

**THE ADMINISTRATION OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS :
A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT
AND THE SANGHA IN THAILAND**

by Yen Lavangkura

Buddhist Sangha is an organization of Buddha's disciples, who voluntarily join the monastic life laid down by the Buddha (Hinayana School). The objective of this organization is twofold. First, is personal salvation from the fetters of worldly desire leading to a serene end, peace of mind, pureness of thought and the non-egoism of the monastic recluse. Second, is to liberate others from the snares of unrest in life, from desires for pleasure of which there is no limit. It aims to help the well-being and happiness of the many by means of compassion in a sophisticated world. Since the inauguration of the *Sangha*, this organization has been self-governing under the guidance of the Three Refuges: the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. These have provided the elements of the structure of the organization that fabricated the individual members, unified the community under a democratic spirit, offered common faith and common goals. In this organization every member participates in the society and all undertake the affairs of the community. Thai Buddhism is of Hinayana origin. It has blended with the Khmerization of Indian origin, characterized by the god-king and the theocracy of the Lord of Life. The king wielded his power over civil administration (Anachakra) and spiritual administration (Buddha-Chakra). Buddhist *Sangha* rituals together with Brahman ceremonies became a feature of divine kingship. Furthermore, the Thai have adapted the system of *Sangha* administration from Lanka, or Ceylon, which was hierarchized by means of designated titles (Samanasakdi) with systems of ranks and insignia (Patyot). In the year B.E. 2484 (1941) of the Constitutional regime, the Government undertook to change the mode of practice of the monarchical regime to give it the appearance of an independent organization under the administrative control of the government. The *Sangha* was changed from a semi-self governed organization to one under the strong secular control of the civil government.

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