

**GRAND RELIGIO-MORAL CONCEPTIONS
OF KINGSHIP : THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS
OF TRADITIONAL BUDDHIST AND BRAHMAN
RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES IN THE THAI POLITY**

Pisan Suriyamongkol*

Introduction

Individuals as well as nations are unavoidably concerned with the past which forms a framework for present attitudes and often a justification for present actions. This general observation has particular relevance to the historical development of the Kingdom of Thailand whose people, like many of the other peoples of Asia, have excellent reasons to look with pride to their past and to be attentive to their own future. There has been striking continuity in the government of Thailand since the establishment of the first viable kingdom of Sukhothai around A.D. 1287.¹ During the more recent period when all the other Southeast Asian states were colonized by Western powers, Thailand retained her independence and her political tradition, thus experiencing a less severe break with the past. This is not to say that Thai history has been unaffected by discontinuities, including some created by the presence of European powers in the region. But it does suggest that various features of contemporary Thai society have been determined in part by the grand religio-political-moral conceptions of kingship and related social group formations, for example.

Thus to better understand Thai politics and behavior, this paper proposes to study two related main elements of Thai traditional polity. One is to trace early Buddhist and Brahman political thoughts and their subsequent developments into a kingship concept. And two is to assess the socio-political implications of Buddhist and Brahman religious principles in the Thai polity and related formation of social groups.

*Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public Administration The National Institute of Development Administration.

Buddhist Concept of Kingship

Early Buddhist political thought expressed views on the origin, nature, location, objectives and administrative change of political authority in the form of kingship. Monarchy was the most dominant political institution of the Buddha's time. In his days, as today, there were rulers who governed their countries unjustly. People were oppressed and exploited, tortured and persecuted, taxed excessively and punished cruelly. The Buddha was deeply concerned by such inhumanities; however, he was realistic enough to recognize that monarchy had come to stay, and as far as he could foresee, it would remain the dominant form of political organization. He and the early Buddhists, therefore, came to terms with the institution of monarchy and proceeded to formulate their own political philosophy in an endeavor to influence its development and final form.²

To understand the specific Buddhist theory of kingship we must first examine the early Buddhist view of kingship as it actually functioned during that age. Professor Gokhale has brilliantly presented the early Buddhist view of kingship in a paragraph which admits of no improvement :

The first, and perhaps the most important, characteristic of kingship that the early Buddhist texts point out is its overwhelming power. In its destructive aspects, royal power is often thought to have the calamitous potential of a conflagration or a flood. It was often exercised arbitrarily, resulting in unpredictable violence and expropriation of people's property. Moreover, the kings are always greedy, whatever the extent of their own opulence, and are always searching for pretexts allowing them to acquire more wealth and territory. They are generally intolerant of dissent from their own views, their way-ward wrath often resulting in the death or deportation of some of their subjects. Finally, the fear of their tyranny is so constant and great that some people are compelled to flee to the wilds or repair to the sanctuary of a monastic order for their own safety.³

Despite the undesirable propensities of some kings, kingship was regarded as an institution absolutely essential to orderly human life and to the institution of religious order (*sāsana*) in early Buddhism.⁴ But Buddhism was also critical of kingship as it was practiced at that time. For examples, early Buddhist literature denounced the science of exercising coercive power (*khattavijja*) and also rejected the notion of self-interest politics (*arthashastra*). Pali canonical text (*Digha Nikaya*) indicates that *khattavijja* belongs to a "group of low arts" and "wrongful occupation."⁵ The Buddhist view is thus opposed to self-interest and it advocates the

unqualified supremacy of the moral law over the affairs of government. The Buddhist theory of kingship is also linked to the earlier expressed views on the origin and nature of the state, its objectives and administration and changes of political authority. Such views can be found in *Theravāda*, *Sarvastivāda* and early *Mahāyāna* texts.⁶ Professor Gokhale and Professor Sarkisyanz briefly summarize these views as follows :

...in the very beginning in the pristine state of humanity, all men were virtuous. Each respects the rights of others and fulfilled his own obligations conscientiously. There was no theft, there was no lying or cheating and there was no violence. With such idyllic conditions, the state was superfluous as a regulatory agency and hence did not exist...⁷

But later humans lost their original perfection because they had fallen into the Illusion of the Self which was also associated with the development of material want caused by the instinct of appropriation.⁸ Therefore, "the standard of human behavior deteriorated. Untruth, deceit theft and violence ruled the lives of men... and might prevailed over right."⁹ This state of anarchy subsequently caused men to elect one among them to be the king, and to empower him to enforce law and order. Thus the first king elected was called "acclaimed by the many"—*mahāsammata*¹⁰ which led to a possible interpretation of the monarchy as requiring popular election, a so-called social contract theory for kingship as described in the *Dhammasattha*.¹¹

But the development of kingship as an institution had passed far beyond the notion of social contract theory. The power of the king had come to rest on the possession of certain tangibles and intangibles. Early Buddhist literature, such as the *Tesakuna Jātaka* described the concept of five powers which are the bases of kingship. They are strength of arms, strength of wealth, strength of ministers, prestige of high birth and strength of intellect.¹² Perhaps the last two are the greatest of royal strengths, for kingship is generally regarded as a reward for meritorious action (*karma*) performed or acquired in former lives. And the Pali texts also generally insist that "a king be a *khattiya* (Lord of land) and belong to a family with a hoary lineage."¹³ According to the *Dhammasattha*, a good king must abide steadfast in the ten kingly virtues. He is expected to be charitable, moral, sacrificing, just, humble, penitent, nonwrathful, nonviolent patient and harmless. It is by these virtues that the ideal king is seemingly a moral king. He should also subserve the *Dharma*, the universal law; and only through it can he justify himself as the king of Righteousness and attain to the dignity of a *cakravartin*, the universal sovereign.¹⁴

This whole complex of Buddhist thought had, in fact, constructed a picture of a world as a coherent system. It made use of the cosmological mode of thought which already existed in the Indian milieu. The basic structure of cosmology is that "framework of concepts and relations which man erects...for the purpose of bringing descriptive order into the world as a whole, including himself as one of its elements." The state was conceived as a microcosmos, paralleling the macrocosmos, and in ways which are complex and not always self-evident, Buddhism came to be the key to the universe and the king is the key to the organization of its worldly aspect. The king is the center of the socio-political system, the "Lord of Lives."¹⁵

However, the most distinctive element introduced in the concept of kingship was the acceptance of a higher universal order as the guiding spirit behind the state.¹⁶ Here *Dharma* as a constitutional concept was applied to politics and is of great significance for understanding the configuration of Siamese political behavior and institutions. In theory, it insisted on the principle of nonviolence, noninjury and compassion in statecraft. However, it should be noted that the use of force is not completely ruled out. In the *Anguttara Nikāya* the Buddha is reported as saying that one of the five qualities that enables a king to rule abidingly is his strength in the four divisions of his army who are loyal and alert to commands.¹⁷ The *Anguttara Nikāya* also declares *Dharma* as the ruler of rulers. the highest in the world. The king must rely just on *Dharma*, honor *Dharma*, esteem *Dharma*, take the *Dharma* as his "standard" and "mandate" and set the *Dharma* as "watch and bar and ward for folk within his realm."¹⁸ This notion is also significant in the sense that it upholds the superior status of *Dharma* and defines precisely the relationship between the *Dharma* and political power.

Brahman Concept of Kingship

The central brahmanical concept of the genesis of the world, society and kingship is markedly different from Buddhism in its stress on ontology. Hindu building blocks are notions of self, deity and *atman*, etc., as existent entities. According to this belief the Brahman concept "conjoins divinity with the process of creation of the world and its beings, and also with the creation of the sacred law and codes of conduct, as a single, total, unitary phenomenon. The creation of nature and the creation of culture are part of a single process."¹⁹ This creative process is in contrast with Buddhism which essentially moves forward, not by divine energy, but by the karmic energy produced by the degenerative and immoral acts of human beings themselves.

The brahmanical concept of social order and foundation is based on the origin of *varna*, or status order. The four *varnas* (Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra) are said to have sprung from the primeval man's body which is a

creation of the divine creative principle. The Brahman is from his mouth and is assigned teaching and studying the *Veda* (the ancient sacred literature of Hinduism), sacrificing for his own benefit and for others, giving and accepting alms. The Kshatriya (ruler) is from his arms. He is assigned to command, to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study the *Veda*, etc. The Vaisya (traderfolk) come from his thighs. They are to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study the *Veda*, to trade and to cultivate the land. And the Shudra (work people) come from his feet and they are given one occupation only, to serve meekly those three castes mentioned previously.²⁰

The dharmashastric literature discusses the king's activities and functions as part and parcel of a comprehensive scheme of the duties and codes of conduct of the social units. His duty is primarily that of protection and this consists of wielding of *danda*, that is, the infliction of punishment and the exercise of coercive force whenever and wherever violation of *Dharma* occurs. But the ruler's most important duty is to uphold and preserve the social order, particularly the order of *varna* as commanded in the canon including the punishment of those actions that lead to confusion and disorder. While the king has the function and duty of enforcing the law, it is the Brahman who has the best knowledge of the canon. And by virtue of his own code of conduct and place in the social order, the Brahman is the creative interpreter, codifier, teacher and adviser on *Dharma*. The Brahman's role thus is to guarantee the social order. As a result power and authority are possessed and exercised by both king and Brahman. But the Brahman's way is superior because he is firstborn, and more importantly, the *guru*.²¹ As Professor Ghoshal explains this superiority.

The Brahmana is entitled to the position of domestic chaplain of the king in accordance with the old Vedic theory of dependence of the temporal power upon the spiritual.²²

In addition, we may see the Brahman's superior authority based on the fact that he knows and expounds the law, whereas the king implements it through *danda*.

But Manu, one of the dharmashastric writers, proclaims that the Lord created the king for the protection of his whole creation and that the king is formed of the particles of eight deities; Indra, Wind, Yama, Sun, Fire, Varuna, Moon and Kubera (Lord of Wealth).²³ This not only supported an old idea about the origins of kingship, but also added a divine composition to the idea of kingship. This new idea is seen as a starting point of historical and religious development in the kingdoms of Farther India, generally speaking Southeast Asia. As Coedes sums up this new development :

In the Indianized kingdoms of Southeast Asia, the Hindu cults developed even further a tendency they had already shown in India and eventually became royal cults. This was particularly true of the worship of Siva. The essence of royalty, or, as some texts say, the "moi subtil" of the king, was supposed to reside in a *linga* placed on a pyramid in the center of the royal city, which was itself supposed to be the axis of the world. This miraculous *linga*, a sort of palladium of the kingdom, was thought to have been obtained from Siva through a Brahman who delivered it to the king, founder of the dynasty. The communion between the king and the god through the medium of a priest took place on the sacred mountain, which could be either natural or artificial.²⁴

From this passage it is clear that there is evidence of the cosmological basis of state and kingship in Southeast Asia. "As the universe, according to Brahman and Buddhist ideas, centers around Mount Meru, so that smaller universe, the empire, was bound to have a Mount Meru in the center of its capital which would be, if not in the country's geographical, at least in its magic center. It seems that at an early period natural hillocks were by preference selected as representatives of the celestial mountain."²⁵ Such was the case with the Khmer empire in the ninth century A.D. The first Angkor city of Yasodharapura was bounded by a hugh square of about two and a half miles on each side, with its sides facing the cardinal points and with the Phnom Bakheng, a small rocky hill, as its center. An inscription describes this mountain in the center of the capital as "equal in beauty to the king of mountains," that is to say, Mount Meru. But more frequently, the central mountain was purely artificial and was represented by a temple only.²⁶

A relatively clear relation between state and universe thus may be obtained by putting together all evidence found in numerous passages in literature and inscriptions, in the titles of kings, queens and officials, in the cosmic numbers of queens, ministers, court priests, provinces, ect., in rites and customs, in works of art, in the lay-out and sturcture of capital cities, palaces and temples.²⁷ In addition, Coedes' summary quoted above clearly signifies a reversed relation between the king and Brahman. It was the king who became divine, and the Brahman was a vehicle for this union between god and king. This represents a subtle, but important change from the classical Indian formulation of the relation between Brahman and the king, as discussed earlier.

The Socio-Political Implications of Traditional Buddhist and Brahman Religious Principles in the Thai Polity and Related Formation of Social Groups

Institutionalization of Buddhist ideals of kingship in Thailand, and some of the Buddhist political, social and religious ideals of kingship can be traced back to the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Bangkok periods.

King Rama Khamheng said the following about his role in administering social and political justice :

...If commoners, nobles or chiefs have a dispute, the king makes a proper inquiry and decides the matter with complete impartiality. He does not enter into agreements with thieves and receivers. If he sees rice belonging to others; he does not covet it, and if he sees the riches of others he is not envious... If the king captures warriors or enemy soldiers, he neither kills them nor beats them. In the gateway of the palace a bell is hung; if anyone in the kingdom has some grievance or some matter that is ulcerating his entrails and troubling his mind, and wishes to lay it before the king, the way is easy : he has only to strike the bell hung there. Every time King Rama Khamheng hears this appeal, he interrogates the plaintiff about the matter and gives him an entirely impartial decision.²⁹

This extract from King Rama Khamheng's speech indicates the political need to attract followers (a form of political ingratiation), particularly in the pioneering period of early Sukhothai when the population had to be induced to come under its rule as a condition of asserting *de facto* as well as *de jure* independence. It also obviously expresses the Buddhist view of the immense significance of the king's attitude toward righteousness in relation to his subjects. In its simplest form it means that the king, by his example, influences for good or for evil the moral stature of his subjects, and therefore, causes their happiness or misery.

The use of an audience bell persisted through the Ayutthaya period and the right of a subject to petition the king still exists today.²⁹ These quotes clearly represent an idealized picture of the society, but they show what kind of an impression the kings sought to make and the kind of society that the kings wanted to model.

Curiously, the monarch's legislative power appears to be limited.

If it was not a day for the recital of the law, King Rama Khamheng... would mount and sit on the stone slab and let the assembly of members of the royal family, its nobility, and the people administer the country together.³⁰

The passage clearly indicates in theory, that the king's function was to preserve the "sacred law." But the king had both the right and the duty to

give meaning and application to this fundamental law.³¹ In so doing, royal prescriptions were enacted according to the *dharmasattha*, a system in which authority of the royal orders derives from the authority of a supreme *Dharma*.³²

Consequently, there emerged the *Rajasatra*, a large collection of royal edicts which were periodically codified. According to the *dharmasattha*,

...the ideal monarch abides steadfast in the ten kingly virtues, constantly upholding the five common precepts and on holy days the set of eight precepts, living in kindness and goodwill to all beings. He takes pains to study the *Thammasat* and to keep the four principles of justice, namely : to assess the right or wrong of all service and disservice rendered to him, to uphold the righteous and truthful, to acquire riches through none but just means and to maintain the prosperity of his state through none but just means.³³

The inscriptions of 1292 stresses the importance of this law in Sukhothai kingship.

That Rama Khamheng is indeed the chief and lord of all the Thai, is the teacher and preceptor teaching all the Thai truly to know what is merit and what is the Law. ...He brings up every inhabitant of these villages and cities in accordance with the Law.³⁴

The foregoing presents only some of the evidence which indicates that the early Sukhothai kings recognized the significance of Buddhist kingly virtues and the acquisition of Buddhist knowledge, insofar as religion was an important integrating mechanism in the formation of the new society. Indeed, the claim of King Rama Khamheng that the people of Sukhothai were charitable, pious and devoted to almsgiving and had faith in Buddhism and observed the precepts of Buddhist lent³⁵ shows not only how central Theravāda Buddhism was in the formation of Kingdom, but also implies that the people of Sukhothai were encouraged to follow the royal style -- a style which served as a symbolic instrument of political integration and legitimacy.

The significance of Buddhist kingship ideals is further demonstrated by the continuing importance of the regalia, such as the king's fan, sword, throne, and harem, and his appropriation of such powerful symbols as the white umbrella, sacred jewels, white elephant and others. Of similar import is the role of the Emerald Buddha, which is believed to be extremely important in protecting the country and its people. During World War II Marshal Phibunsongkhram required his cabinet members to swear in front of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha that they would be loyal to the nation and would execute the national affairs to the best of their ability and pray for national protection.³⁶ The majority of these regalia,

statues and sacred jewels, etc., contain fertilizing, prosperity-conferring qualities. In them virtue, merit and power are combined.

The Thai kingship shifted to brahmanical concepts of cosmology and kingship as the Ayutthayan kingdom gained power and control over Sukhothai around A.D. 1378, particularly after the defeat of the Khmer kingdom and the sacking of Angkor Thom in 1431 by King Boromaraja II. Consequently, Ayutthaya borrowed many concepts of political institutions, vocabulary, system of writing and art forms from Cambodia.⁸⁷ By the end of the fifteenth century, Ayutthaya court was rigidly formalized according to Brahman cosmological concepts. At the apex stood the monarch, who by then had been elevated to the status of a god-king to whom all respect was due and from whom all authority flowed. And because of this concept of Brahman kingship and its rituals, Ayutthaya contributed more complex features to the socio-political structure and form than did Sukhothai.

Perhaps the central role of the divine monarch in relation to the nature of the traditional Siamese state and its political and social structure, is better understood in terms of a system based on the compass with the principle of dual classification. As Heine-Geldern writes :

... the system based on the compass was largely supplemented and modified by the division into offices of the right and left hand, right and left in this case referring to the place on the side of the king due to the respective office bearer on ceremonial occasions. As the king, when sitting on the throne, always faced the East, right corresponded to the South and left to the North. In Siam, for instance, there were a major and a lesser queen, each of the right and of the left. Civilian officers had their places on the left of the king, officers of the army on his right, i.e. "in the South," because the planet Mars, connected with war was considered to be the planet of the South. Indeed, the population of Siam was divided into the two classes of the right (South) and of the left (North). The former had to render military and the latter civilian services.⁸⁸

This system based on the compass sets symbolic boundaries for the purpose of containing power. As Professors Riggs and Tambiah contend, the traditional Thai political and social structures are more consistent with religious concepts and principles than concepts such as rational bureaucracy and territorial and functional orientations.⁸⁹

Riggs' study of the traditional Thai polity is basically founded on Heine-Geldern's cosmological viewpoint. This viewpoint postulates a correspondence between the microcosmic world of men and the macrocosmic universe of gods. The principle of correspondence (which is unrelated to rational orientations) is applied to

the role of the divine monarch, palace architecture and bureaucratic organization in order to assure the welfare and prosperity of the state. The significance of this for the behavior and conduct of social groups and individuals within the society is noted by Riggs :

Indeed, the design of palaces so as to match the universal order provides an architectural framework within which the organization of government takes form. *From this standpoint it is not functional or territorial criteria which determine architectural patterns; rather it is the structure of the palace which shapes the conduct of its inhabitants.* Each wing or court of the palace had its corresponding officials, and the salient characteristic of each office, therefore, was its location, or better, its topological identity. *Consequently, such categories as east and west, right and left, center, rear and front are more germane to the traditional perspective than any particular function or domain which may, in the course of time, come to be associated with a given palace or court.*⁴⁰

Thus, Riggs argues that (1) the cosmological principles provide the basis for the structure of the government, and this structural pattern, in turn, shapes the conduct of its inhabitants both social groups and individuals. (2) The palace structure is relevant to the cosmological architecture but has nothing to do with any particular in function or domain which became associated with palace structure in the course of time. In other words, Riggs separates the palace structure which is based on cosmological principles from the practical territorial and functional considerations of administrative practice. He then elaborates further that "the cosmological principle was carried far down through the hierarchy of officialdom, as revealed by the numbers of office bearers."⁴¹ But he stresses that their official roles were originally conceived in cosmological terms and not primarily in either functional or territorial terms. Riggs admits that there are functional and territorial aspects to official duties and, through time, a range of shifting duties was undoubtedly assigned. Consequently, Riggs argues that "it is possible to substitute functional or territorial for cosmological names of agencies, but the result is a distorted and anachronistic image of the system."⁴²

As far as a cosmological perspective is concerned, Riggs is justified in rejecting the validity of the rational/functional approach used by Wales, as well as by several other scholars, including Vella, Mosel, Wilson and Siffin. But insofar as he insists that it is the structure of the palace which shapes the conduct of its inhabitants and separates the cosmological principle from the territorial and functional practice of government, he mistakenly injects a fallacy and a contradiction into his interpretation.

Heine-Geldern clearly expounds the basic notion of the cosmological principle as follows :

The primary notion...is the belief in parallelism between Macrocosmos and Microcosmos, between the universe and the world of men. According to this belief humanity is constantly under the influence of forces emanating from the directions of the compass and from stars and planets. *These forces may produce welfare or work havoc, according to whether or not individuals and social groups, above all the state, succeed in bringing their lives and activities in harmony with the universe.*⁴³

To produce welfare and prosperity, not only must the state be organized according to universal order, but its inhabitants must live and act accordingly as well. It is not primarily the structure of the palace or government that shapes the conduct of its inhabitants; rather, it is the cosmological belief which must be seen as a totality. To use Professor Tambiah's words, the belief "fused (conduct) together in an ordered, unitary nondualistic view."⁴⁴ As a consequence many individuals today, including, most notably, prosperous and sophisticated urbanites and power-wielding politicians and generals, still believe that they may attain harmony if they follow properly the astrologers' indications, the lore of lucky and unlucky days, and many other minor rules which affect their power, merit, bliss and prosperity. Clearly, the root of this kind of practice is the cosmological principle.

The interrelationship between Buddhism/Hinduism and Thai kingship is intimately linked to the formation of social groups as well. As presented earlier, the main basis of social organization was that the king owned not only the land within the kingdom, but also the people (who, obviously, owed allegiance to him). The Thai king was the *Phra Chao Phaendin* (the Lord of the land), the *Chao Chiwit* (the Lord of life) and so on. But, in practice, only the upper level of political hierarchy, i.e. the princes and nobles who ran the government bureaucracy, owed direct allegiance to the king. The staff of each governmental unit was made up of personal clients of princes or nobles who held offices. An intricate system of double allegiances was used to integrate the kingdom. Loyalty was due to one's immediate superior, to the person who appointed and/or protected him and to one's elder relatives in the king's services. The formation of social groups based on a formal patron-client system was thus developed from top to bottom, radiating out from the king through members of the royal family, nobles and commoners. It should be noted however, that the vast majority of this agricultural society were the *phrai* (commoners). The government controlled them from far away. The only channel through which their voices could be heard and from which governmental assistance could be given was their *nai* (direct superiors). Consequently, the relation-

ship was a dyadic and contractual one in which the *phrai* offered gifts and services to their *nai* in return for aid and protection.⁴⁵

Looking from a different perspective, Akin suggests that the proliferation and duplication of administrative systems in which officials traditionally derived their income from taxes and fees--that is, from "eating the town" (*kin muang*)--was characterized by patron-client relations. The following lively account by Akin provides a sociological reason for that phenomenon and deserves to be quoted in full.

Most noble officials were judges of one type of case or another, for the administration of justice was divided among various *krom*. These were what H.G. Quaritch Wales called departmental courts. In the provinces each official held his own court to decide cases appertaining to his department (*krom*). To be a judge in a case was a lucrative business. Luang Chakkhapani tells us that when an official of the rank equivalent to Chao Krom (Krom Chief) realized that his income was insufficient, he could request a favor from his superior by asking the latter to let him conduct the trial at his own home. This was profitable for, while the trial lasted, both parties to the litigation and also the witnesses had to stay at the home of the judge. During the trials then, relatives and friends of both parties would bring food and other things to the judge's house for them. In order to please the judge they would also bring him gifts of money and food. Further, when the official was allowed to conduct a trial at his house, he had the prison at his house, and could put either party or both in prison, have either of them flogged, or put in chains. One can see that the situation was most tempting for the judge to take bribes and blackmail the litigants, and such cases were not lacking. . . . There was, however, a snag in this profitable business. For there was the right for either party to appeal against the conduct of the trial, stating, for example, that the judge had taken a bribe from the other party. As Luang Chakkhapani tells us, officials who were judges of low rank, therefore, tried to protect themselves by *fak tua* with those officials sitting on the Court of Appeal. Thus an informal client and patron relationship was created between a lower ranked noble and a higher ranked one with the expectation that the latter would give aid and protection.⁴⁶

To *fak tua* is to "give oneself" temporarily to a noble or a person of superior status. Thus, Akin speaks of informal clientship which developed within the formal organization. Among the princes and government officials, clients expected aid, protection and promotion in return for their gifts and services. In

this situation it seems more likely that mutual benefits accrued. But there were informal patron-client relations between the nobles and commoners as well. Namely, a *Phrai* (commoner) might seek protection from a patron with a higher rank than his *nai* (noble). Clearly individual peasants had little to offer to build such relationships except for small gifts and services.

From the second half of the Ayutthayan period on another set of informal patron-client relations discussed by Akin developed between the nobility and Chinese immigrants.⁴⁷ Traditionally, Thai society is characterized by a two-fold division of the population--the peasantry and the ruling officialdom. Thus there emerged a need for commercial go-betweens to carry out various aspects of trade, especially foreign trade. In addition, the impact of industrialization and modernization in late nineteenth and twentieth centuries further increased opportunities for commercial expansion, principally in the realm of exports and imports and retail trade. Since the social goals of the indigenous people continued to be realized within the framework of the traditional class structure, the immigrant Chinese responded to this opportunity.

Professor Skinner has explored the historical reasons for the Chinese being given access to the highest rungs of the Thai economy. Early Thai contacts with the Chinese had been for purposes of trade and economic gain, primarily for the ruling authority. In the mid-Ayutthayan period, the Chinese were employed to sail Thai junks carrying goods to China. When their trade prospered, Chinese merchants became a good source of royal revenue which they paid in return for the access and protection provided by the king. It appears that in Ayutthayan days the wealthy Chinese merchants were exposed to the power and dependent on the bounty of the Thai king. Specifically rejected by the imperial court in China and thus having no protection, local Chinese could not counter the power of the absolute Siamese monarch nor could they achieve any satisfaction in terms of social standing and prestige from China. The Thai court, on the other hand, was willing to offer prestige and power and conferring noble rank and to lend official sanction to Chinese community leaders by appointing them captains. Later, to satisfy the economic needs of both the king and his officials, the monopolies over the country's products and dispensing positions in state affairs and trading operations were granted to various Chinese merchants.⁴⁸ This was evidenced when some Chinese were appointed provincial governors by King Taksin and the first five Chakri kings as rewards for their services as revenue collectors for the court. In addition, Akin observed that the method of tax farming which was widely used for collection of revenues from the reign of King Rama III was connected with patron-client relationships. The position of tax collector was supposed to be sold to the highest bidder, but a certain amount of manipulation was involved. Pay-offs to princes and nobles, as well as an annual sum to the government were necessary. The princes and nobles gained

wealth from their Chinese clients and the Chinese gained a lucrative job and used their wealth and ties to improve their social status.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The charisma and sacredness surrounding the Thai kingship continue even after the Revolution of 1932 in which the king's powers are subject to constitutional limitations. As Professor Tambiah rightly observes about present practice :

...the king does in a real way symbolize the Dharma of politics, and with Buddhism the collective identity of the Thai people, while at the same time, and perhaps precisely because of, being removed from the actual arena and practitioners of politics. To reign but not to rule, to enjoy the charisma of legitimating the actual rulers and therefore also of mediating when the times are out of joint--all this connotes a return to some deep seated aspects of the heritage, in spite of recognized changes.⁵⁰

The influence of Buddhist and Brahman belief systems and rituals is also pervasive today as in the old days. The importance of hierarchy, the relationships of superior and subordinate both formal and informal, and the relationship between Thai officials and Chinese businessmen and/or their descendants continue today. All of these features and behavior cannot be appreciated without the basic understanding of the grand religio-moral conceptions of kingship.

Notes

¹There have been no sudden changes throughout Thai political history. Changes have occurred gradually although increasing violence has developed since October 1973. But it could be argued that since the proclamation of the present Constitution in 1978, Thailand has slowly, but firmly institutionalized its somewhat democratic political processes. For detailed analysis on this point see Pisan Suriyamongkol, *Institutionalization of Democratic Political Processes in Thailand : Bureaucratic Polity at Bay* (Bangkok : Thammasat University Press, 1988).

²Balkrishna G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 26 (November, 1966) : 15.

³*Ibid.*, p. 16. Cites Samyutta Nikaya, Milinda Panaha and Majjhima Nikaya.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (London : Cambridge University Press, 1976). Cites *Digha Nikaya* I, p. 9, *Jātaka* no. 528, and *Jātaka* no. 546.

⁶Richard A. Gard, ed., *Buddhism* (New York : George Braziller, 1961), p. 215.

⁷Balkrishna G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Cites *Digha Nikaya* III, pp. 84-93.

⁸E. Sakisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), pp. 10-11.

⁹Balkrishna G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Historical cases from Sri Lanka and from Burma give evidence of Buddhist kings in the past who claimed their political authority on the basis of this theory, although in actual practice this might not be the case.

See. E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhis Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

In Thailand, a Siamese king theoretically succeeds to the throne by election. Prince Dhani suggest that the idea must have come from *mahasammata* as this title was used by the Siamese kings until the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925 A.D.). Indeed, before the actual coronation ceremonies King Mongkut may have had the notion of *mahasammata* in mind when he signed himself "newly elected President or Acting King of Siam" in a letter to the Governor of Prince of Wales Island (Penang).

See Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lord of Life* (New York : Taplinger Publishing Company, 1960, p. 271 and p. 288.

¹²Balkrishna G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, p. 17. Note also parallels with Benedict Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Claire Holt (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 1-69.

¹³Balkrishna G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁵S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (London : Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 34.

¹⁶Balkrishna G. Gokhale *op. cit.*, p. 22.

- ¹⁷S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- ¹⁸B.G. Gokhale, *Dharmiko Dhammarāja, A Study in Buddhist Constitutional Concepts*, *Studies in Indian History*, Vol. 18 (Bombay : The Indian Historical Research Institute, 1953), p. 162.
- ¹⁹S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer. op. cit.* p. 22.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 20–22.
- ²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.
- ²²U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*. (Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 59–60.
- ²³S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- ²⁴G. Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. Walter F. Vella (Honolulu : East-West Center Press, 1968), pp. 100–101.
- ²⁵Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, *Southeast Asia Program*, no. 18 (Ithaca : Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1956), p. 3.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ²⁸G. Coedes, *The Making of South East Asia*. trans. H.M. Wright (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1966), pp. 144–145.
- ²⁹H.G. Quaritch Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
- ³⁰Prince Wan Waithayakorn, *Stone Inscriptions of Sukhothai*, (Bangkok : n.p., 1965), p. 11.
- ³¹H.G. Quaritch Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- ³²Prince Dhani Nivat, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- ³³*Ibid.*, p. 94.
- ³⁴Prince Wan Waithayakorn, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 10
- ³⁶In 1965, Professor Direk Jananam, who served as Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs during World War II, told the audience at the Political Science Department, Thammasat University, that this requirement was in part a response to the Japanese officials who tried to appropriate the Emerald Buddha.

To reject the Japanese request and convince them of how important the Emerald Buddha was to the welfare and protection of the people and state,

Marshal Phibun required his cabinet members to pledge their loyalty and pray for national protection to the Emerald Buddha. The linkage between the Emerald Buddha and its believed protection of the people and state was so successfully demonstrated that the Japanese finally had to relinquish their demand for fear of public and government reaction.

³⁷S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

³⁸Robert Heine-Geldern, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁹See Fred W. Riggs, *Thailand : The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu : East-West Center Press, 1966), pp. 69-71 and S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁴⁰Fred W. Riggs, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Robert Heine Geldern, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁴⁴S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁴⁵Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873*, Southeast Asia Program no. 74 (Ithaca : Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1969), pp. 87-89.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 133-135.

⁴⁸G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 3.

⁴⁹Akin Rabibhadana, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁵⁰S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, *op. cit.*, p. 527.