pavilion where hti was placed
- 24 Hair relics well
- 25 Gautama adoration hall
- 26 Maha Bodhi style pagoda
- 27 Small golden pagoda
- 28 "Two pice" pavilion
- 29 Izza Gawna pavilion
- 30 Elder or Nsungdawgyi Pagoda
- 31 King Tharrawaddy's bell

Shwedagon

- 32 Pavilion with wood carvings
- 33 Planetary Post for the Sun
- 34 Shan umbrellas
- 35 Kakusandha adoration hall
- 36 Eastern stairway landing
- 37 Dhammazedhi's stone inscription
- 38 U Nyo pavilion
- 39 Flying monk prayer post
- 40 Interesting bell
- 41 Bo tree
- 42 Pagoda trustees office
- 43 Curio museum
- 44 Pavilion with wood carvings
- 45 Stairs to the pagoda plinth
- 46 Tawa-gu "wonder working" image



allowing him to contact the most exalted embodiments of the sacred. To be the sponsor of a pagoda is such a great act of Kutho, in addition, because it implicates most of the other acts of giving: it requires feeding of monks, it requires feeding of laymen, it is preceded by several *hsungywe*, and only a man who has already sponsored several *shinbyu* would do it. Further, although building a pagoda is an individual act, it entails wide cooperation in Nondwin. The cooperation is in the upkeep of the pagoda (perhaps the family will be involved, or, in pagodas larger than any Nondwin is ever likely to build, a board of community trustees), in the celebration each year of the pagoda festival, which is community and supracommunity wide, and in the constant repair and gilding of the pagoda as wind, sun, rain, and time erode it.

The countryside of Upper Burma is heavily dotted with pagodas in ruins or in advanced states of decay, untouched for generations. From the knowledge gained in Nondwin of what the building and upkeep of a pagoda means, I can understand why so many towering heaps of brick, mortar, and rubble are allowed to gently slide into shapeless mounds. A man will be the builder or sponsor of a pagoda only at one point in his life: when he believes that his *kan* is at its peak of strength, when he can give this greatest offering at the height of his secular and spiritual power. Although any kind of pagoda will do (from wood, to the stone and gilt of the great ones like the bell shaped pagoda outside of Sagaing, or the Arakan pagoda, or the *Shwe Dagon*), the actual *hpaya* built reflects a man's estimate of the height of his *pon*, his *kan*, and his wealth. So people hold off until the right combination appears. It was even so in the courtly period when kings built pagodas. They always conceived of projects larger than they could handle. The rationale was that their *pon*, *kan*, and the prosperity of the kingdom would grow to meet the demands, and the given monarch considered himself as on his way to being the always hoped for universal ruler, or the Buddha to be. This accounts for many of the partially finished acres of royal efforts to build virtual cities of pagodas.

Furthermore, a pagoda is conceived of as an individual act of giving. It should be tied to a name, to a person. So if a man in fact has the funds and the feeling of *pon* and *kan*, he is not likely to want the lesser merit involved in repairing someone else's pagoda; he will build his own glory. And, finally, a pagoda needs some sort of social group to give it continuity. Its care must be laid on either relatives and the community at large (the only feasible means in Nondwin), or, as in the earlier days on pagoda slaves tied to its maintenance (there are still descendants of such slaves in attendance at the Arakan pagoda), or in the larger communities on a board of trustees who see that the pagoda is kept up.

Because pagoda building is tied to an individual at the height of his pon, kan, and wealth, because he wants his name attached, he builds new ones rather than care for old ones. And because the care of a pagoda requires some sort of continuous social entity, and social groups die out over time (like dynasties, families, and communities), many pagodas have no one to keep them up.

In Nondwin there is a single major pagoda, built four generations ago. There is one smaller pagoda built by U Sein Ko about eight years ago. His smaller pagoda cost for the actual building 6,500 kyats and another 1,000 kyats in the hsungywe and upkeep. It is not yet topped with the final hti and so is not yet a finished pagoda. U Sein Ko, like the kings of old, leaves himself some room for the burgeoning of greater fortune. And since it is not a finished state, it has neither an annual celebration, nor does the community pay attention to it, nor does anyone but those U Sein Ko hires from time to time do anything about its upkeep.

The pagoda, to the East of Nondwin, is both a community and a family responsibility. There is, in Nondwin, a Buddhist Association. This Association plays a part in all the rituals and ceremonies in which more than relatives or neighbors are involved, in rites and celebrations that draw on funds from all the households. The Association is organized with a president, a second president, committee members, and a treasurer. The treasurer of the Association (one of the big rich of Nondwin) is responsible for the gathering of personnel and funds for the celebration of the annual pagoda festival. This year (1960) the pagoda festival fell on the 17th of November, but it always falls on the "dead" moon of the month of Tazaugmon, whatever its calendar date is. On the day preceding the actual pagoda festival, a hsungywe is given in the name of Nondwin. The treasurer writes letters of invitation asking 12 monks to this hsungywe. The monks are invited from Legyi, Nyaungbinhla, Mondaw, Nyanbintha, and Nyaungbinwin, in addition to Nondwin (where there are only two, one in each of the Village monasteries). This is the inner "circle" of about a seven-mile radius from which the people of Nondwin usually invite monks to hsungywe. The outer "circle" is about 20 miles in radius and does not of course reach the exalted abbots of Sagaing or Mandalay. The monks, if they are well, without previous engagement, and able to move, are obliged to attend a hsungywe when they are summoned.

The monks come to Nondwin to take the morning meal at about 11:00 o'clock. They assemble in the house yard of the Association treasurer, and they dine on food that had been collected earlier from the villagers. This small hsungywe is a miniature of all the larger and smaller feedings of monks in a group. It is a standardized hsungywe, and the only differences from one to another lie in the number of

monks and their accompanying koyin or kyaungtha, the elaborateness of the food offered, and the number who stay to hear the final sermon.

The monks are seated on boards, on a raised dais about three feet higher than the laity, who sit at the monks' feet, on the ground. The monks are in the East (mingala or auspicious direction) and face West to the villagers. The men sit in nearly even rows close to the dais and behind and to the sides of the men sit the women. The courtyard is virtually covered by straw mats, and people sit about drinking tea and chewing some of the fried beans or peanuts or pickled tea that are being served. Betel nut is chewed and cigars, of the country variety of hseiboleik, a cheroot made of tobacco and chopped parts of a tree, wrapped either in a corn leaf or a tobacco leaf, and plugged at the smoking end with a rolled corn shuck, are smoked. (This cheroot drops large pieces of lit ash, from the wood fiber, and smoking can be dangerous for a novice, who may, as I did, frequently burn holes in his clothing. The villager may carry around with him a used sardine can as a protective ash tray or use one of the small bowl-like Shan teacups for resting his cigar.) A few hseibyinkeik, the full tobacco cigar, are available. For the monks soda pop is served as well as tea, and they may even get a few cigarettes. Since about 7:00 A.M. when the first monks arrived, people have been drifting in and out of the yard, drinking tea, chatting, smoking. At least one representative from every household comes. Nobody can, or wants to, opt out of this communal ritual. The villagers mainly talk among themselves, and the monks carry on among themselves with equally light-hearted and desultory conversation. As each villager comes into the compound he walks up to the dais, where the monks sit cross legged, one shoulder uncovered, and gives from one to three shikkoes. This the monks do not necessarily acknowledge unless they are spoken to. On leaving, the villager also approaches the dais to give a shikko.

There is in Nondwin an old man who is devotion leader. He is called "Neikban Pointer" in his official capacity. At about 11:00, standing to one side of the dais, he calls out "make ready." The bustle of teacups and the hum of chatter subside. The monks arrange themselves in a line facing the congregation, the elder and more venerable monks in the center, the younger ones at the flanks. They cover both shoulders and stop speaking and laughing. The congregation faces them in a kneeling position. The Neikban Pointer shouts out "Awgatha, Awgatha", and the congregation recites this devotional. Then there is a chant and response between the monks and the laity. First comes the Triple Jewel, then the five precepts. The fadawbwe (basket-like arrangements of banana, coconut, flowers, and fruits), placed earlier in front of each monk, are moved to one side by the koyin. The water blessing is offered. The

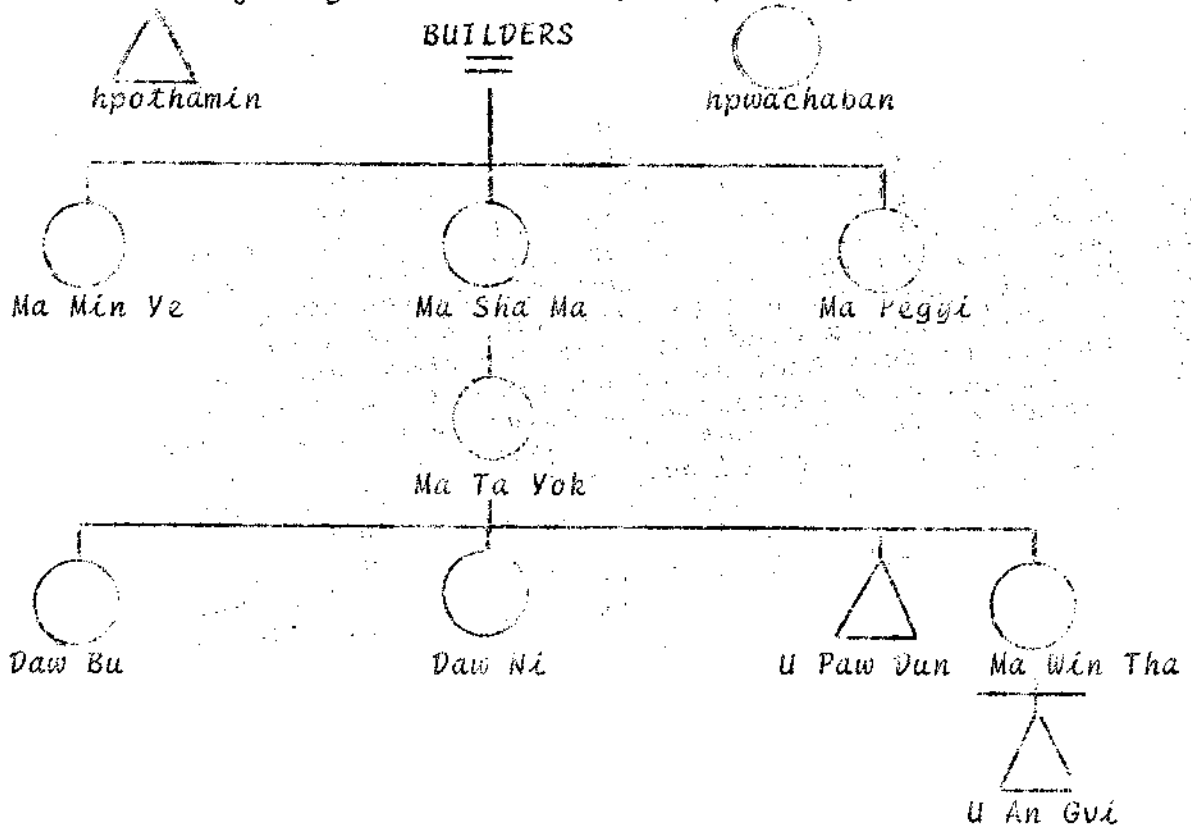
Neikban Pointer (as community representative) gets on the dais with the monks and slowly, drop by drop almost, pours water into a brass bowl while the monks intone in unison the blessing that ensures merit from life to life and gives some kutho to all who are present and all who have participated in this hsungwe. There is a short blessing given by the senior monk for all living things. He then gives a short sermon, most of which like most sermons, concerns giving to the sangha, respecting the sangha, remembering that the sangha is the custodian of the anama and gives an opportunity to see the teaching being lived. With a series of Thadu, Thadu, Thadu (amen, or so be it), the hsungwe is formally over. The monks then eat their special festal curries, and those of the laity who stay on also eat. Ease, casualness, and informality quickly return to the courtyard.

The food for this hsungwe, as well as for the one the day after at the actual pagoda celebration, was donated by the households of Nonawin. The donations were sealed to public knowledge of the wealth of given households. There were three divisions of giving: the rich give food and bananas, the moderately wealthy supply food, and the poor supply bananas alone. The cost of food and bananas was 7 kyats, food alone 5 kyats and bananas 2 kyats. The total collected then was:

Rich	33 X 7ky	231
Moderate	33 X 5	165
Poor	26 X 2	52

448 ky

This was the first year that the costs of the pagoda celebration were apportioned among households. hitherto, it was borne by a single household. This family was descended from the original builders of the pagoda and was in the category of hpaya dayahka, temple supporters follows. The pagoda then is four generations old, and, through all of the



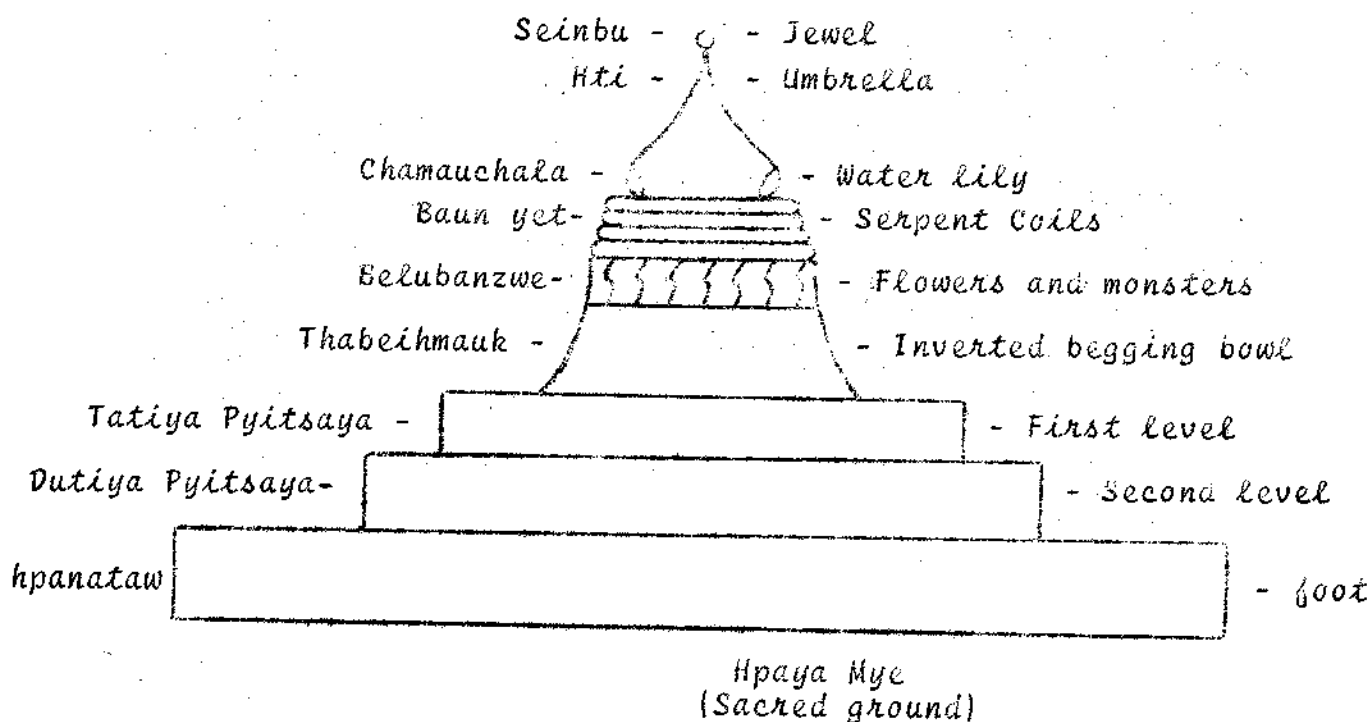
possible kin links, nearly 70 persons in Nondwin could be traced who fall in the category of temple supporter. But the responsibility falls on a brother-sister pair, and, since U An Gyi is in the rich category, whereas his other relatives are not, the burden and honor falls chiefly on him. The founders of the pagoda did not have Burmese names, and village opinion is divided as to whether they were from the Arakan or from the Shan plateau. Historical records are lacking, though my guess, on the basis of proximity of the Shan region and from the fact that Shans did from time to time in the past hold dominion over this part of Burma, is that they were probably Shans. They cannot say why the care of the pagoda descended through female links, and I do not know. U An Gyi's sister, responsible for the provision of tea, spent an additional 25 kyats for the celebration, so that the cost of the celebration was, in total, 473 kyats.

The food for the celebration was collected by the Buddhist Association. The young men of the Association with their musical instruments assembled in the treasurer's house for a march down the main street where each household would give its apportioned amount. For this march they assembled: a large gilt offering bowl (hsundawgyiok) carried by a cross stick on the shoulders of two young men, a large gilded betel box carried by one youth, gilt ornaments in the shapes of birds and flowers each large enough to necessitate being carried by one person, two gilt fans, and two gilded umbrellas. These things are the property of the East Pongyi Kyaung and are borrowed for the occasion. The paraphernalia are royalty and power symbols, and they express the royal style and the feeling of a major increment of kutho. Since the whole community is involved, although U An Gyi is predominant, everyone gets some chance to share in this major mode of kutho building. There is also a vague feeling that those who give together will be reborn together, so that, even though it is each individual who gives, the group context in which each person gives may be recreated in another existence. Buddhist belief in rebirth here acts as a positive means to keep people on good terms with each other, since there is the possibility that they will be reborn together on the one hand, and, on the other, that dissension among households will spoil the celebration and diminish the strength of kutho accumulated when the community acts as a united whole. In this real sense Buddhism is an integrating force; it causes individuals to adjust and accommodate their interests so they may work as a group. The band in the procession is made up of a heavy, triangular, brass gong, which is turned up at the corners and needs two men to carry it on a cross shoulder pole, a skin-covered drum, cymbals, a portable xylophone, wooden clapping blocks, and bamboo split clappers. This band, with its ornaments and a

white banner with Buddhist Association written on it, moves down the street, and each housewife waits with her uncooked rice or meat or bananas and puts it in the large bowl. No body is asked; the band procession moves at its own rate and disbands at the end of the street.

As part of the celebration a group of women, in the household of a first cousin of U An Gyi, are cutting paper into flower-like patterns and are putting these ornaments on bamboo poles, to be later placed on the pagoda grounds. Some men come in and help with the making of decorations, they are distant cousins of U An Gyi, in the category of temple supporter. (No one will bother, for my benefit alone, to trace out the long links of bilateral kinship which put them in that category. It is enough, for them, to know that they are kinsmen and should help out.) The decorations add about 10 kyats to the celebration costs.

The pagoda itself sits at the eastern margin of Nondwin. Since it is in the basic form of most pagodas in the region, its features are worth noting. There is on the pagoda grounds a *tazaung*, a raised platform for placing images (none are in fact here) and a *zaiyat*, a covered pavilion for the congregation and the monks. The form of the pagoda, villagers say, comes directly from the words of the Buddha. They say that when the Buddha was leaving this existence, Ananda asked how he should be remembered, and the Buddha said, "Recall me this way," and he turned over his begging bowl and placed his staff atop it. The



additions of the lotus motif, the monsters, flowers, and the coils representing serpents are elements plainly derived from the cosmology sketched earlier.

At the pagoda itself, the ceremony repeats the *hsungywe* held the day before when the monks arrived. At this event a few dances are performed by the dance teams of Nondwin. The dancers of Nondwin have costumes for the elephant dance and a sort of bird dance. The first are papier-maché elephants moved by dancers. The bird dance has a series of splendid costumes of various mythical birds. This dance group often goes to other villages for pagoda dedications or similar celebrations, when invited. They, for example, went to Nyaungbinwin and danced for a pagoda dedication. The village of Nondwin also contributed 60 kyats toward the placing of the umbrella and *seinbu* atop this pagoda.

This act of giving, the building of a pagoda, has been described at such length because it opens up some interesting paradoxes in the notions of sacrifice and of giving to get *kutho*. In the first place, for villagers, pagoda building is rarely a possibility, yet it is clearly at the top of the hierarchy of volitional giving. It is to be undertaken only at the height of one's *kan pon*, and secular prosperity; it is a token that an individual is willing to give all for the act of remembering the Buddha, and it is a sign, or supposed to be a sign, that one is filled only with thoughts of the Buddha and his teachings. Building a pagoda is clearly the "royal style", the expression of kings and powerful men that they are approaching the fullness of the Buddha. But even this singular act of individuality requires the participation of a social group, and the *kutho* is shared out among, or diffused among, this social group. Furthermore, it is a great secular display. It is an earnest of power and strong *kan* as much as it is *kutho* accruing. Villagers say it is good to put out as much as one is able to in any *kutho*-getting activity, and they mix the worldly and other-worldly in their explanation. The common saying, "Nobody respects a pagoda without gold," nicely juxtaposes the *kutho* and power and display elements. Building a pagoda is supposed to tax or even overtax the resources of the sponsor and the group he can enlist. Impoverishing oneself and one's community for the thought of the Buddha, as an expression of possession by the teaching, is the ultimate in sacrifice. Not many can, or try to, do it. The kings of yore, who, I assume, set the pagoda-building style, often nearly did.

Manning-Nash. 1965

pages 116-124

The Form and Symbolism of the Pagodas (*)

We have studied the social and economic aspects of the Pagodas, illustrated by the two radically different examples of the Great Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, and the Pagoda of the village of Nondwin in Upper Burma.

Despite the great differences in scale and social and economic setting, it is also clear that the overall form is almost identical in both cases.

Basically, a Pagoda is a three-dimensional mandala, a core or center (manda) and a container or enclosing element (la). The explicit symbolism is extremely complex and profound, but as we shall see it is at the same time a symbolic model of the cosmos, or universe, a symbol of the Buddha, a symbol of spiritual development through progressive stages towards nirvana, and a symbol of the Buddhist society.

(*) A Note on the term "Pagoda"

From Glossary, in Ling, 1979:158

"Stupa A memorial mound, used in ancient India to honour great Kings. Adopted by Buddhists as a shrine for relics, such as ashes or bones of deceased Buddhist saints. In its developed form in Indian and South-East Asia is often called a pagoda, and in Thailand a chedi, with the original dome shape extended upwards to a point, covered with a 'hti', or small umbrella-like cover."

From Footnote 10, page 202, in Spiro 1970

"The word 'pagoda' (probably an English hysteron-proteron) of the Sinhalese dagoba, in turn derived from the Sanskrit dhatu garbha, or relic container) is not, of course, a Burmese word. Nor do the Burmese use the Indian stupa to refer to these structures. Some use the term zeidi, derived from the Pali cetya (offering place), but mostly they use hpaya: (Lord), a term which is also used for the Buddha, a monk, or a king.

From Lama Angarika Govinda, 1960:185

"If the symbols of the five elements, as shown in the present diagram of the five Centres of the Buddhist yoga-system are placed one upon the other in their corresponding three-dimensional forms, they demonstrate the essential structure of Tibetan 'Chor terns' (mchodrtan), religious monuments developed from the Indian stupa, which originally served as a receptacle for the relics of the Buddha and his chief disciples. In Tibet, however, they are purely symbolical structures: plastic mandalas.

"The pagoda is the most sacred structure in Buddhism. Neither a church nor a temple, it is in the most technical sense a relic chamber, and in the least technical sense a symbol of the Buddha. In either case it is a triangular or cylindrical structure of solid stone or brick, which (if it is a true pagoda) is an object of worship rather than a structure for worship. Most probably antedating Buddhism (Dutt 1962; 182-183) pagoda worship is an ancient Buddhist practice, prescribed (as we have seen above) by the later Theravada texts for Buddhist reliquaries, and therefore proper.

There is probably no Buddhist society in the world in which the pagoda (Burmese *hpaya*) is more popular than in Burma. Almost nowhere in the entire country can the eye scan the landscape without lighting on a pagoda - usually three or four, often scores. For, in addition to the inhabited village or crowded city, there is no place too remote and no mountain too high to dampen the the zeal of the pagoda builder. Although pagodas differ in numerous details and size - they may range from a few feet in height to the 326 foot Shwe Dagon in Rangoon - they conform typically to the same basic plan. At the bottom is a square terrace, usually made of brick or masonry, on top of which is the polygonal plinth on which the bell shaped body rests. This latter is divided into two parts by an ornamental band. Capping the structure is a cone-shaped spire made up of a number of lotus leaf rings. Attached to the top of the spire is an "umbrella" (*hti*) made of metal (in the case of the famous pagodas, inlaid with precious metals and stones), from which hang the sweet sounding pagoda bells. Pagodas are usually painted white, but the more famous ones are covered with gold leaf. As they ascend to the pagoda platform, the faithful purchase one or more pieces of gold leaf which they apply to the structure.

Pagoda architecture is given a variety of symbolic interpretations. According to one, the base of the Pagoda represents Mt. Meru; the plinth and the two parts of the bell shaped body represents the three worlds of sense, form, and shapelessness; and the spire represents the Buddha. According to another interpretation the bell-shaped body represents an inverted monk's bowl. In still another, the base represent the heavens of the four World Guardians; the plinth represents the Tusita Heaven (where Buddhas reside before they descend to the earth), and the spire represents nirvana.

...At the entrance to the pagoda compound one usually encounters two huge leogryphs made of brick. These are meant to guard the pagoda. In the compound, and close to the pagoda itself, one usually finds images of ogres (*bi:lu*) and winged half-lion, half-human creatures (*manoukthi-ha*). These, too, are guardian figures. Adjacent to the building is a larger pillar holding a streamer

(tagun-daing) on top of which rests an image of a Brahminy goose (hin-tha), while attached to each of its four sides are images of the protector gods of Buddhism (samma deva). The bird is said to represent the wife of the Buddha, who at her death became a Brahminy goose and in that form worshiped her husband. Frequently a pagoda contains many niches with small Buddha images made of brick or plaster. In addition, the platform on which it is built may have on it a number of large bronze images of the Buddha. Some pagodas have a central Buddha image as well. The Arakan pagoda of Mandalay, for example, is famous not for its relics but for its Mahamuni image, which over the years has been so heavily gilded by the faithful that its original shape is no longer recognizable.

A true Pagoda, as I have mentioned, is a Buddhist reliquary. Preferably it contains a relic of the Buddha Himself (or in some instances, like the famous Shwe Dagon pagoda in Rangoon, of a previous Buddha); or, in lieu of that, a relic of a holy monk or of a saint. In Burma the relic, together with numerous other sacred objects, such as Buddha images, and treasure (gold and jewels, for example) is buried in a vault deep inside the structure, forever sealed from the human eye. Hence, the religious rather than social motive for pagoda worship is fairly clear: since there is a relic of the Buddha, He Himself is present there in more than a symbolic sense. This is why the Buddhist does not worship at the pagoda; rather, he worships the pagoda. It is not only a memorial to the Buddha but in some important sense an embodiment of Him. This accounts in part for the reverence with which it is treated, and the enormous wealth lavished upon it."

(Spiro 1970: 202-204)

The pagoda represents the extreme of power in both the sacred and mundane planes. Of the long myth which establishes the history and sacred nature of the Shwedagon Pagoda, one short passage describes the cataclysmic events which literally shook the cosmos when the casket containing the Hair Relics was opened, in order that they could be placed and sealed inside the relic chamber at the core of the Pagoda.

"When Sakka opened the casket to bathe the Hairs there was a tumult among men and spirits. The eight Hairs ascended the sky above seven palms high. The rays emitted by the hairs penetrated up to the heavens above and down

to the Avici Hell. Denizens of the hells and departed spirits saw human beings. The blind beheld objects. The deaf heard sounds. People with bent limbs stretched them out. The dumb spoke distinctly. The earth quaked. The wind of the ocean blew. Mount Meru shook. Lightning flashed. The rain of nine gems fell. All the trees of the Himalayas though not in season bore blossoms and fruits and did homage to the Hair Relics" (We Pin, Shwedagon, Rangoon 1979:12)

The power of the pagodas is not relegated to the distant past. In November of 1961 astrologers throughout Asia predicted a world calamity. Following directives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of U Nu's Union government, 60,000 sand pagodas were built simultaneously throughout Burma, "to avert impending dangers and to achieve complete peace and tranquility in the Union". ('The Guardian' (newspaper) Rangoon Nov. 26 and Dec. 10, 1961 quoted in Smith, 1965:171).

These sand pagodas were to be nine cubits in height, to have nine-tiered spires of brass or iron, and were to be build on December 9, between the astrologically determined hours of 6 am. and 8.24 am. After the completion of each pagoda, nine monks were to be offered vegetarian alms food, and religious texts were to be recited by nine men and nine women for three days." (Smith 1965:171)

The sacred nature of the pagoda, as the focus rather than a place of worship, is clear from Siro's explanation, quoted above. It is therefore not hard to understand why European - especially British - attitudes and behaviour at the pagodas were felt to be profoundly offensive and sacriligious by the Burmese. Two issues stand out from the historic record; firstly the pillaging of the pagoda by Portugese adventurers in 1612, who attacked the Shwedagon and stole the great bell in order to melt it down and re-cast it

as cannon, and later in 1824 when a British expeditionary force took the Shwedagon Pagoda by force and mined shafts into its base, on the conviction that "a large chamber existed in the centre of the Pagoda, full of treasure". (T.A. Trant. officer of the Quarter-Master-General's staff, quoted by We Pin in 'Shwedagon' 1972).

The occupation of the Shwedagon Pagoda by British troops continued for many years, principally since its height afforded a tactically suitable site for the deployment of **artillery** and for an observation post, but also as an explicit political measure, since it was already apparent to the British military command that this Pagoda was a key religious and political symbol for the Burmese people. The Burmese, led by their General, Maha Bandoola, made repeated and courageous attacks on the British positions at the Pagoda, but were repulsed by the superior firepower of the British weapons.

Apart from the constant pillage of gold and silver images and objects by the British troops, their heavy boots tramping the sacred floor of the Pagoda began a second major political issue which was to offend and inflame the Burmese for almost a hundred years. The "footwear issue" has been reviewed and commented by both European and Burmese students of the British colonial period in Burma. I shall cite We Pin.

"The Great Pagoda has always been part of the land and the peoples, and it never has been divorced from historical events. In matters of trade the annual Pagoda fair was famous and attracted visitors from distant countries. In times of unrest, princes sought refuge there. In quiet and prosperous times kings and queens went there to perform high acts of merit. In times of war the Pagoda was the citadel over which pitched battles were fought. In the period of foreign domination of the land and the peoples, it was fitting that the Pagoda should be the centre round which the oppressed peoples could rally. By 1919 the people of Burma were beginning to move against the foreign domination. Two causes round which they could rally were connected with the pagoda. One was the continued military occupation of a part of the Pagoda. At their annual conferences, the General Council of Burmese Associations and the Young Men's Buddhist Association passed resolutions expressing dissatisfaction with the

continued presence of the British military on the Pagoda and demanded a clear statement on the precise date when the military would vacate the premises. A British civil servant serving in Burma at the time wrote this:

"Being in the centre of a fort, with an arsenal in close proximity, the pagoda is in military custody. The presence of an arsenal is a menace to the safety of the famous shrine. A serious explosion would shatter the fabric and irreparably destroy one of the wonders of the world." But the agitation had to continue over a decade before success. In early 1929, bodies of British soldiers buried on the Pagoda were removed with appropriate ceremony to the military cantonment cemetery. In November, 1929, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda was transferred into the hands of the Pagoda Trustees. The west covered stepway held in military custody for 77 years could now be used by pilgrims. A big festival was held in March, 1930, to commemorate the opening of the western approach.

The other political cause had to do with the "shoe question". In 1917, a resolution was passed at the fifth annual conference of the Young Men's Buddhist association. It called for the prohibition of footwear on pagodas, their glebe lands, and in the monasteries of Buddhist monks. It recommended that signs to this effect should be put up at those places.

Foot wear had been prohibited from the days of the Burmese kings. Hiram Cox, the British envoy to the Burmese Court in 1796 wished to observe the regulation and at the same time did not wish to take off his shoes, so instead of going up to the Pagoda platform he watched the people on festival days from a point on the roadway. After the annexation of Lower Burma, the regulation was openly flouted by the Europeans.

The "shoe question" became a national issue and the agitation became nation wide. In 1919, the British authorities issued an order prohibiting foot wear in the precincts of the pagodas. But they attached a rider. The order allowed for exception in the case of employees of the Government entering the precincts on official business. The order did more to stir up the feelings of the people than to appease them. But by then the political movement against the British had begun to gather momentum."

The motive behind the choice of title for this study, "The Secret of the Pagodas" is principally a half-humorous, half-serious attempt by an anthropologist whose work has been rejected by publishers and ignored by professional colleagues, to lure a few others into reading and perhaps, one day, publishing this study. It may be that such a title will attract only those interested in

Flying Saucers and Pyramids, Atlantis and the Bermuda Triangle. But a more precise and dryly academic title, such as "Some aspects of symbol polysemy in religious and political behaviour of S.E.Asia" would not arouse much interest of the casual browser of anthropological shelves in libraries and bookshops.

Of course there is no "secret" about the pagodas. All Buddhists know perfectly well what pagodas are and their multiple meaning in mundane and spiritual life. And the more profound and complex symbolism is evident to all those who practice Buddhist meditation, the degree of depth and complexity apparent depending upon the stage of development. I do not claim to have unravelled any secret, merely to have compiled and made a little more accessible that which has been entirely obvious to Hindu and Buddhist sages for thousands of years, and that which, in my view, is also present in the most ancient of human spiritual endeavours, Shamanism, whose distribution is global and whose antiquity must be reckoned in millions of years.

But in another sense there is a secret, in so far as we are dealing with symbols, and symbols conceal as much as they reveal. Although Einsteinian relativity and post-Einsteinian physics and cosmology are seen, with good reason, by oriental sages, as rather tardy and clumsy gropings towards that which has been astonishingly clear and coherent in the teaching of Buddhist and Hindu spiritual masters, there have been some leading occidental philosophers and scientists who have understood much about symbolism in Eastern religions. Notably Carl Jung and Richard Wilhelm, in "The Secret of the Golden Flower", and the several works of Dr. Evans-Wentz, can bear out this assertion.

Although Jung's views on symbols and the collective cons-ciousness are ignored or even scorned by the current fashions in mainstream of the anthropology of religion, I consider that his approach is the most useful guide to understanding religious symbols.

In the debate about the arbitrary or non-arbitrary nature

of the relation between a symbol and that which it represents, I must differ from those who adopt a linguistic approach favouring an arbitrary relationship, at least where religious or sacred symbols are concerned. Firth, (1973:165) makes an provocative but non-committal review of these issues showing how both the linguistic position, and the "natural" or "Universal" position, exemplified by Mary Douglas and Jung, can be substantiated by the ethnographic evidence from all over the globe. In some ways I believe the argument to be unnecessary, since there must be some symbols which have arisen through convention, and whose original semantic link with those things they represent become lost or disassociated in the course of time. Furthermore there are those symbols, used for commercial and political promotion, in advertising and propaganda, which are deliberate manipulations of obvious psychological associations or behavioural traits in a particular culture at a particular time.

But with regard to the sacred or religious symbol I believe entirely in the validity of Jung's view that:

"A symbol is not an arbitrary or intentional sign, standing for a known and conceivable fact, but an admittedly anthropomorphic - hence limited and only partly valid - expression for something suprahuman and only partly conceivable." (Jung, 1958:152)

In the Burmese symbolic language, the Lotus leaves of the Pagoda are symbols of Unfolding of understanding, or mindfulness (satipassana) the first stage of meditation. The Jewel or Diamond, at the tip of the Pagoda, are symbols of insight (vipassana), as well as being present in the Triple Gem; Refuge in the Buddha, Refuge in the Dhamma, and Refuge in the Sangha. These are the preliminary and successive stages of meditation taught and practised in Burma, as steps along the path towards the ultimate goal of nirvana.

The explicit symbolism of other parts of the Pagoda form, as consciously expressed by the Burmese informants of Manning Nash and Spiro, are that the inverted half sphere or bell shaped

structure represents the Buddha's begging bowl, in turn a distinctive symbol of the monk, of world renunciation and, in its inverted position, must represent the end of the monks path, his dis-incarnation, the cessation of the need to eat and therefore to beg. The attainment of this ultimate goal is further re-stated in the symbol of his staff, which the Buddha placed on top of his bowl, once again because on entering Nirvana he no longer needed its support, his movement finally stilled. The Burmese state that the Spire of the Pagoda is the Buddha's staff, and that it represents Nirvana.

Unconcerned with the doctrinal and other differences between the Mahayana and Theravada forms of Buddhism, since we are dealing with practices and beliefs which are constant throughout Buddhist Asia, and which antedate the formalisation of Buddhism, (according to Spiro and other authorities) it is also reasonable to at least point out the association between the Great Mantra OM MANI PADMA HUM of Mahayana and specifically Tibetan forms of Buddhism, and the symbolism of the Lotus leaves around the base of the dome or inverted half sphere, and the Diamond at the tip of the spire. The complete interpretation of this Mantra is hidden and only perceived by the most advanced Mahayana adepts. But at the most superficial semantic level MANI "means" Diamond, or Jewel, and PADMA "means" Lotus. A very profound and comprehensive treatment of the Great Mantra can be found in Lama Govinda's "Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism", since the immediate and sole aim of the whole book is the explanation of this mantra. The four parts or words of the Great Mantra are treated, with a whole chapter devoted to each part. In fact, the Great Mantra is the Foundation of Tibetan mysticism.

Definitely not the ultimate level of symbolisation in the Pagodas, but as deep as it is advisable to go in the context of the present study is that which was first apparent to me in reading Lama Angarika Govindas "Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism". I have not a single doubt that there are meanings, or levels of symbolic representation which are quite clear to those who practice the successive stages of meditation, but about which it is useless

or impossible to reason. Symbols both reveal and conceal.

At this level, the Pagoda is, as well as a symbol of all these other aspects - the Buddha, the Cosmos, the Society, - also a symbol of the human body as it is represented by the form of the meditating Buddha. Thus the principal organs of the body are represented by symbols, in the cakra system, and in the specific symbolic language of the Pagodas, these body organs, or cakras are represented in their perfected and quiescent or extinguished form. Thus the base of the pagoda represents the seated posture, the lotus posture, where the centre or spire, the crown of the head, is perfectly centered and balanced over the center of the base, the legs in their sitting form, quiescent and without movement. Above the base of the pagoda, and the lotus posture of the meditating Buddha, we find the serpent coils, or the sexual (kundalini) force quenched and converted into spiritual energy. Above the serpent coils we find the lotus petals, which as "The golden Flower", also have to do with the transformation of sexual energy into Light. Above the Lotus petals we have the inverted half sphere, which represents the inverted begging bowl, and therefore the cessation of the need to eat, and in the chakra system, the stomach center. Above the inverted sphere of the Pagoda we find the spire covered by the hti or umbrella, the distinctive and honorific prerogative of the monk to protect his head from the opposed extremes of sun and rain. This represents the head center, and the stilling of illusory cravings and aversions. Finally the spire, which we have seen is explicitly stated to be both the Buddha's staff and also the symbol of nirvana, tapers away into infinity where a diamond at the tip of the Pagoda, as well as representing Perfect Wisdom - the Diamond Sutra, for example - represents the crown of the head or the top most cakra.

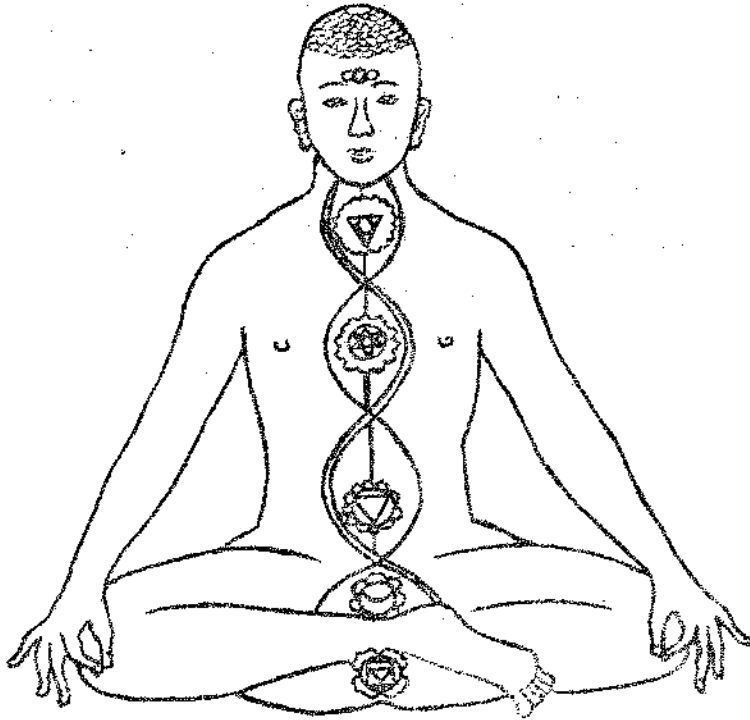
Lama Angarika Govinda shows us how these levels, or cakras, are also symbols of the five elements, and also of the sacred seed syllable of Sanskrit, HUM, in that the form of the HUM is composed of the symbols of ether, air, fire, water, earth, and clearly are further symbolised in the form of the temple of KUMBUM, The

Temple of the Hundred Thousand Buddhas.

Following Lama Angarika's teaching that "In the symbolism of meditative processes, the leading principle is not a theoretical point of view, but the practice and the experiences derived from it". I do not intend to take the matter further. The diagrams and illustrations, which Lama Angarika Govinda juxtaposes and explains, and which I reproduce here, are perfectly explicit and beyond any rational or academic comment. I have neither authority nor capacity to take the matter any further; I can only recommend those who are interested to read Lama Govinda's written work, preceded, perhaps, by John Blofeld's "The Tantric Mysticism of Tibet", as an introduction.

SIMPLIFIED DIAGRAM OF THE CENTRES OF
PSYCHIC FORCE ACCORDING TO THE
TRADITION OF THE KUNDALINI-YOGA

(Lama Govinda, p.146)



SITUATION OF THE PSYCHO-PHYSICAL CENTRES AND
THE THREE MAIN CURRENTS OF PSYCHIC
ENERGY IN THE HUMAN BODY

The vertical axis, corresponding to the spinal column and shown as a simple straight line, represents the *Susumna-Nadi*; the curved double line *Ida-Nadi*, and the opposite curved single line *Pingala-Nadi*. We shall hear more about this in the following chapters.

(Lama Govinda, p.189)

Symbolism of the Seed-Syllable HŪM
as quintessence of the Five Wisdoms

Flaming Drop
(Tib.:thig-le)
Colour: Blue

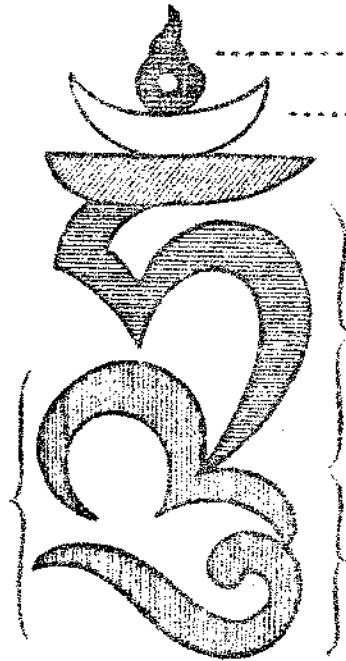
Crescent
Colour: White

Head of 'H'
Colour: Yellow

Body of 'H'
Colour: Red

Vowel-sign
(Upper half:
lengthening
sign)

(Lower half:
the vowel 'U')
Colour: Green



Dharmadhātu
Wisdom
(Bairocana)

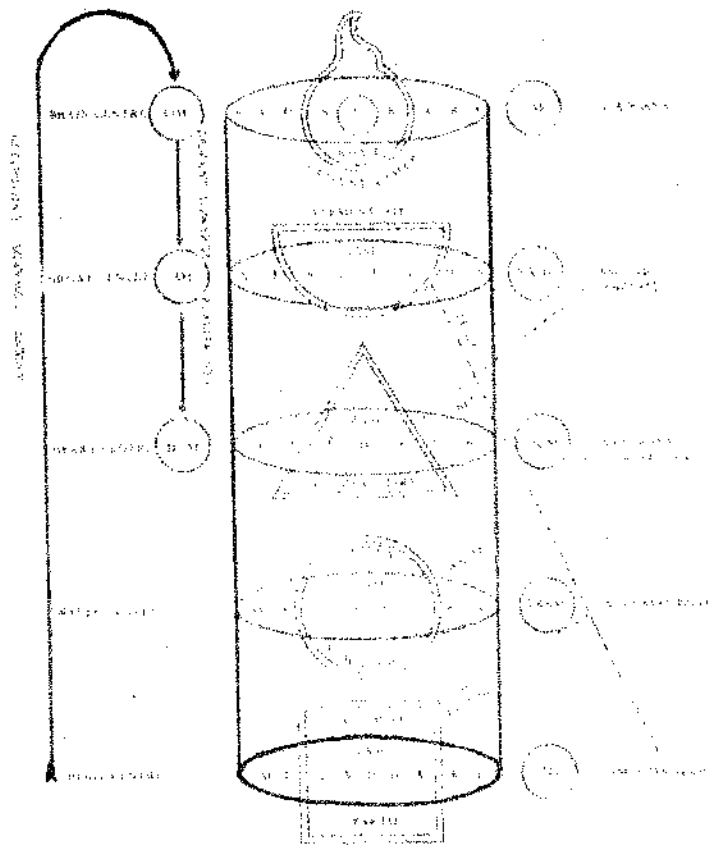
Mirror-like
Wisdom
(Akṣobhya)

Equalizing
Wisdom
(Ratnasambhava)

Discriminating
Wisdom
(Amitābha)

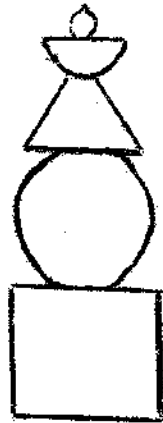
All-Accomplishing
Wisdom
(Amoghasiddhi)

(Lama Govinda, p.184)



RELATIONS BETWEEN CENTRES, SEED-SYLLABLES,
ELEMENTS AND DHYANI-BUDDHAS

(Lama Govinda, p.186)



(Lama Govinda, p.187)

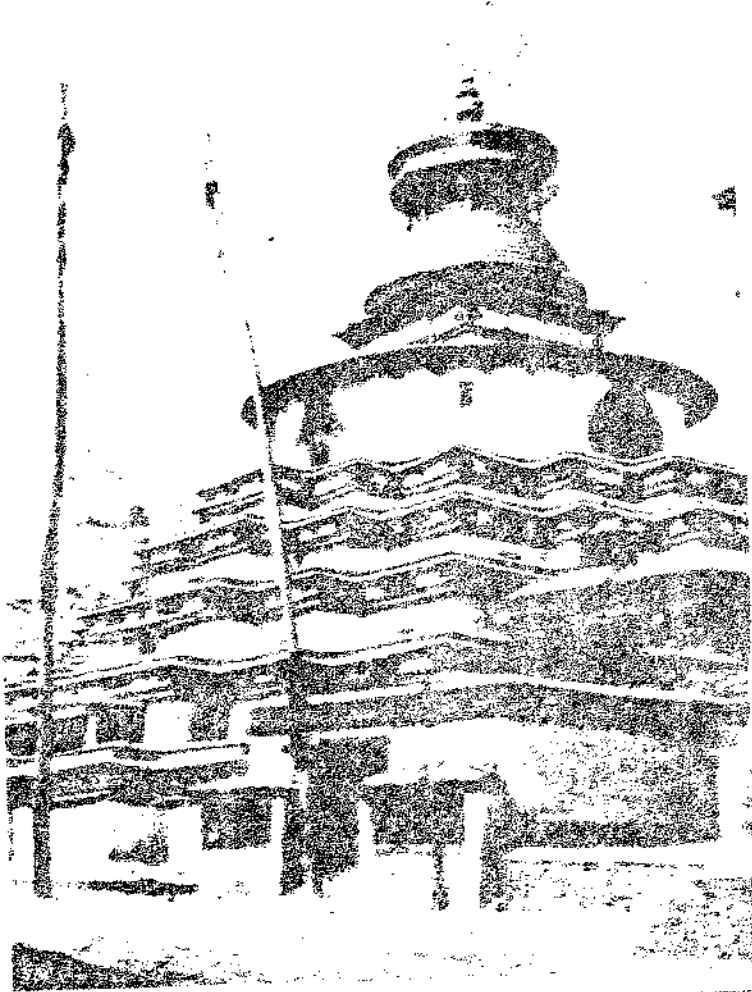
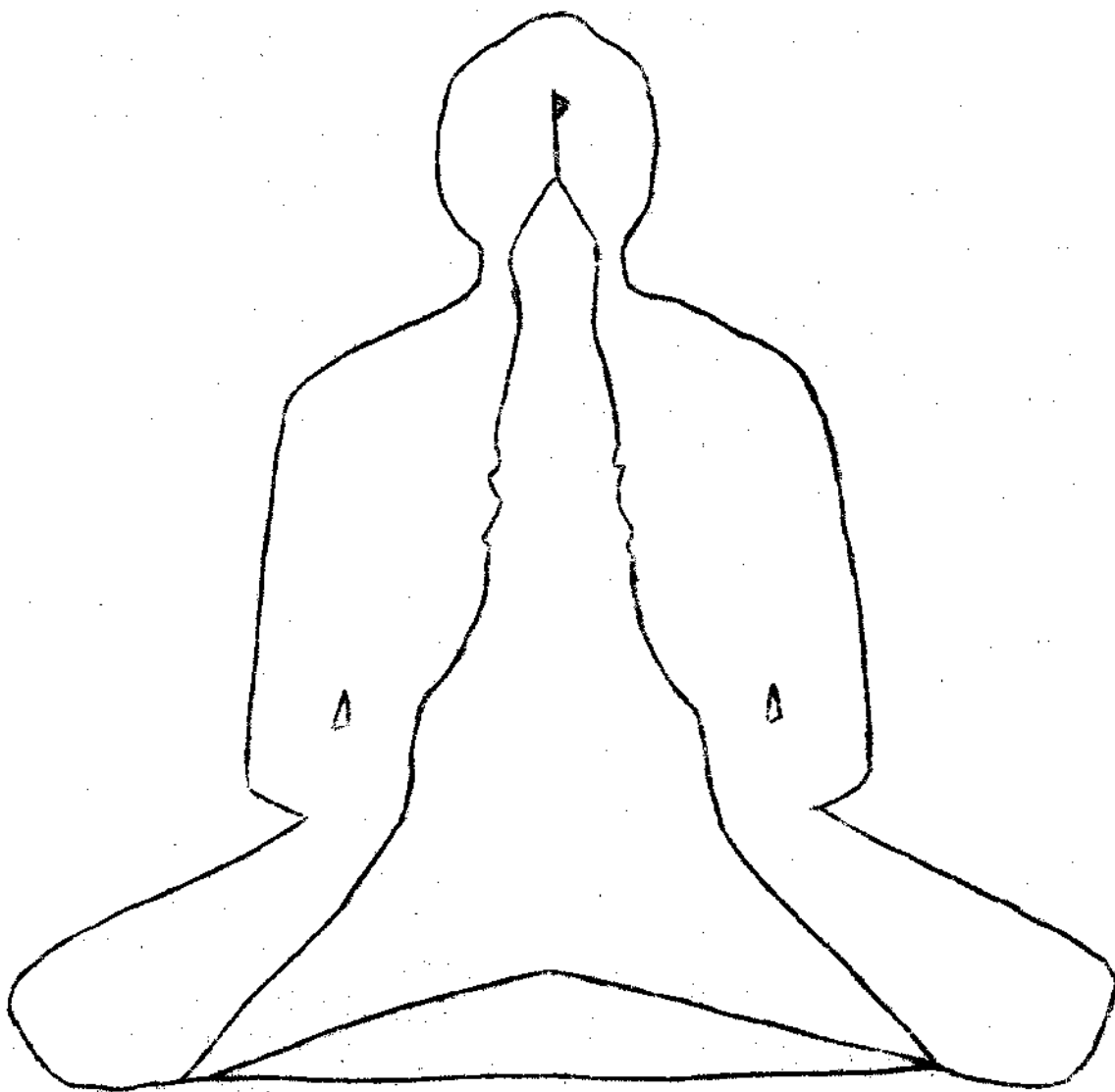


Plate 5

KUMBUM

THE TEMPLE OF THE HUNDRED-THOUSAND BUDDHAS



M. E. Wright

CONCLUSION

To conclude this study I shall make a broad, rather than deep, review of the issues of religion and politics in South East Asia. Since one of the dominant themes has been the ideological confrontation of Buddhism and Communism, as either compatible or conflicting world-views for establishing a framework for belief and action in daily economic, social and political life, both at the level of explicit government policy and at the level of the individual member of these countries, I shall also include some brief observations on comparable issues in Tibet, China and Taiwan.

In one way, the whole idea for this study germinated from reading "The Golden Peninsula" by Charles Keyes at the close of 1979. However I had previously been a student of Professor Tambiah at the University of Cambridge, where his course on "The Religion of South Asia", in 1965 had already stimulated a deep and lasting interest in religions of the east, especially in Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, as well as in the political history of Asia. If the massive American phase of intervention in the long Indochina wars had not made free and non-aligned field research impossible at the very time (1966) when I had to make a choice about which part of the globe I should choose for my doctoral field work, I would have studied the hill tribes in Laos or Cambodia, and would not have passed the last thirteen years engaged in field research and applied anthropology with the nomadic forest tribes of the North-west Amazon forest. However, I believe that a global and varied experience is the essence of Anthropology and am glad that destiny has allowed me to take up again, even if only from a distance and through reading (more than any substantial field work) some anthropological interests which began so long ago.

What puzzled me with Keyes book, especially in the chapter on "Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam" (Keyes 1979:181) was the process by which the fundamental attitudes and cosmology of the Vietnamese had been so rapidly transformed from the Karma

dominated outlook exemplified by the nineteenth century poem, *The Tale of Kieu*, which was "better known to Vietnamese than Shakespeare's plays are to Westerners" (p.242), to an outlook "that through work or labor one realises one's place in society". Vietnamese religious belief and practice had been successively dominated by Mahayana Buddhism or Confucianism of Chinese origin, according to the long history of tides of autonomy and colonisation between China and Vietnam. However, as throughout South East Asia, these formally established religions practised by the ruling elite have the character of what Lewis (1971) has categorised as a central morality cult, which co-exist accompanied with spirit cults practised by the rural and less privileged urban people, or what Lewis has called peripheral cults, which express the frustrations of the socially and economically marginal and oppressed, in cults which are characterised by trance, ecstasy and Spirit possession. This double current in religious behaviour is already very familiar to Anthropology, and has been shown to have an apparently universal distribution.

In Brasil for example, Catholicism is the State religion, in the sense that the primate Cathedral occupies the most central position in the deliberate spatial symbolism of the capital, Brasilia, and is significantly located in the row of Ministeries, Senate, Chamber of Deputies, Presidential Palace etc, with the central urban and interstate bus station only a few hundred metres away. At the same time throughout Brasil there is an amazing proliferation of small protestant churches and various forms of spirit cult, which are frequented by the poor who live in the miserable favelas (shanty towns or slums) at the peripheries of the urban centers.

However, in Vietnam Keyes suggests that it is principally through rigorous land reform and redistribution programs, and also intensive primary education with a strong Marxist-Leninist component, that:

"The discrediting of the Cult of the guardian spirit has been accompanied by a discrediting of the Buddhist monks and astrologers who traditionally served to interpret to villagers what heaven had decreed." (Keyes, ibid. p243)

At the same time, all authorities on religion and politics in Indochina, including Keyes, recognise the important role, even if passive, played by the Buddhists in the long struggle for independence from colonial rule. The French called their earlier effort to suppress nationalistic uprisings "La Guerre des Bonzes", and held that Buddhist pagodas and temples were hideouts for the Viet Minh nationalist guerillas.

Later, in the phase of the American attempt to stop the swelling current of nationalist and communist struggle against colonial domination, the critical ideological incident, which both American and Communist Vietnamese analysts refer to as a kind of turning point in the persuasion of the people, was the self-sacrifice in 1963 of Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk, who in the middle of a main street in Saigon, assumed the Lotus posture of meditation, poured gasoline over himself, struck a match and died motionless and in silence. (Keyes, 1979:228 and "Lotus Flower in Sea of Flame" by Nhat Hanh, 1968)

In Vietnam then, Buddhism appears to have played an important, if passive, role in the long struggle against colonial domination. The same is true, as we have seen, in Burma.

The problem which remains is the extent to which Buddhist belief and practice, after hundreds or thousands of years, can be so rapidly transformed or repressed in the cosmology of the people, even if we do recognise the extreme necessity and all pervading social and economic influence of land redistribution. Our study of Burma has shown the persistence of Theravada Buddhism through British colonial rule, its promotion to State Religion, along with Nat worship, during U Nu's Marxist oriented government, and its toleration by Ne Win's military Socialist dictatorship.

At the same time, the same Theravada Buddhism flourishes under the monarchist - military government of Thailand, where, to contrast with the Marxist Buddhist monks of Burma in the period following the Second World War, we find extreme right-wing monks such as Kittivudho who during the mid-seventies promoted the

Nawaphon movement, a strange combination of Buddhism and militant anti-communism. Kittivudho even re-interpreted some of the Jataka stories, popular tales which are built upon the Life of the Buddha, to demonstrate that killing communists was a commendable and necessary act, which would accumulate merit within the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth. Once again, we see a persistence of tradition established by the warring Buddhist Kings of neighbouring States, who did not seem to follow the basic Buddhist precept of ahimsa - not to harm any being, whether by thought, word or action.

The ability of Buddhism to survive and co-exist with popular and local cults, in all the countries where it has spread, is a well known and commented fact, and contrasts sharply with the extreme intolerance of Christianity, whose missionaries, whether Catholic or Protestant, are determined to conquer all of mankind, even the most remote and independent peoples such as the nomadic forest tribes of the Amazon forest. Whilst the Christian missionaries - at least in modern times - are not militant in the sense of making overt use of the threat or application of violence - fire-arms, bombs, napalm etc - they certainly use every economic, social, cultural and psychological device available in their modern crusade against the religious and cultural autonomy of the "primitive" peoples all over the world, and are always amply supported with money, aircraft, radio-communications, food and medical supplies. They have doctors, and when, instance, American Protestant missionaries operate in Catholic countries, or countries who do not practice or welcome Christianity, they disguise what is in fact The Wycliffe Bible Translation Society as a purely Scientific and secular altruistic organisation, the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

In comparison, Islam seems even more fanatically intolerant and militant, the holy war-cry of "death to the infidels" echoing through the centuries and far across Asia and Africa. But Islam does not seem to have such an extensive or systematic missionary front at work in non-Islam countries.

Returning to Buddhism in South East Asia, I can only quote, once again, Professor Tambiah.

"...let us take for instance Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, which together make up a meaningful belt by virtue of their sharing a common religion - Theravada Buddhism. Through the ages there was communication and interchange between these countries in religious matters. but on first sight today each country appears to differ significantly from the others. Sri Lanka appears to combine radical Socialist politics with an official support for buddhism; Burma on the other hand, combines a general's autocratic and bureaucratic rule with a nominal "secularism" that underplays Buddhism and in distrustful of its political use. Thailand stands on the extreme right; its revered (but relatively powerless) kingship was propped up until recently by a powerful military clique that champions buddhism as the State religion and as a sacred national heritage. These three countries, then, appear to mix politics and religion in different proportions to produce different compounds. Nevertheless, a few decades ago Sri Lanka was ruled by a relatively conservative party (UNP), which tried to keep Buddhism and Politics apart or at least within bounds; in contrast, Burma a dozen years ago was enthusiastically behind U Nu, who tried to combine a fervent Buddhism with democratic and Socialistic politics; and Thailand, after the so-called revolution of 1932, responded at least for a brief spell to Pridi's Socialist, secularist, democratic politics, and its present ferment since October 1973 is partially at least a return of the aspirations of those times. In other words, the structure of the political system and its relation to Buddhism is not necessarily permanent at any time in these three countries. The patterns comprise temporary crystallizations; each society, it would seem, could change its pattern over time, but the patterns themselves constitute a limited set of possibilities. And these possibilities appear to relate to a deeper and underlying and persisting set of dialectical tensions stemming from the relation between Buddhism and the polity in early Buddhism and from the Asokan era in India and, subsequently, from the various Buddhist Kingdoms of South and Southeast Asia of Sinhalese, Mon, Burmese, and Thai extractions."

(Tambiah 1976:518)

If we take our comparative conclusion a little further afield, to Cambodia, Vietnam, China, and Tibet, it appears that Communism reigns as the dominant ideology, and has crushed all Buddhist belief and practice. During the last two years there are

faint glimmerings of hope that the communist regimes of these countries have been opening at least a stern and grudging tolerance for Buddhist and other - belief and practice, but then this may also be no more than a necessary political measure to hope to win a little sympathy of the people, as a kind of salve to the bruising of the human spirit, denied any expression under the intolerant ideological view of Communism.

In Cambodia, under the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot, where 85% of the population are Buddhists, temples were demolished or converted into warehouses. Monks were executed or put to forced labour. Today, under the Vietnam backed Heng Samrin regime, freedom of worship has been proclaimed and a few surviving temples have been restored to public use, but the monkhood is forbidden to any man less than fifty years of age.

In Vietnam, people are free to worship and meditate in what free time they have, but there are few monks who have been spared or allowed to practice their role as guides to the spiritual needs of the people, and temples and pagodas are adorned with banners and statues of Ho Chin Minh to remind them that Buddhism is tolerated only as an appendage of the State. (David de Voss. 1980).

In Laos, the Supreme Patriarch, Pra Yodkaw Vachirorods, is quoted as saying: "Buddhism is alienated and separate from the people. Religion is dying in Laos". (David de Voss. 1980)

In Tibet, invaded by the communist Chinese in 1959, "hundreds of monasteries were destroyed and the monkhood dismantled. The land owned by the monasteries was confiscated and divided into peoples communes. In 1959 there were 120,000 monks; today there are about 2,000, and only 10 monasteries remain out of 2,464. ...In 1976 after the downfall of China's "Gang of Four" the Peking Government admitted to violating its stated policy of respecting religious beliefs and cultural heritage in Tibet. A new policy of moderation began. The move was also designed to gain popular support for social stability and modernization." (Audrey Topping, 1979:72)

Finally, to compare certain parallel but inverted events in communist Mainland China and Taiwan, it is interesting to note that whilst in 1978 the Chinese Press openly criticised the "Little Red Book" and stated that Mao Tse Tung "was a man, not a God", accompanied by the removal of Mao's portraits and statues from public places, in Taiwan there has recently been concluded the posthumous de-ification of Chiang Kai Shek with the completion of an enormous mausoleum for posterity's continued reverence of his "sacred" mortal remains, and this mausoleum follows exactly the formal architecture, whose symbolism we have already examined in all its aspects, of the ancient Pagoda.

To close, we should bear in mind that perhaps the least concerned with the current tide of events in the confrontation between Buddhism and Communism are the Buddhists themselves, since the essence of the Buddhist philosophy, faith and way of life is that the human condition, samsara, is what the Buddha explained as anicca impermanence, dukkha suffering, and anatta, the non-existence of the self.

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