

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Department of History

HISTORY 438

BUDDHISM AND SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY

Spring 1994

Rm. 1131 Humanities Tuesday & Thursday 1:00-2:15

*Thongchai Winichakul*

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Except Vietnam, the countries in the mainland Southeast Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand) are distinctive not only to the region but also to the world since, including Sri Lanka, they are the homeland of Theravada Buddhism for more than a thousand years. Over 120 millions people today have practiced and lived under the influence of Theravada Buddhism. With the Westernization and attempted secularization in those countries taken place less than 150 years ago, the influence of religious tradition is very strong. It is not overstated that it is impossible to understand those countries and people without recognizing the role of Theravada Buddhism.

It is not the aim of this course, however, to study the Theravada's tenets or philosophy in depth. As a history course, the theme will be the role of religion in the politics and cultures of those countries in history: the ideas and influence of Theravada Buddhism in shaping political and social institutions, the role of the monastic order in relation to the state and peasant, and the effects of and on the religion as the countries have gone through colonialism and modernization since the mid-nineteenth century. The focus on Thailand and Burma is not arbitrary, since they are major force of the region's history and religious development, and they provide us with adequate examples to understand the entire region.

As an introduction to the culture with which students may not be familiar, the course will explore major topics instead of a chronology. No previous knowledge is required; nor is the ability to memorize all the dates and unfamiliar terms and names. What is required is attention and patience, plus imagination, to learn about the unfamiliar culture.

Class: Two 75-min. lectures weekly. Questions are welcome any time in and/or at the end of the class.

Office Hours: Rm. 5211 Humanities ph. 263-8931  
Tuesday 3:00-4:00, Wednesday 11:00-12:00, and by appointment

Grading: 1. One mid-term take-home exam. The question will be given probably in Week 6 and due a week later. (20%)  
2. For four credit students: One research paper about 10-12 pages, plus notes and references at the end. Due April 22. (40%)  
For three credit students: a short essay (4 pages) on a narrow topic, OR given materials, OR a book review. The instruction will be given in Week 9 and due April 22. (40%)  
[All written works must be typed in double space.]  
3. Final exam (see the Time-table) 40%

What is expected from students is NOT the ability to excerpt, or paraphrase the lecture or reading materials, but one's understanding of the subjects in her/his own words; his/her ability to communicate in writing, the basic research skills such as library search for relevant materials, and the ability to explain a question either by analysis or description. Originality, creativity and imagination will be bonus.

**Required Textbooks:**

Spiro, Melford. *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes.*

Smith, Bardwell. *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand Laos and Burma.*

*The Course package for History 438-Spring 1994* (available at the Copy Center of Humanities Building, Rm.1650 Humanities)

**Recommended books:**

Ishii, Yoneo. *Sangha, State and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*

Tambiah, S.J. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*

Sarkisyanz, E. *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution.* (A classic book, very good for our class. Unfortunately it is old and out of print. There are many copies in the libraries, and in the reserves.)

All textbooks and the recommended ones, including the course package, are also available in the Reserves Collection (in the College Library). This course have previously offered as History 203 and 459 in 1992 and 1993 respectively. The course packages of both are also in the Reserves, although the materials are not entirely the same.

**Note on the Readings:**

The required readings in each week are in either the required textbooks or in the coursepack. The number at the end of each item is page numbers. The supplemental readings are recommended for anyone interested in particular topics.

SCHEDULE

- WEEK 1 (Jan 25) Introduce the course: aims and objective of the course; business; assignments; expectation.  
(Jan 27) Introduction to Southeast Asia's placenames and very brief history.  
Reading: No.
- WEEK 2 (Feb 1,3) The Buddha and divisions in early Buddhism  
Theravada Buddhism to Southeast Asia  
Reading: \* Conze, Edward. A Short History of Buddhism. 9-47.

IDEAS

- WEEK 3 (Feb 8,10) The Four Noble Truth, Nirvana, Karma, merit  
Reading: \* Spiro. Buddhism and Society. chap. 2, 4, 5 (31-65, 92-139)  
\* Keyes, Charles, "Merit Transference in the Kammic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism," in Karma: an Anthropological Inquiry, ed. Charles F. Keyes. 261-86
- WEEK 4 (Feb 15,17) Buddhism and popular belief  
Reading: \* Kirsch, A, Thomas. "Complexity in the Thai Religious System," Journal of Asian Studies 36 (1977): 241-266  
\* Spiro. Buddhism and Society. chap. 6,7 (140-87)  
\* Terwiel, B.J. Monks and Magic. 72-96

WEEK 5 (Feb 22,24) Cosmology and social order

- Reading: \* Reynolds, Frank E. Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology. introduction pp. 5-37. The entire book is a translation of a thirteenth century Thai cosmographical text.
- \* Heine-Geldern, Robert. Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia
- \* Reynolds, Frank E. "Ritual and Social Hierarchy: An Aspect of Traditional Religion in Buddhist Laos," in Bardwell Smith ed. Religion and Legitimation of Power. 166-74.
- \* Reynolds, Craig J. "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai History, With Special Reference to Nineteenth Century Culture Change," Journal of Asian Studies 35 (1976): 203-220

THE SANGHA (MONASTIC ORDER)

WEEK 6 (Mar 1,3) The *sangha*

- Reading: \* Spiro. Buddhism and Society. pp. 279-320, 365-77, 396-421
- \* Tambiah, S.J. The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets. chap. 5 (53-77)

BUDDHIST POLITY

WEEK 7 (Mar 8,10) Merit and power, kingship, and state

- Reading: \* Tambiah, S.J. World Conqueror and World Renouncer. 111-131
- \* Aung-Thwin, Michael. "Divinity, Spirit and Human: Conceptions of Classical Burmese Kingship," in Centers. Symbols and Hierarchy : Essays on Classical States in Southeast Asia. ed. Lorraine Gesick. 45-86
- \* Gesick, Lorraine. "The Rise and Fall of King Taksin: A Drama of a Buddhist Kingship," in Centers. Symbols and Hierarchies. ed. Lorraine Gesick. 87-105

WEEK 8 (Mar 15,17) Religious reforms

- Reading: \* Swearer, Donald and Premchit, Sommai. "The Relations Between the Religious and Political Order in Northern Thailand (14th-16th c.)," in ed. Bardwell Smith. Religion and Legitimation of Power. 20-33
- \* Butt, John W. "Thai Kingship and Religious Reform," in *ibid.* 34-51
- \* Aung-Thwin, Michael. "The Role of *sasana* Reform in Burmese History: Economic Dimension of a Religious Purification," Journal of Asian Studies. 38 (1979): 671-88

WEEK 9 (Mar 22,24) Peasant rebellions

- Reading: \* Keyes, Charles F. "Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism and Thai Society," Journal of Asian Studies 36 (1977): 283-302
- \* Chatthip Nartsupha, "The Ideology of Holy Men Revolts in North East Thailand," in Turton, Andrew and Tanabe, Shigeharu eds. History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia. 111-134
- \* Spiro. Buddhism and Society. 171-180

WEEK 10

SPRING RECESS Mar 26 - Apr 3

## TRANSITION

WEEK 11 (Apr 5,7) Buddhism and colonialism in Burma  
Modern Buddhism in Burma

Reading: \* Sarkisyanz, E. Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution. 110-179

WEEK 12 (Apr 12,14) Modern Buddhism in Siam

The *sangha* and nation-building in Siam

Reading: \* Kirsch, A. Thomas. "Modernizing Implications of Nineteenth Century Reforms in Thai Sangha," in Religion and Legitimation of Power. 52-65

\* Reynolds, Frank E., "Sacral Kingship and National Development: The Case of Thailand," in Religion and Legitimation of Power. pp.100-110

\* Keyes, Charles F. "Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand," Journal of Asian Studies. 30 (1971): 551-568

## BUDDHISM IN MODERN NATIONS

WEEK 13 (Apr 19.21) Buddhism, women, and the prostitution issue

"Thailand: Minidragon" (video)

Reading: \* Keyes, Charles F. "Mother or Mistress but Never a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," American Ethnologist 11 (1984): 223-41

\* Kirsch, A. Thomas, "Buddhism, Sex-role and Thai Economy," in Women of Southeast Asia. ed. Penny Van Esterik. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. 16-41

\* Khin Thitsa. Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand.

WEEK 14 (Apr 26.28) Buddhism and the bourgeoisie

Buddhism and forest

Reading: \* Zehner, Edwin. "Reform Symbolism of a Thai Middle-class Sect: the Growth and Appeal of the Thammakai Movement," Journal of Southeast Asian Studies. 21:2, 402-426

\* Reynolds, Frank E. ""Legitimation and Rebellion," in Religion and Legitimation of Power. pp.134-146.

\* Keyes, Charles F. "Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism," in ibid. 147-164

\* Taylor, J.L. "Living on the Rim: Ecology and Forest Monks in Northeast Thailand," SOJOURN. 6:1, 106-125

WEEK 15 (May3.5) Buddhism, socialism and nation-building in Burma

Buddhism and Politics in Burma Today

Reading: \* Tin Muang and Muang Than. "The *sangha* and *sasana* in Socialist Burma," SOJOURN: Social Issues in Southeast Asia. 3:1 (Feb. 1988), 26-61

WEEK 16 (May 10.12) Final discussion and remarks

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS  
(for weekly reading, research and FYI)

- Week 1 & 2 Introduction to Southeast Asia and early history of Buddhism to Southeast Asia
- Coedes, George. The Making of Southeast Asia. 10-87
  - Than Tun. Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma. 3-58
- Week 3 Nirvana, Karma and merit
- Spiro, Melford. Burmese Supernaturalism
  - Aung-Thwin, Michael. Pagan. chap. 2 (30-47)
  - Lester, Robert. Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. 23-46
  - Keyes, Charles ed. Karma: an Anthropological Inquiry.
  - Conze, Edward. Buddhism. 11-48
- Week 4 Popular Belief
- Spiro. Burmese Supernaturalism.
  - Anuman Rajadhon. Popular Buddhism in Siam and Other Essays on Thai Studies. 25-68, 99-168
  - Tambiah, S.J. Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand. chap 13-20 (223-366)
- Week 5 Cosmology
- Sarkisyanz, E. Buddhist Background of the Burmese Revolution. chap.11,13 (68-74, 82-86)
- Week 6 Sangha
- Ishii. Sangha, State and Society. chap 1 (3-33)
  - Reynolds, Craig J. The Buddhist Monkhood in the Nineteenth Century Thailand. chap 2
  - Lester, Robert C. Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia chap 5-7 (83-150)
  - Wijayaratna, Mohan. Buddhist Monastic Life.
- Week 7 Merit, power, kingship and state
- Spiro. Buddhism and Society. chap.16 (378-395)
  - Reynolds, Frank E. "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Buddhist Symbolism and Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos," In ed. Bardwell Smith. Religion and Legitimation of Power. 175-193
  - Ishii. Sangha, State and Society. chap.2-3 (34-66)
  - Aung-Thwin, Michael. Pagan. chap 3 (47-68)
  - Aung-Thwin. "Kingship, the sangha and Society in Pagan," in Explorations in Early Southeast Asian Statecraft. eds. Kenneth Hall and John Whitmore. 205-256
  - Sarkisyanz, E. Buddhist Background of the Burmese Revolution. chap. 4-5,7-10,14-15 (26-36, 43-67, 87-97)
  - Hanks, Lucien M. "Merit and Power in Thai Social Order," American Anthropologist. 64 (1962), 1247-61.
  - Reynolds, Craig J. The Buddhist Monkhood in the Nineteenth Century Thailand. chap 1
- Week 8 Religious reform
- Aung-Thwin. Pagan. chap.8-9
  - Victor Lieberman's argument against Aung-Thwin in the same journal 39 (1980) 753-69; and then Aung-Thwin's "A Reply to Lieberman" in the same journal 40 (1980/1): 87-9.
  - Mendelsohn, E. Michael. Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership. chap.1 (31-65)
  - Luce, G.H. and Pe Muang Tin. trans The Glass Palace Chronicle. intro.
  - Wyatt, David K. "The Subtle Revolution of King Rama I of Siam," in

Moral Order and the Question of Change, ed. David Wyatt, pp 9-52

Week 9 Peasant rebellion

- Ishii. Sangha, State and Society. chap.9 (171-187)
- Ishii, Yoneo. "A Note on Millenarian Revolts in Northeastern Siam," Journal of Southeast Studies. 6:2, 121-126
- Tambiah. Buddhist Saints of the Forest. chap.20 (293-320)
- Sarkisyanz, E. Buddhist Background of the Burmese Revolution. chap. 21-22 (149-65)
- Adas, Michael. "Bandits, Monks, and Pretender Kings: Pattern of Peasant Resistance and Protest in Colonial Burma, 1826-1941," in Power and Protest in the Countryside, ed. Robert P. Wellner and Scott E. Guggenheim, pp. 75-105
- Tanabe, Shigeharu. "Ideological Practice in Peasant Rebellions: Siam at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia, ed. Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe, Senri Ethnological Studies No.13. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1984, pp.75-110.

Week 11 Buddhism and Colonialism

- Ferguson, John P. "The Quest for Legitimation by Burmese Monks and Kings," In ed. Bardwell Smith. Religion and Legitimation. 66-86
- Mendelsohn, E. Michael. Sangha and State. chap 4 (173-235)
- Smith, Donald E. Religion and Politics in Burma. chap 3

Week 12 Modern Buddhism

- Tambiah, S.J. World Conqueror and World Renouncer. chap. 10-12 (179-261)
- Alabaster, Henry. The Modern Buddhist, Being the Views of a Siamese Minister of State on His Own and Other Religions.
- Ishii. Sangha, State and Society. chap.8 (146-170)
- Reynolds, Craig J. "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai History, With Special Reference to Nineteenth Century Culture Change," Journal of Asian Studies 35 (1976): 203-220
- Reynolds, Craig J. The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand. chap. 3-4
- Ishii. Sangha, State and Society. chap. 6-7 (100-145)

Week 13 Buddhism, women

- Penny Van Esterik, ed. Women of Southeast Asia. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. chap. 1, 4
- Keyes, Charles F. "Ambiguous Gender: Male Initiation in Buddhist Society," in New Perspective on Religion and Gender, ed. Caroline Bynum, Steven Harell, 1986
- See the works by Chatsuman Kabinlasingh

Week 14 Buddhism, bourgeoisie

- Jackson, Peter A. Buddhism Legitimation and Conflict. section 2
- Sulak Sivaraksa. Seeds of Peace, and Siam in Crisis.
- Jackson, Peter A. "The Hupphasawan Movement: Millenarian Buddhism among Thai Political Elite," SOJOURN: Social Issues in Southeast Asia. 3:2, 134-170
- Somboon Suksamran. Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: the sangha in the Modernization of Thailand. chap.3,4

Week 15 Buddhism and nation-building in Burma

- Sarkisyanz, E. Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution. chap 25-28 (192-236)
- Mendelsohn, E. Michael. Sangha and State. chap.5 (236-298)
- Smith, Donald E. Religion and Politics. chap.5,7